



IRON BEANS IN RWANDA



Why Iron Beans?

Iron deficiency is a global public health problem that impacts more than 1 billion people around the world. It is widely prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa. During childhood and adolescence, it lowers immunity and impairs learning capacity. It reduces the ability of adults for physical labor. Severe anemia increases the risk of women dying in childbirth. In Rwanda, anemia, which is used as an indicator of iron deficiency, afflicts almost one in five non-pregnant women and almost one in three children under-five.

Although iron can be found in several other foods such as red meat, fish, and green leafy vegetables, these are rarely eaten in the quantity needed. The development and dissemination of iron beans complements these efforts and builds on beans as mainstay of the Rwandan diet. On average, Rwandans consume 60kg of beans per capita annually.

Iron Beans in Rwanda

Since 2010, ten varieties of beans rich in iron have been released in Rwanda. The varieties were evaluated for several years, and tested in on-station and on-farm trials prior to their release to farmers by the Rwanda Agriculture Board (RAB) in partnership with HarvestPlus. To date, more than 500,000 farming households are growing and eating iron beans.

Given the importance of beans in Rwanda, these new varieties could provide more iron in the diets of millions of Rwandans and contribute to reducing iron deficiency. The new bean varieties contain enough iron to provide up to 30 percent of the daily iron requirements of children and women.

Not only are these crops excellent sources of iron, they are also competitive with bean varieties that farmers are growing. They are also high yielding and resistant to major diseases and pests. Iron beans are also highly marketable due to their large seed size and preferred colors, including red and white, which are highly sought after in local and urban markets.

What Next for Iron Beans in Rwanda

Iron beans are on track to reach virtually all bean-growing farm households in Rwanda by 2016. In addition, efforts are ongoing to make iron beans accessible to non-producing households throughout the country. HarvestPlus works in partnership with the Rwanda Agricultural Board, International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) emerging private sector seed companies, agro-dealers, cooperatives, and traders in order to develop sustainable markets for iron bean seed and grain. HarvestPlus and its partners also undertake promotional activities such as field days, awareness campaigns and other events to encourage adoption and consumption of iron beans.

The Government of Rwanda has recognizes the nutritional and public health potential of iron beans and biofortified crops in general. Biofortification is included in the Ministry of Agriculture's Nutrition Action Plan.

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