



Cowpea growers see 55 per cent jump in profits from improved varieties

Resource-poor [cowpea](#) farmers in sub-Saharan Africa have seen their profits jump by 55 per cent thanks to improved dual-purpose cowpea varieties developed and introduced by IITA and its national partners in Nigeria. [Paul Amaza](#), IITA Agricultural Economist, says that farmers who use traditional varieties earn about US\$ 251 per hectare, while those who are growing the improved cowpea are getting US\$390, or US\$139 more, per hectare with proper crop management.

The improved varieties -- IT89KD-288, IT89KD-391, IT97K-499-35, and IT93K-452-1 -- produce high-quality grains for use as food and fodder and are also resistant to *Striga*, a parasitic weed that reduces yields of susceptible local cowpeas by as much as 80 per cent.

[Alpha Yaya Kamara](#), IITA's Savannah Systems Agronomist, says over 100,000 farmers in Borno and Kano states in northern Nigeria and in the Niger Republic are currently using the improved varieties, where their adoption rate is conservatively estimated at 65 per cent. He explains that farmers in the savannah region view cowpea as both food and cash crop. Therefore, when the varieties were introduced, farmers took to them quickly since they serve both ends well. "Those who cultivate it are basically better off than those who do not", Kamara adds.

The improved cowpea varieties were developed and deployed in partnership with the Borno State Agricultural Development Project, Kano State Agricultural and Rural Development Authority, Kaduna State Agricultural Development Project, the Institute of Agricultural Research - Zaria and the University of Maiduguri. Other local development partners are also promoting the improved varieties by organizing farmers' field days, exchange visits, training and farmer-to-farmer diffusion.

Cowpea (*Vigna unguiculata*) is a grain legume grown mainly in the savanna regions of the tropics and subtropics in Africa, Asia, and South America. Its grain contains about 25 per cent protein, making it extremely valuable to those who cannot afford animal-derived protein foods such as meat and fish. It is tolerant to drought, fixes atmospheric nitrogen and improves poor soils.

According to the [FAO](#), about 7.56 million tons of cowpea are produced worldwide annually, with sub-Saharan Africa accounting for 70% or about 5.3 million tons.

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See also:

[Cowpea overview](#)

[Cereals and legumes systems](#)

Other IITA cereals and legumes projects:

[Development and Promotion of *Alectra* Resistant Cowpea cultivars](#)

[Improving tropical legume productivity for marginal environments in sub-Saharan Africa](#)

[Tropical Legume II](#)

Related websites:

[Cowpea](#) in Wikipedia

[Cowpea](#) in Alternative Field Crops Manual, Purdue University

About IITA

Africa has complex problems that plague agriculture and people's lives. We develop agricultural solutions with our partners to tackle hunger and poverty. Our award winning [research for development \(R4D\)](#) is based on focused, authoritative thinking anchored on the development needs of sub-Saharan Africa. We work with partners in Africa and beyond to reduce producer and consumer risks, enhance crop quality and productivity, and generate wealth from agriculture. IITA is an international non-profit R4D organization established in 1967, governed by a Board of Trustees, and supported primarily by the [CGIAR](#).

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