



FIRST PERSON Cultivation Techniques Improve Lives

New methods allow a small farmer to expand his business



Photo: USAID/Shaymaa Omran

Farmer Bakry Mohamed uses a new technique for air drying aromatic and medical plants that increases production, quality and, hence, income, in addition to creating job opportunities for others in his village.

Until two years ago, Bakry Mohamed was a traditional Egyptian farmer who ate what he reaped. He never thought of market demand, new crops or new techniques. But after working with USAID, Bakry became recognized as an example of how small efforts can make a huge difference in an Egyptian farmer's life.

A father of eight living in Fayoum Governorate, Bakry is typical of the 34 percent of Egypt's labor force that works in agriculture. He owns eight acres of reclaimed desert, which he used to irrigate by flooding — an inefficient use of resources that led to reduced yields. He grew the traditional crops of wheat, maize and clover, which satisfied his family and livestock needs, and sold whatever was left for a very small or even no profit.

In 2003, USAID began helping Bakry and other small farmers improve their yields through training and study tours. Bakry said the most important element of his education was a 2004 trip to the University of California-Davis, where he observed and participated in using new growing techniques to cultivate different crop varieties.

Today Bakry plants high-value beans, tomatoes and aromatic and medical plants. He cultivates them using efficient drip irrigation and processes them with improved drying techniques. Since 2004, he has produced 1,500 tons of onion, 11 tons of basil and 4 tons of wormseed (ambrosia or epazote), and he has sold his produce to both local and international markets. This farmer, who had never before exported, managed to sell more than \$15,000 worth of crops to foreign buyers in two short years.

While Bakry used to rely solely on family members to work his farm, his expanding business created job opportunities for others in his village. Bakry now hires 766 days of non-family labor to cultivate, harvest, sort and process his yield, paying each laborer about \$3.50 a day, higher than the normal rate paid in the area. Bakry has also shared what he learned with his neighbors, conducting workshops to teach people in his village, especially women, about improving post-harvest techniques and meeting international quality standards.