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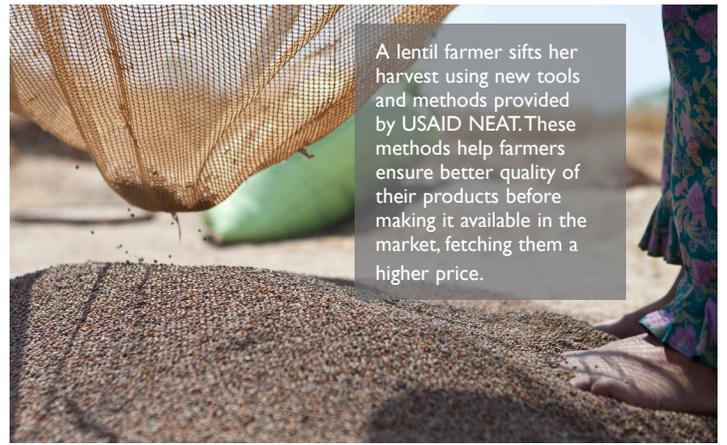
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Members of the Kalika Farmer Group at Bardia district looking at the quality of their lentil crop.

Lentil is Nepal's number one export, yet there are significant constraints in productivity. Yields are low, quality sometimes poor, and processors are operating at only 35 percent of capacity. Lentil farmers fail to reach their potential due to inefficient utilization of land, use of traditional farming practices, and a lack of market access. For example, few farmers have access to and use high quality seed. Also, smallholder farmers often sell their lentil in small quantities to village-level traders, which decrease their ability to bargain for a competitive price.

Since 2011, with USAID Nepal Economic Agriculture and Trade (NEAT) project's support, more than 17,000 farmers across 11 districts of Nepal are cultivating a new future in commercial lentil production. By adopting good agriculture practices, farmers have increased production by more than 50 percent and are increasingly satisfying the growing hunger for lentil in Nepal and abroad.



A lentil farmer sifts her harvest using new tools and methods provided by USAID NEAT. These methods help farmers ensure better quality of their products before making it available in the market, fetching them a higher price.

Lentil Producers Satisfy Hungry Markets

Zahir Kahn (below) and his 25-member cooperative farmer group in Banke district have successfully switched from using traditional seeds and methods of farming to selling quality lentil to large markets. Every member of the cooperative participates in a daily savings program, helping increase their resilience. Today, with the quality and quantity of his lentils so good, Kahn even sells his seeds to the Nepal Agriculture Research Council. On the right picture, he is displaying his productive Spring 2013 lentil harvest.



With USAID NEAT's support, farmers like Zahir Kahn and the women in the picture above are now bulking their crop with their neighbors, grading their lentil, and utilizing newly acquired collective bargaining skills to sell to district level traders, wholesalers, and processing firms for a higher price. Farmers hear directly from the traders about the varieties, timing, and quantity that are in demand and have begun block-farming lentil so that they can produce enough to sell to the large traders or processors directly. The program also facilitated access to improved inputs like seeds and fertilizers and provided on-farm training on practices such as zero-tilling and integrated pest management.



Did You Know?

- Nepal ranks 6th among the world's largest producers of lentils. The country grows nearly 5 percent of the world's lentils.
- Nepal produced 204,869 tonnes of lentils in 2011, up 36.31 percent to take the 6th place behind Canada, India, Turkey, Australia and the U.S.
- Bangladesh is the largest buyer of Nepali lentils followed by India, Singapore, the UAE and Bahrain.
- In 2011-12, Nepal exported 33,151 tonnes of lentils worth Rs. 2.67 billion. Bangladesh alone procured lentils worth Rs. 2.45 billion.
- In 2008-09, lentil worth Rs. 5.66 billion was exported, making it the country's largest export.
- Experts say Nepal could boost its lentil exports to more than Rs. 25 billion annually if there were proper research and improved seeds.

Source: Sangam Prasain, The Kathmandu Post, April 19, "Bardia lentil farmers buoyed by higher prices."