



White Pea Beans: Ethiopia's Latest Cash Crop



International market opportunities for Ethiopian white pea beans are soaring sky high. Ever since beans were included in Ethiopia's Commodity Exchange (ECX), world markets for white pea beans have grown significantly. The ECX is a unique partnership of market actors who promote the country's agricultural products. The bulk of who include traders, cooperative unions, and the government. As a trade organization, it serves markets in Europe, Middle East, southern and northern Africa, India, and Pakistan.

The International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT, its Spanish acronym) is a research organization based in Colombia that facilitates the work of the Pan-Africa Bean Research Alliance (PABRA) in 28 countries of sub-Saharan Africa. The CIAT-PABRA collaboration, working through the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR), has been an important part of Ethiopia's development efforts since 2004.

Ethiopia, rich in white pea beans, had, in the past, lacked strategies for getting the improved varieties to farmers. PABRA assisted Ethiopia to overcome this by developing sustainable strategies that ensure wide, fast, and equitable dissemination of quality seed, and to influence policies useful to bean production. One strategy adopted was the Wider Impact Approach (WIA), which encouraged the sale of small seed packs that ranged in size from 100 grams to 5 kilograms, enabling hundreds of smallholder farmers

to access seeds of beans and other legumes, which would otherwise be unaffordable in larger 100 kg bags.

Through its holistic approach to the bean production chain, PABRA was also key player in stimulating the launch of white pea beans in the ECX in October 2010. Speaking at a PABRA forum, Kedra Mohammed from ECX said, "Both PABRA and EIAR work closely with smallholder farmers to increase their participation in the maze of markets." She added, "The ECX will boost these efforts to ensure that smallholder farmers will have a wider market for their produce and increased incomes, and that bean consumers will also be satisfied."

The launch was achieved by encouraging members of the Agricultural Commodity Supplies-Ethiopia (ACOS) to register their status as producers of white pea bean. In the ECX, beans, promoted by the government, are now traded alongside other fast-moving crops, namely, coffee, sesame, maize, and wheat. ECX members include farmers, traders, processors, exporters, and consumers. Ethiopia has, over time, been able to establish a local market for its white pea beans. This was done jointly with PABRA by ensuring a steady supply of high-quality and nutritious grain in the regional markets, making Ethiopia the lead producer of white pea beans within eastern and central Africa.

"The regional and international demand for the white pea beans symbolizes the importance of the crop in and outside

Ethiopia,” said Setegn Gebeyehu, Coordinator of bean research in the EIAR. He added, “PABRA was instrumental in marketing smallholder farmers’ produce through the WIA, and Ethiopia is proud to be part of the Alliance.”

PABRA’s long-term efforts have borne fruit in other sub-Saharan African countries, ensuring that the legume is ranked as a key food security crop in Malawi, Rwanda, and Uganda.

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White pea beans packed and ready for marketing.

