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ACA's Nigerian Farmer Trainings Begin to Show Fruit



On this same trip, Mr. Salifou organized a second training-of-trainers session in Kwara State at FoodPro, a cashew processing facility which recently became ACA Seal-certified. This workshop was designed to provide guidance on harvest and post-harvest handling operations of cashew nuts. The training filled significant skills gaps, which were particularly evident in the session on calculating KOR, where only three of the 20 trainers were previously familiar with this procedure. By properly managing the nuts that are harvested, farmers

The ongoing expansion of the African Cashew Alliance's farmer training program began to show fruit in November 2014, when ACA agricultural expert Mohamed Salifou returned to Nigeria to assess the implementation of the ACA's ongoing Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) training. Mr. Salifou ascertained that a total of 2,023 farmers, of whom around 25% are female, have now received GAP training in 41 villages throughout Kogi, Kwara, and Oyo States.

will be able to sell their volumes for higher prices, because quality receives a significant boost through the implementation of these practices. Throughout the month of January, these Ilorin State trainers will train a further 2,000 farmers on these practices.

This is the result of a "training-of-trainers" course conducted by ACA in late September 2014, where 20 Nigerian extension officers received instruction in how to run their own training courses on crucial GAP topics such as weeding, pruning, thinning, and firebreaking. The 20 extension officers went on to deliver training sessions in their respective regions in October 2014. In follow-up interviews with Mr. Salifou, newly-trained farmers expressed their appreciation for the training, and discussed their expectations for much higher quality raw cashew nut harvests than in previous seasons, which will thereby result in higher incomes for the successful farmers.



The evident success of the first wave of training-of-trainers workshops means that ACA will replicate the process in both Cote d'Ivoire and Benin during the first half of 2015. This program is made possible by the support of USAID's Towards Inclusive Markets Everywhere Annual Program Statement (TIME APS).



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Highlights of 2014

ACA experienced a multitude of successes and changes during the year of 2014. It was difficult to choose our most significant moments, but here is a glimpse:

January: In collaboration with the Global Shea Alliance and Borderless Alliance, ACA was awarded a grant under the USAID Toward Inclusive Markets Everywhere (TIME) program entitled “Industry Alliances Working Together to Empower Poor Rural Women in the Cashew and Shea Sectors”. This project seeks to help farmers to improve product quality and meet international standards in both sectors, strengthening their ability to improve their livelihood through engaging more effectively with export markets.

February: ACA bid farewell to Xenia Defontaine, who served for 4 years as our Public Relations Manager. Her contributions in facilitating communication between the Secretariat and cashew stakeholders were invaluable to the African cashew sector.



March: Equatorial Nut Processors Ltd (ENP), a Kenyan-based cashew processing facility, became the first African company to join ACA's Advisory Board. ENP is a model processor, internationally recognized through several certifications, including HACCP, ISO 22000, and ACA's own Quality Seal.

April: The second segment of a three-session program aiming to increase industry knowledge among actors across the cashew value-chain, called the Master Training Program (MTP), was held in Bouake, Côte d'Ivoire, with participants representing both private and public sector organizations from Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

May: Two of Kenya's foremost cashew processors, ENP and Jungle Nuts, were re-certified by the ACA Quality Seal program.



Employees of Equatorial Nut Processors (ENP)

June: Burkina Faso demonstrated its commitment to improving its domestic cashew sector through the subscription of two major processors to the ACA Seal program – Anatrans and Sotria-B. Both facilities are well on their way to becoming certified within the foreseeable future.

July: The final session of the Master Training Program was held in Sunyani, Ghana. Equipped with new knowledge and revamped motivation,

65 participants were awarded certificates indicating that they are now “master trainers” and will now serve as experts in their respective communities, sharing best agricultural practices.

Benin-based Tolaro Global, the first cashew processor to ever receive the ACA Seal, was re-approved for the third consecutive year, proving its commitment to high-quality, socially responsible, sustainable cashew production.

August: ACA re-established relations with Guinea-Bissau's major cashew stakeholders after more than a year of disruption which followed a political coup in March 2012. ACA signed an MoU with the Agencia Nacional de Caju (ANCA), the national association dedicated to advocating for cashew farmers and processors in Guinea-Bissau.

September: In its push to support rural farmers, ACA held its first Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop for 20 representatives of Nigerian cashew-producing regions. The training took place in Parakou, Benin and covered a vast array of topics related to good agricultural practices (GAP), including farm management and maintenance.



ACA delivers workshops on good agricultural practices in Benin

On September 12, ACA mourned the passing of its former President, Mr. Idrissa Kilangi. He was an indispensable proponent of the African cashew industry, and his loss is felt very heavily.

October: Mim Cashew and Agricultural Products Ltd, one of the most highly-renowned cashew processors in the Brong-Ahafo region of Ghana, received ACA Seal certification for the third consecutive year, setting a shining example for other facilities in the area.

Throughout the month of October, 2,000 Nigerian farmers were trained on the principles of GAP by the trainers who attended the ToT workshop the previous month. This knowledge- and skill-sharing supports the USAID TIME mission to empower rural cashew farmers to improve their livelihoods.

ACA also participated in a strategic meeting organized by the USAID-NEXTT project in Nigeria in conjunction with the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC). This meeting resulted in an agreement for future collaboration in the form of technical assistance to Nigerian stakeholders under NEPC's sponsorship for the 2015-2016 period.

ACA ACTIVITIES

November: FoodPro, a Nigerian cashew processor, became the first in its country to join the ranks of the six other ACA Seal-certified facilities. In a country which only processes 20% of its cashew harvest, this is a pivotal accomplishment. See the full story on Page 3.

The second ToT workshop was hosted in Nigeria for twenty participants representing Kogi, Kwara, and Oyo states. This training was titled “Harvest and Post-Harvest Handling Operations of Cashew Nuts” and its contents will be relayed to farmers in the trainers’ respective communities.

December: Throughout the month of December, 2,000 Nigerian farmers were trained on the principles of harvest and post-harvest techniques by the trainers who attended the ToT workshop the previous month. This knowledge- and skill-sharing supports the USAID TIME mission to empower rural cashew farmers to improve their livelihoods.



Harvest and Post-Harvest Best Practices Training

ACA Quality and Sustainability Seal Highlight: FoodPro

The ACA Seal Program was launched in 2012 with the intention of improving and standardizing the quality, safety, and social components of cashew processing in Africa. Seven African cashew processing facilities have achieved ACA Seal certification so far, and several more are currently implementing measures that will enable them to become Seal-approved within the next year or two. The newest member of the Seal family is FoodPro, a processor in Kwara State, Nigeria, which received Seal certification in November 2014.



Since founding FoodPro in 2010, the FoodPro team has extensively researched the cashew processing value chain, travelled to Vietnam, Benin, Gambia and Kenya to engage with processors and equipment manufacturers, and opened dialogs with potential kernel purchasers in Europe. FoodPro Director and co-founder Ayo Olajiga adds, “Perhaps the most important step in the journey was joining the African Cashew Alliance and attending the conference in Benin in 2012. This afforded us the opportunity to engage with global players in a single forum as well as observe innovation in processing equipment. The relationships formed at the ACA conference continue to yield fruit till today.”

Foodpro began production late 2012, and was assisted in its development by fellow ACA member Jungle Nuts, an ACA Seal-certified cashew processor in Kenya. Mr. Olajiga describes the advice and support provided by Jungle Nuts as “instrumental” in helping FoodPro refine its business model and continuously improve the quality of its output.

Foodpro’s main customer base is currently the UK market, although domestic sales are also growing in response to an increasing demand for processed cashews within Nigeria. The company is expanding quickly – while at the beginning of 2014 FoodPro employed around 100 staff, it begins the New Year with a workforce of 287 people, 88% of whom are women.

“One of the key drivers for the creation of Foodpro was to create a platform for sustainable employment creation,” says Mr. Olajiga. “The dedication and focus we observe

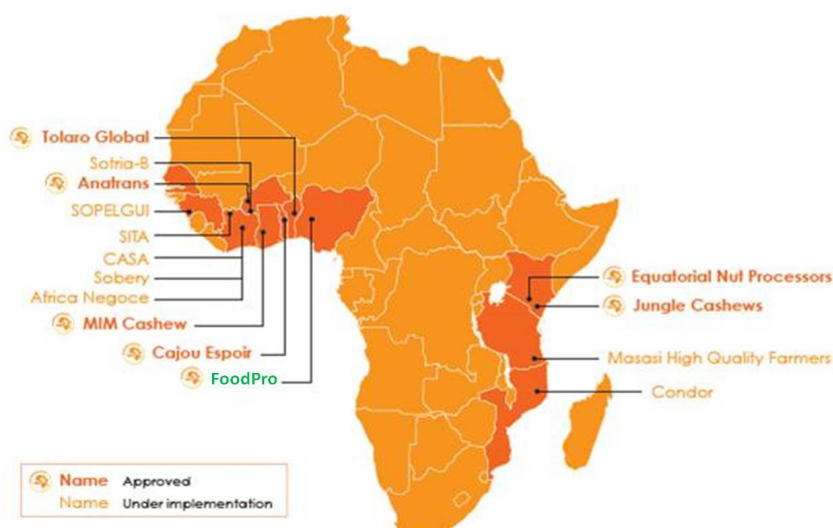
walking the factory floor is truly amazing, and inspires us to grow the company.”

With the long term plan of becoming a truly globally competitive company, the next step for FoodPro was to cement its reputation as a processor of top quality nuts by attaining the ACA Seal, a step which Mr. Olajiga describes as requiring “significant investment in people, process and equipment.”

Assisted by ACA Seal Coordinator Peter Nyarko, FoodPro implemented further changes in all areas of the factory, ranging from establishing an on-site laundry and introducing colour coded overalls, to redesigning internal reporting procedures. New talent was recruited in the area of quality assurance, section supervisors were empowered to take ownership of various stages of output, and an overall culture of inter-departmental collaboration and cooperation was fostered. Equipment was upgraded, and automation increased in a number of sections, while regular training was introduced for all levels of staff.

“The processing of kernel is like a relay,” observes Mr. Olajiga. “There are no prizes for doing well in one section - the entire process must be seamless for a quality product to be delivered.”

Since entering the Seal program, FoodPro has increased its production from 0.6 tonnes per day to 4 tonnes per day, and expects a further threefold increase in output in the coming year. Surveys have revealed increases in both customer satisfaction and employee morale, sale prices have risen, and new potential customers have approached the firm with purchase enquiries. Ongoing compliance with Seal standards is ensured by daily quality reporting, both by section supervisors and by the firm’s new Quality Assurance Manager. The firm plans to also introduce random monthly Seal audits in 2015 to further strengthen guarantees of quality.



As will be familiar to many cashew processors across Africa, a major challenge facing FoodPro is the issue of poor quality kernels being harvested at farm level. "A good process cannot make a bad quality cashew good," says Mr. Olajiga. To address this challenge, FoodPro has partnered with ACA and Nigerian government agencies to work directly with farmers, providing training in pre- and post-harvest cashew handling, thereby ensuring a rise in both harvest quality and farmer income, and also contributing significantly to the long-term sustainability of the Nigerian cashew industry as a whole.

Another challenge facing the company is the lack of skilled and experienced workers in the cashew processing sector. Mr. Olajiga notes that assistance from both ACA and Kenya's Jungle Nuts have helped FoodPro provide workers with the training necessary to ensure the sustainable growth of a skilled workforce.

The future for FoodPro is very bright indeed. The company expects to double its annual production output in 2015, and has a three-year plan in place to increase output from the present level of 1,500 tons of RCN to 10,000 tons.

Following ACA Seal certification, FoodPro is now experiencing a degree of international buyer interest which vastly outstrips the company's capacity. "We have received strong interest for product supply from North America, the Middle East and South Africa, says Mr. Olajiga, "but we do not currently have the capacity to enter into new supply agreements. So a key focus in 2015 will be on broadening the customer base through capacity expansion. However, Foodpro will focus on being a reliable supplier of quality products to customers with whom it builds long-term mutually-beneficial relationships - the focus will be on quality expansion, not just quantity expansion."

Further medium-term plans for the company include extracting cashew shell oil to convert into renewable energy for the factory, and launching a major branded retail product on the Nigerian market. But over and above the standard business targets, FoodPro has a vision for a company which delivers benefits to all its stakeholders. Says Mr. Olajiga, "We want to have a company where our employees are proud to work, our customers receive more value than they pay for, and shareholders receive good return on their investment."

NEWS AND INFO

Tanzania: Governmental Push to Reclaim Defunct Facilities

In a major boost to Tanzania's cashew processing capacity, the country's ruling political party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), has promised to reclaim warehouses for the purpose of establishing dozens of new cashew processing facilities. These warehouses, which were originally processing plants owned by the government, were privatized in recent years with the intention of improving efficiency and sharply increasing processing capacity. However, many of these warehouses were converted into storage facilities for raw cashew nuts to be internationally exported, defeating the purpose of their initial creation.

At a public rally held in the Newala District, Mr. Abdulrahman Kinana, CCM's Secretary General, announced that his party would collaborate with the relevant agricultural and trade ministry heads to devise a plan that maximizes the potential of the under-utilized processing units.

"Why should we export raw cashew nuts to other countries while we could process them here?" he asked the rally's audience. According to recent research, approximately 90% of Tanzania's raw cashew nuts are exported to India to be processed. "We must process our cashew nuts in local plants to add value to the produce. This will be of benefit to the farmers."

The farmers are not the only group which will benefit from this intervention. Mr. Kinana emphasized the social impact that the revival of these plants would catalyze, indicating that "more young people will benefit from employment opportunities [in cashew processing factories],

thus improving social development."

One of the African Cashew Alliance's key objectives is to expand domestic cashew processing in Africa. Nearly half of the world's cashew crop is grown on African soil, but only a fraction of these nuts remain in Africa to be processed. In exporting its raw materials, Africa misses a tremendous opportunity for job creation, income generation, and agency. The bulk of the profits created by the global cashew industry are in value-addition:

roasted cashew kernels, cashew butter, cashew milk, and other consumer-ready products. Local processing facilities which can employ members of the surrounding communities will therefore give local economies a significant economic boost.

ACA has a strong presence in the Tanzanian cashew sector; in fact, for many years, ACA's President was a Tanzanian (the late and greatly missed Mr. Idrissa Kilangi, who sadly passed away in 2014) and many of its members hail from the East African nation. One Tanzanian cashew processor,

Masasi High Quality Farmers, located in the Masasi district, is currently on its way to becoming ACA Seal-certified and will certainly serve as an example for its new domestic counterparts.

Roger Brou, ACA's Managing Director, says that he is "excited to welcome these new processors into the African cashew sector" and that ACA is "prepared to offer its assistance to ensure that they are successful."



Cashew Calendar 2015

January

16 - 19

Peanut and Tree Nut Processors Association Convention in San Diego, CA, USA

February

5 - 6

World Cashew Convention in Dubai, UAE



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