

SNAPSHOT

Greenhouse Technologies Reap Big Harvests

Growing tomatoes for all seasons improves productivity and income



Photo: by Fintrac Inc.

Idd Seif holding clusters of tomatoes inside his greenhouse.

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Idd Seif

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“I’ve never experienced a greater harvest and highest income in my life from such a small greenhouse plot,” said 51 year-old Idd Seif, a smallholder farmer in Lukozi village, Lushoto district in Tanzania’s Tanga region. Idd started farming in 1997 in an open field using poor agricultural methods that led to poor harvests and limited income.

During the past several years, Idd has been growing broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, cauliflower, and tomato on a ½ acre open field lot and experiencing consistently disappointing yields. In 2011, the Tanzania Agriculture Productivity Program (TAPP) funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) as part of Feed the Future, selected Idd as one of the smallholder farmers whose farm would host a demonstration plot for hybrid tomato greenhouse technology. Prior to the construction of the 28 by 11 meter greenhouse plot on his farm, Idd attended trainings on greenhouse technology.

There, USAID-TAPP trained Idd on good agricultural practices such as using a drip irrigation system to control water usage and practice fertigation, a method of applying soluble fertilizers through drip system to save labor and time. Additionally, Idd learned that he should plant on raised beds to facilitate the development of good root systems and allow for easy weeding. “The good thing about the greenhouse technology is that you can grow your crops throughout the year, and you can also plan your crop production so as to take advantage of growing a particular crop in off-season,” said Idd.

In November 2011, Idd transplanted 780 seedlings onto the raised beds, using proper spacing and a trellising system that permits a single plant to grow to the height of more than a meter. Idd’s trellising practice created 16 clusters for each plant, meaning he could harvest about 15 kilograms from a single plant from each season.

Idd started harvesting tomatoes in February 2012; as of April he had harvested a total of 4,840 kg valued at 4,840,000 Tanzanian Shillings (\$4,200). He sold much of the produce at nearby local market, while the rest was transported to other markets in the Dar es Salaam region. Idd expects to harvest an additional 6,500 kg of tomatoes during the remaining four months of the growing season, bringing his total sales to Tshs 11,293,000 (\$9,000).

After recouping his initial investment of Tshs 2,500,000 (\$2,200), Idd will have earned himself an impressive profit. “If I compare greenhouse technology with my first poor farming practices, it’s a big difference with an increase of 100%,” admitted Idd, adding that he plans to invest his profit into a second greenhouse and share his skills and technologies with his children.