



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Bio-Fortified Maize Offers Zambian Children a New Lease on Life, and Their Eyesight



AgResults

PVA Maize Meal is enriched with vitamin A to combat malnutrition, stunting and increased blindness. Zambia is considered to have one of the highest rates of malnutrition and vitamin A deficiency.

In the low light of a Zambian morning, children across the country go about their morning chores. Some fetch the day's water for cooking and bathing. Some clean and prepare the house for the day. A few pack their bags, put on their shoes and make their way to school. For many, however, these chores are difficult because their eyesight has diminished, or they have become completely blind.

This blindness is one of the many devastating consequences of vitamin-A deficiency. Those affected, who are most often women and children, face a lifetime of socio-economic stigma and social exclusion. In extreme cases, some children are more susceptible to infection, stunting and slowed growth, and even death.

Over the past three decades, USAID, in cooperation with other international donors, has invested heavily in the development of technologies such as improved seeds and bio-fortified foods that target specific nutrition challenges such as vitamin-A deficiency. In Zambia, which has some of the highest vitamin-A deficiency rates in the world, Feed the Future has prioritized the development of bio-fortified pro-vitamin A (PVA) orange maize, which has shown to dramatically reduce the impact of vitamin A deficiency among vulnerable populations.

Developing orange maize, however, is only the first step in combatting vitamin-A deficiency. The most crucial step is ensuring it reaches those who are most vulnerable and working so it can become a staple of the Zambian diet.

Introducing new products into a market is challenging and often costly, as consumers have to be aware of the product and its benefits. To date, Zambian grain millers and seed companies have been hesitant to enter the orange maize market due to the fact that consumers remain largely unaware of it and its nutritional benefits, and the costs to entering the market remain

high.

To overcome these challenges, USAID, a Feed the Future agency and partner in the multilateral, multi-donor fund [AgResults Initiative](#), launched a prize competition to incentivize seed companies and millers to produce and sell orange maize seed to farmers and maize meal to consumers. The competition is one of six that Feed the Future supports to deliver high-impact agricultural innovations. [The Zambia PVA Maize Project](#) provides monetary prizes in proportion to volume of sales of orange maize seed and maize meal by seed companies and millers, respectively. The idea behind the competition is that incentivizing the private sector to promote the awareness and demand for seed and maize meal will increase the adoption from consumers living in urban and peri-urban areas and ultimately, a lasting orange maize market that does not require continual donor support will be created.

The AgResults Zambia project is only in its second year, but preliminary results are promising. Marketing and promotional events have increased awareness of orange maize and chipped away at cultural stigma against it, which is sometimes confused with yellow maize, a product used mainly as animal feed. Additionally, an increasing number of seed companies and millers have shown interest in joining the project. By the end of the first year, the project will have inducted four seed companies, and is working to have 10 millers join the pilot.

If this trend continues, Zambians have a lot to gain. Getting orange maize products into grocery stores in Zambia will improve access to vitamin A-rich foods for more urban consumers and will improve nutrition for rural farming households, who will be able to access and buy orange maize seeds at agro dealers shops, grow more maize for sale to millers, and have some left over to store and use for their household meals.

With a vibrant market and access to this beneficial product, children across Zambia will not only be able to see better, but they will also live healthier, more productive lives.