



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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A New Twist on Seed Technology



Fintrac Inc.

Kenya Seed Company Ltd. sells StrigAway improved seed through a partnership with Feed the Future and AATF. Private seed companies in East Africa are working together to bring to market a new herbicide-coated maize seed variety that has the power to combat Striga, a parasitic weed that infests up to 50 million hectares of Sub-Saharan African land.

The weed causes farmers to lose anywhere from a third to 100 percent of their staple crops, leading to hunger and financial hardship for as many as 100 million people. Traditional approaches to controlling Striga include crop rotation, intercropping and different planting techniques. However, these methods are time-consuming and have limited results, especially for smallholders, who account for 70 to 80 percent of the farmers in this region.

Years of research and collaboration between the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), the Weizmann Institute of Science, chemical company BASF and others culminated in the development of a new herbicide-coated maize seed variety called StrigAway. When farmers use StrigAway, the herbicide prevents the weed from attaching to the maize plant and kills Striga seeds that have not germinated in the surrounding soil. This means fields can be virtually clear of the pest throughout the season.

Bringing StrigAway to market has not been easy, however. Farmers must be trained to apply the herbicide and handle the seed safely. Touching the seeds can make them ineffective and storing them for too long or with other seeds can decrease germination. Companies selling StrigAway are thus obliged to invest up front in farmer education and training, which can be expensive.

To address these challenges, [Feed the Future Partnering for Innovation](#), a U.S. Agency for International Development program that helps the private sector introduce scalable agricultural technologies to smallholders, invested more than \$3 million in a project to help StrigAway take root in the Feed the Future focus countries of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, where Striga infests about 1.4 million hectares of farmland. Led by the Africa Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) and working with CIMMYT, BASF and six private seed companies, the project is increasing “just-in-time” seed production by providing automated treating equipment, improving packaging and labeling, and delivering safety training.

The new technology is making waves within the local private sector. For example, Freshco, a Kenyan seed company, received an automated seed treater and training from AATF and BASF in the fall of 2014. Freshco learned that to maintain its germination rates, the seed should be coated only when there is sufficient market demand. Freshco has been selling the seed to farmers, who usually harvest only three 100-kilogram bags of maize; the company expects yields to double this year as a result of StrigAway. With Freshco in the lead, the other seed companies are ramping up their efforts. If successful, these companies will sell upwards of 955 tons of improved maize by next year, with the seed valued at more than \$2 million,

benefiting nearly 40,000 farmers.