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President of the Oromia Region visits a seed facility run by a Seed Production and Marketing Union in Chefe Buluk

Oromia Regional President H.E. Ato Shimelis Abdisa visited the seed facility of Chefe Buluk Seed Production and Marketing Union 2020 in Horo Guduru, Wollega Zone on 29 March 2020. He was accompanied by the regional Vice President Dr Girma Amente and Head of Oromia Bureau of Agriculture Ato Daba Debele. Regional staff of the Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) were also in attendance.

The visit included a trip to the seed processing plant, mini seed laboratory and modern seed storage site. Presentations regarding the facility, seed production and marketing activity as well as similar initiatives underway in the region were made during the visit.

Speaking after the visit, the President said "I did not know we have this kind of plant in Shambu. This is very important to modernize our agricultural practices. Going forward, it is very important to scale fast the same facilities in other parts of Oromia"

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The activities, challenges and opportunities of the union were discussed during the visit. The union manager explained that the union has aggregated 9,846 quintals of certified seed and was ready for the upcoming planting season. The officials appreciated the role played by the ATA in introducing seed technologies and improving infrastructural capacity of seed unions to solve bottlenecks in seed sector development and to enhance access and use of quality seed in the region.



ATA and MoA apiculture teams visit Israel for training and experience-sharing

Seven apiculture experts from the Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) attended a 20-day training at the MASHAV International Agricultural Training Center in Israel that aimed at developing the beekeeping subsector through training and experience-sharing. The training, which lasted from 16 February to 6 March 2020, was organized for high level beekeeping experts drawn from federal and intervention regional institutions within the Integrated Apiculture Value Chain Development Project (IAVCDA). As the ATA IAVCDA project is nearing conclusion at the end of the current year, the training intended to strengthen and capacitate federal and regional beekeeping experts of BoA to ensure sustainability of the project outcomes and visions.

The training was given by pioneer and high-level Israeli professionals and beekeepers both in classroom and in the field. The team was able to learn how Israel has brought tangible changes in agriculture, historical perspectives on beekeeping in Israel, policies for the development of beekeeping sector, challenges, and solution. As part of the training, the team visited many commercial and small apiary sites in fields, beekeeping equipment workshops, honey and wax processing plants, nursery sites, universities, research center and some historical places. On returning from the training and experience-sharing visit to Israel, Ato Assefa Amaldeg, Senior Project Officer at ATA's IAVCA, asserted that an apiculture-based extension system needs to be developed together with a functional credit system that would help fund small start-ups. "Coordination among stakeholders is also key to enabling Ethiopian apiculture to attain similar success rates as the apiculture development we observed while in Israel," He added. "Research centers, development workers and policy makers need to work hand in hand."

The team that traveled for the training returned inspired and challenged by the training, experience sharing and personal interactions with the beekeepers. The trainees' eyes have been opened to new possibilities of ensuring sustainability and maximizing productivity of beekeeping in Ethiopia.



ATA and Mercy Corps sign a memorandum of understanding for the use of a digital platform to enable data-driven support to farmers

The Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) and Mercy Corps' AgriFin program have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 2 April 2020 to support ATA implement develop a data hub through which ATA will be able to derive insights from, and provide data-driven holistic solutions to farmers. The data hub will also enable ATA to implement a digital farm-management tool enabling farmers to make data-driven decisions and improve existing processes and performances within ATA's Farmer Production Clusters (FPC) program. The agreement was signed by ATA CEO Khalid Bomba and Mercy Corps/AgriFin Program Director, Leesa Shrader, in Addis Ababa and Nairobi.

"This partnership is an exciting and bold initiative for the two institutions. Since the initiation of the partnership last year, Mercy Corps' AgriFin program has been supporting the ATA and its FPC program to design and test high-impact digital solutions for smallholder farmers. These solutions will ultimately be scaled, benefiting the 2.5 million smallholder farmers under the FPCs," ATA CEO Mr. Khalid Bomba said.

Through the ATA-Mercy Corps AgriFin partnership, ATA is piloting CropIn's SmartFarm platform, which will enable the organization to obtain real-time insights on the FPCs across various geographies, enabling it to provide timely recommendations and guidance to individual smallholder farmers as well as clusters based on these insights.

"ATA has always been at the forefront of technology innovation for the agricultural sector in Ethiopia, indeed across Africa," said AgriFin Program Director, Ms. Leesa Shrader. She added, "Mercy Corps is honored to work with the ATA team to help them take their work to the next level, combining data and building responsive digital systems which can inform government, private sector and smallholder farmers' critical work in agriculture, building a solid foundation for Ethiopia's food security and economic growth."

The ATA will develop and scale a solution to meet the financial and productive needs of smallholder farmers in Ethiopia while working with the Mercy Corps' AgriFin program as a strategic partner to assist in the potential roll-out of the project. Mercy Corps' AgriFin aims at leveraging the power, convenience, and prevalence of mobile phones to help smallholder farmers access digital services and boost their harvest, production, and ultimately their incomes.

CropIn delivers future-ready farming solutions to the entire agriculture sector, including decision making tools that bring consistency, dependability, and sustainability to agri-businesses. The ATA will use the platform to provide decision makers with complete visibility to the activities taking place at each of the FPCs and utilize the data to support in decision making. The platform will also equip Development Agents (DAs) with updated information that they can use to deliver timely information and advisories to farmers. The tools will enable the ATA and its stakeholders to analyze and interpret data to make actionable recommendations.

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The land preparation activity was visited by Oromia regional government bodies led by Dr. Girma Amente, Vice President of the Regional state & Head of Oromia Rural Development Cluster, and Federal Prosperity Party (PP) officials led by Ato Binalf Andualem, Secretary General , Federal PP office. Zonal and woreda levels government officials and farmers' representatives were also in attendance.

Such coordinated mobilization for land preparation, planting, weeding and harvest not only increase efficiency in terms of time spent per plot, but also facilitate optimum preparation, application of inputs and efficient harvest, ensuring increase in yield/harvest and better market competitiveness for members of the FPC.

Fayisa Buta FPC has been registered with the 8028 Farmers' Hotline with the identification number (ID): WH-OR-1272, GPS coordinates (X-37P0532655, Y-0901481). The cluster has also fulfilled the requirements and transitioned from pre-basic to basic status.

The visiting officials left highly impressed by the FPC's organizational and coordination efficiency, including the employment of tractors for land preparation. They recommended that this successful practice should be scaled up to other parts of the Oromia Region.





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