The Chairman of NESG’s Policy Commission, Emmanuel Ijewere, recently asked a provocative question: How many Nigerian jobs are lost each year to imported rice?

Let us imagine Nigeria producing enough rice to satisfy national consumption. Regularly-cited estimates of Nigerian rice production are 3 million metric tons, and total consumption is estimated at 5.5 million tons. Thus, if Nigeria produces an average of 1.47 metric tons per hectare, and 2.5 million metric tons are required to replace imports, then production would require **1.7 million new hectares** under cultivation.

Is the land available? Absolutely. Of the 98 million hectares of farmable land in Nigeria, less than half are cultivated. Large areas in Benue, Taraba, Niger state, and several other rice producing states remain uncultivated. Each hectare available has the potential to produce up to 5 metric tons per hectare, as we’ve found with MARKETS farmers in Benue, Kwara, Anambra, and Ebonyi.

We often think of jobs as full time employment with an annual wage. Yet agriculture remains the largest employer, where 70% of Nigerians obtain their livelihoods. A hectare of rice requires more labor than most crops—an average of 177 labor days, or just more than eight person months of employment.

So how many jobs would be created if Nigeria replaced imported rice with home grown varieties? At least 13.7 million person months of employment, or the equivalent of 1,139,773 full time jobs.

Jobs are particularly important for Nigeria’s youth. Due to population growth, an estimated 4.5 million new workers enter Nigeria’s labor market each year.

The economic potential of increased rice cultivation is even greater than one million new farm jobs per year. Employment in processing, transport, services, and retail will increase. The demand for fertilizer, high quality seeds, and other inputs will increase, stimulating performance of the sector as a whole.

However, imported rice must be replaced with similar quality product. Processing serves as an engine of growth, as farmers respond to the demand from processors. Working with Olam, MARKETS has witnessed this increased demand in Benue, Kwara, Anambra, and Ebonyi states. We’ve also seen youth return to work on farms. In Benue state, where rice yields have increased to more than 5 metric tons per hectare, mechanical threshing has been done by youth.

The Federal Government of Nigeria, several states, banks, and private firms have done a great deal to support rice processing. MARKETS recently gathered representatives from the largest rice processors to identify constraints for the industry as a whole. Development of the Nigerian workforce, along with access to credit and supportive government policies, are essential for the sector to grow. Together we see enormous potential for the sector, and MARKETS applauds the NESG, Ebonyi Agro, Olam, Labana, Arewa, and the many others working towards increasing Nigerian rice production. The path to create jobs and grow more rice for Nigeria is clear.

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Cowpea, a staple protein in northern Nigeria, is often destroyed by weevils. These pests can infest stored cowpea and ruin an entire harvest in months. Although farmers and vendors sometimes treat with pesticides, application of post-harvest chemicals pose a severe human health risk.

There is a better way. MARKETS, IITA, and Purdue University are promoting a new chemical-free storage system to prevent loss from infestation and keep cowpea pest-free for up to one year. The system uses the Purdue Improved Cowpea Storage (PICS) bags to provide nonperishable storage without the use of toxic chemicals.

PICS technology is simple and easy to use. Cowpea is stored within two inner polypropylene bags and an outer woven bag with no holes. Triple-bagging ensures the inner cowpea bag remains airtight, causing pests to die from lack of oxygen.

Since 2009, MARKETS and IITA collaborated with local NGO PROGREEN as well as state ADPs, local governments and farmers’ organizations. Together we have trained more than 1,000 extension agents who have conducted demonstrations on the use of PICS in over 10,000 villages in 20 northern states. More than 40 women technicians have been engaged in 12 northern states to popularize the system, including use of radio messages.

The project is also developing a distribution network of PICS bags in Nigeria. The development of a supply chain for the bag is expected to provide business opportunities to bag manufacturers, distributors, and vendors. Some 60,000 PICS bags were sold in 2009 to cowpea dealers, while 70,000 were used for demonstrations across the 20 states.

MARKETS Assists NAFDAC to Improve Testing Procedures

The National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) ensures the safety of food, agricultural products and drugs which are either imported, exported or produced for domestic consumption in Nigeria.

As part of MARKETS’ mandate to improve food security in Nigeria, MARKETS is supporting NAFDAC’s efforts to meet the globally recognized quality standard known as ISO 17025—a feat only four other African countries have achieved. Meeting ISO 17025’s standard will demonstrate NAFDAC’s testing capability, ensure food safety, and improve trade flows.

NAFDAC recently completed “sample cycle test” analysis—a measurement of how long it takes a laboratory to test a given product and determine if it meets safety and quality requirements. The results show that NAFDAC takes twice the acceptable time limit to complete an analysis. These delays translate directly into added costs for importers and exporters and a slowing of trade flows.

Results of the analysis have been an eye-opener. Mrs. Iruhe, NAFDAC’s Director of Quality Control, remarked “Never before has anyone taken the time to go through our system in detail. Staff now understand how to conduct internal audits and have received training on preparing their systems for success”.

NAFDAC completed proficiency testing—along with 53 other countries—to measure ability to determine key additives in food products. NAFDAC ranked in the top 10 percent for 2 of the 4 categories, directly reflecting NAFDAC’s improvements due to MARKETS support.

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