MUNG BEAN RENOWNED IN NORTHERN ETHIOPIA

The innovative seed making an impact on household nutrition

Mung bean, locally known as *masho*, is a highly nutritious crop from the pea family that is relatively high in protein, a good source of vitamins A and C, and a natural antioxidant. In northern Ethiopia where children suffer the highest stunting rates in the country, children have taken a liking to this newly introduced bean, often prepared in the form of soup with other vegetables such as sweet potato, kale, and Swiss chard.

Despite Ethiopia making great strides to overcome undernutrition in the past decade, wasting and stunting remain high, particularly in rural areas of the country. In the Amhara region, nearly one in every two children under five are stunted according to the Ethiopian Demographic Health Survey (2016). Yet, one-third of the region’s rural districts are agriculturally productive and a vast majority of residents are smallholder farmers.

In an effort to improve the nutritional status of women and young children in Ethiopia’s productive regions, USAID promotes dietary diversity among smallholder farmers through the Feed the Future Ethiopia Growth through Nutrition Activity livelihood package. The project delivers vegetable and pulse seeds, fruit seedlings, farming tools, and poultry or small ruminants (sheep or goat) to 28,000 nutritionally most vulnerable households across four regions.

In July of 2017, mung bean was introduced in Takusa and Alefa districts of Amhara region. About 600 kg was distributed to 320 households and planted both as a single crop and intercropped with other produce.

Over 35 hectares of land have been cultivated with mung bean seeds since. Smallholder farmers and district government officials alike are fascinated with the performance of the crop as households obtained 50kg to 150kg yield.

As mung bean is drought resistant, it is also grown for animal forage, silage, hay, and chicken feed, making it an ideal crop for the drought-prone rural north and an economically significant pulse seed. With its great nutritional value, good production performance, short maturation period, and relatively high market price, mung bean has an immense potential to improve the lives and livelihoods of small-holder farmers.

Thanks to the support of USAID, this innovative crop is gaining popularity in the Amhara region where farmers are obtaining mung bean seeds from Growth through Nutrition beneficiaries and planting on non-beneficiary farms using irrigation. Government officials are also greatly encouraged to scale it up to other districts – a promising start to sustainably reducing undernutrition in the region.

“I’ve made more money from my harvest than I ever imagined I could. We won’t have to worry about expenses for food for the coming six months.”

– Adugna Degu, smallholder farmer