



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Growing Organic in Cameroon



Joseph Natividad

For women farmers in Cameroon, the land is their livelihood.

“Growing vegetables and growing my garden is how I feed my family and make a living,” said Evelyne (pictured above), an agriculturalist and president of her farming group in rural Cameroon. “It is how I help my daughters succeed in their studies.”

But flourishing as a farmer often hinges on purchasing seeds and fertilizer and developing the business acumen necessary to thrive in a competitive market.

Agriculturalists in Africa, like Evelyne, face multiple barriers to growing a bountiful harvest that is also financially successful, even after paying for farming inputs. The costs of fertilizers, pesticides, seeds, equipment, and transportation can dramatically reduce profits.

That’s where Peace Corps Volunteers like Clare MacMillen come in.

With the help of a Feed the Future partnership in the region, MacMillen and her Cameroonian counterpart Vitalis recently evaluated a market garden project that involved Evelyne’s farming group. As they interviewed group members, they discovered common anxieties and challenges: While the women tending the garden made strides in financing, growing and selling their produce together, many lamented losses in soil fertility, detrimental pest infestations, and the expense of chemical inputs.

“Each time these answers popped up [Vitalis and I] would look at each other and nod, realizing a strong need in the area,” MacMillen said.

MacMillen, taking into account the women’s interest in organic gardening, paired resources from a Feed the Future training she attended with Vitalis’ extensive agriculture and community development experience to pilot a project on organic fertilizer and pest management.

“Once I explained my vision for the project, Vitalis took full control from rallying community support to executing the

trainings to organizing transportation for us to visit the trainees' compost piles," Clare said.

Composting was new for the community, but it met their needs on multiple levels. It provided an environmentally-friendly gardening technique that would enrich the soil, and the women's group was already interested in the health benefits of organic produce. Best of all, it was also free. The women already had all the raw inputs they needed to create a compost pile—green nitrogen-rich weeds they clear from their farms, dead grasses and other debris from harvesting corn or removing rice hulls, wood ash from cooking fires or baking mud bricks, soil with local microbes, and water.

Working between three villages, MacMillen's counterpart trained 144 farmers in producing compost, organic pest repellents and pest deterrents. All of the products used inexpensive local ingredients.

They also discussed management, budgeting and marketing with seven agriculturalist groups, further strengthening the connections between farm and market. As a result of the trainings, one women's group constructed two compost piles at their group's garden and built six piles at one member's home garden.

Motivated women's groups are the key to improving soils and food security in Cameroon. "In many ways I was merely a catalyst," MacMillen said. "The agriculturalists and people like Vitalis are the truly motivated, dedicated, and inspiring people who made this project work."

The Peace Corps serves as one of 11 federal departments and agencies contributing to the U.S. government's global hunger and food security initiative, Feed the Future. Volunteers across Peace Corps' six technical sectors have a rare opportunity to bring American leadership and ingenuity to the doorsteps of families facing serious challenges around the world. More than 4,000 Volunteers have taken a grassroots approach to promoting important food security messaging and practices since 2011.