



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Investments in Improved Cowpea Varieties Pay Off in Senegal

Through the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Collaborative Research on Grain Legumes, led by Michigan State University, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is continuing decades of research investments in cowpeas, an important staple food crop in many regions of Sub-Saharan Africa. Cowpeas offer essential nutrients and grow well in hot, dry climates, which is why Feed the Future works to improve cowpea production in several West African partner countries.

Newly published data from Senegal shows that these investments are paying off for smallholder farmers who have adopted improved cowpea varieties developed with support from USAID under Feed the Future. An **economic impact analysis** concluded that cowpea varietal improvement has been profitable in Senegal, estimating the value of net benefits at \$78.6 million, with an internal rate of return on investment of 17.9 percent.

As of 2010, in three Senegalese regions where Feed the Future is working, 42 percent of farmers receiving assistance had adopted the new varieties developed by the Innovation Lab, a huge increase compared to the 3.58 percent adoption rates of a similar impact survey conducted in 2004. This increase reflects a focused multilateral effort in recent years by the Government of Senegal, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, NGOs, farmers' associations, and Feed the Future to disseminate improved cowpea varieties more widely.

The improved cowpea varieties offer a number of benefits compared to traditional varieties: for example, the 2010 survey found that median cowpea yields for the improved seed varieties were consistently higher than traditional ones. Both the cowpeas themselves and their pods are edible in the improved varieties, and 87 percent of farmers surveyed say they regard the fresh cowpea pods as an important source of food, while 21 percent of farmers say that the pods provide an additional source of income. The improved cowpeas also mature faster than traditional ones, providing necessary nutrients during the "hungry period" right before the cereal harvest when farming households have typically exhausted their food supplies.