



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Rwandan Farmers Turn Straw Into Income



USAID/Rwanda

Ann Marie (center) weighs wheat straw that will be sold to a mushroom production facility.

Not long ago, 25 year-old Ann Marie Ukwimanishaka was part of the large share of Rwandans—over 70 percent—who farm the country's mountainous terrain for their income. The work is difficult and the pay is low and uncertain. But subsistence farming of wheat, along with selling handmade baskets, was how Ukwimanishaka supported herself, her mother and her two sisters.

Agriculture is one of the drivers of Rwanda's economy, and strengthening the agriculture sector is widely seen as essential to reducing poverty. However, it will require significant private sector investment to move farmers beyond subsistence agriculture and connect them to new markets to increase their incomes. The need is especially great for women farmers, who often take on the heavier share of burden in both farming and caring for a household.

Feed the Future is working to increase the Government of Rwanda's ability to attract investment in agriculture and identify market opportunities that can be linked to smallholder farmers. By connecting farmers to businesses, their incomes are more likely to increase and be more reliable, allowing them to better plan for their harvests. Increasing agricultural productivity and generating opportunities for economic growth and trade are key interventions under Feed the Future.

In January 2016, through funding from Feed the Future, the U.S. Agency for International Development began partnering with Kigali Farms, a mushroom seller, to establish the first button mushroom production facility in Rwanda. Once it's operational, the facility will produce 250 tons of mushrooms annually.

To grow button mushrooms, the seed must be planted in a material composed largely of wheat straw. Kigali Farms will need 28 tons of it each month to meet its button mushroom production goal. Seeing an opportunity for Rwandan farmers to supply the mushroom seller with needed wheat straw, Feed the Future helped set up three collection centers (two more are planned), where farmers can store and sell their wheat straw to Kigali Farms.

Farmers have the opportunity to sell their wheat straw during the wheat harvest, which is four months long. But in just the

first two weeks that the centers were open, approximately 20 metric tons of wheat straw were sold to Kigali Farms, earning \$800 for 26 farmers, including 21 women.

Recently, Ukwimanishaka joined Kigali Farms as a facilitator between the company and one of the wheat straw collection centers. Now, she can count on a daily wage. Not only that—she can supplement it too. Through the collection center, Ukwimanishaka sells her family's straw, and she gains even more income from the baskets she continues to make.

“The opportunity to sell wheat straw is a great opportunity for women in this village,” Ukwimanishaka said. “And the impact of the earnings from wheat straw is visible at the household level, as demonstrated by myself.” With her increased income, she has purchased a sheep for breeding and additional basket-making materials so that she can expand her business.

Throughout 2016, Kigali Farms is expected to purchase 300 metric tons of wheat straw from 800 farmers across Rwanda.