

15th ACA Annual Cashew Conference

Opening Ceremony

Keynote Address by Mark Slupek, USDA Deputy Administrator, Global Programmes

English

- USDA is excited to be part of this year's African Cashew Alliance conference. And we welcome all of you to this excellent event as well. This year's theme, "A Sustainable Cashew Supply Chain for the Future", could not be more relevant. Climate change, resource constraints, hunger, disease, and poverty; There are many issues that require us to think about what sustainability means and how we can achieve it.
- Nobody can achieve sustainability alone. We need to collaborate to create a more sustainable supply chain for cashew producers, processors, and other stakeholders to thrive and to ensure a stable supply of this nutritious and economically valuable commodity.
- USDA aims to increase agricultural cooperation with Africa by developing effective partnerships between U.S. public and private sector stakeholders and their African counterparts; encouraging adoption of science-based decision-making and trade enabling regulatory environments in African countries; and coordinating efforts to support access to innovative tools and technologies to enable farmers to choose solutions to adapt to climate-smart, resilient, and other sustainable agricultural systems.
- A key mechanism for cooperation is the Food for Progress capacity building program. USDA current Food for Progress cashews programming has awarded \$183 million across 8 countries in West Africa: Benin, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria, Cote D' Ivoire, Ghana, and Burkina Faso. These projects reach approximately 150,000 direct beneficiaries and have helped generate \$180 million in sales, both locally and internationally.
- Through our commitment to a multi-year strategy of investment in African cashews, predicated on USDA's belief in the incredible economic potential of cashews in Africa, we have built upon our successes in each subsequent project award starting with production and harvesting improvements that reduce post-harvest waste and certify producers as organic to increase economic and climatic gains, then transitioning to increasing local processing, then to enhancing the financial network available to cashew stakeholders.
- Despite all progress, COVID-19 has shown us that the cashew sector is not without its structural weakness. We can use innovation to create more resilient supply chains that can withstand not just climate-based shocks but disease-based shocks as well.
- USDA is always seeking innovations that can address these concerns and create a cashew value chain for the future. With the Prosper Cashew project we are increasing access to working capital to create a self-sustaining cashew processing network in West Africa. With USDA's LIFFT project we are linking cashew actors together across the value chain to create an integrated trade network where no single point brings down the whole value chain. On BeninCaju, we are expanding the use of cashew apples to get more value from the plants already being grown, thus making a more multi-faceted supply chain, and

reducing waste. And on Pro Cashew, we are working to fill the data gap through the Cashew-IN system to arm cashew stakeholders with current information that prevents supply chain malfunctions and information asymmetry.

- USDA sees the future sustainable supply chain as one in which we digitize the industry with farmers first to harness technology that increases yields and efficiency. Through data management and traceability, digitizing financial information, providing remote technology enhanced extension services, using drone technology to map cashew trees, and more we are able to improve productivity and build a sustainable supply chain. USDA wants to utilize 21st century technology to meet 21st century demands.
- These are just some examples of how we are trying to directly engage in cashews to address supply chain concerns. USDA also works with officials at the African Union across economic communities and sectors to harmonize regulatory standards and create greater fluidity in all sectors including cashews. With improved regulatory standards and fewer barriers to trade, African cashews can find sustainable demand and investment.
- A cashew supply chain for the future is not a given. Innovation, policy, technology, and use of best practices are critical to setting up the value chain for success but none of those are possible without collaborating and sharing our ideas and lessons learned. In that spirit, USDA is delighted to declare the African Cashew Alliance's 2021 conference officially open.