



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/ducks-love-duckweed%E2%80%94and-chickens-do-too>

Ducks Love Duckweed—and Chickens Do Too



Lema Debela Deresa

Mrs. Mulu collecting eggs hatched from duckweed fed chicken.

Mulu Worku, a 29 year-old mother of a young son, tends chickens in Holeta Town, a community about 25 miles from Addis Abba, Ethiopia's capital city. At first glance, her activities may seem unremarkable in a country where poultry raising is considered traditional women's work. But on a closer look, her traditional work is potentially transformational.

Mulu is one of 1,200 Ethiopian women engaged in an innovative Feed the Future project to improve the nutritional quality and commercial potential of their flocks. The innovation? Simply put, it's chicken feed, made from the aquatic plant popularly known as duckweed.

Duckweed is something of a miracle food for poultry. Like wild ducks who have feasted on this nutrient-rich plant, their domesticated farmyard cousins gain a similarly rich complement of protein, vitamins and trace minerals by consuming the dry feed. For poultry growers, the use of duckweed as a supplementary feed brings cost savings as well. Because the plant is a prolific grower in a variety of fresh and brackish waters and because it requires a smaller amount of seed money and labor, it is less expensive to produce than traditional factory-processed and vitamin-enriched feed made from soy or other land-based food crops. In combination with traditional feed, it can lower the overall costs of poultry production.

Funded by Feed the Future and implemented by its Ethiopian civil society partner Stand for Vulnerable Organization, this project is also innovative in another way: It relies on a network of 60 women's self-help groups, scattered throughout the 10 districts in the Oromia Regional State, to train women in these agricultural practices. The self-help groups learn from each other, gain support from each other, and save money for purposes that are mutually beneficial. For example, Mulu, once a day laborer with a household income of less than \$2 a day, now works on a farm owned by the 20 women in her group and makes double what she once earned. She and her group have also been able to save \$175 to start a business that will produce duckweed feed.

Mulu and her fellow group members demonstrate how women's empowerment and inclusion can help to meet Feed the Future's goal of overcoming chronic food insecurity, persistent child malnutrition, and women's economic vulnerability in

Ethiopia.

As Mulu said, “Thanks to the people of the United States of America, today my group members are better off in that we are now able to nourish our children with eggs produced from our group’s poultry farm and have developed saving and working habits.”