All Africa.com article: Nigeria: Bagging Beans Against Beetles

Post-harvest food loss in West Africa is estimated at between 10% and 40%, depending on who is talking. No matter the actual figure, crop loss at any level is a serious problem in a region that, for the most part, experiences consistent food shortages. Purdue University listened and they responded to this problem!

WASA – the West Africa Seed Alliance – was designed and developed to stimulate increased agricultural output and was recently involved in an initiative to reduce post-harvest food loss.

With a decentralized management structure, WASA has placed small groups of experts on the ground. One such group, based in Kano (No. Nigeria) identified a problem – local farmers were losing a large percentage of their cowpea harvest to pests and mold – and responded by deploying Purdue’s solution.

I was fortunate enough to attend a cowpea storage demonstration for women in January in Kano State. One of the women told me that most people sell their cowpea immediately after the harvest for fear of losing it to pests and/or mold. This leads to a glut with resulting depressed prices. If you could keep your cowpea for 4-5 months it could be sold four for 4-5 times the price.

Low tech (plastic bags); low cost (about $200 for a demonstration); and highly effective, if the excitement of the women I saw is anything to go by. This short video (link) was compiled from stills shot by WASA’s COP, Edo Lin and I, and the soundtrack is a recording of the reactions to the demonstration.

VIDEO LINK: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=DskxpjOu3nc

I have often told this “story” to illustrate my belief that in development, small is probably better (than big projects with big goals). And this is a good example of technology transfer at the grassroots level. Farmers are using the Purdue technique which will, no doubt, be passed down to the next generation of farmers, resulting in a long-term and highly sustainable impact on farmer incomes and on food security.

Kay Chapman, our dedicated editor, sent me the All Africa link and asked me to comment because I have been enthusiastically promoting this kind of grassroots, small-scale intervention. For more information on WASA, and CAS-IP’s involvement in WASA click HERE.

Post written by Peter Bloch, consultant to CAS-IP