



PHOTO & CAPTION

Seed Fair Boosts Harvest



Photo: USAID/CRS

Farmers from Niger negotiate seed prices with vendors at a USAID-sponsored seed fair in the south-central Zinder district.

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Agriculture experts feared that Niger's 2005 harvest would be threatened by a lack of seeds following a year plagued by drought and locusts. USAID responded by helping poor farmers buy the seeds they needed to produce their crops. The provision of quality seeds boosted local production; farmers produced a healthy national harvest totaling 3.7 million tons — 36 percent more than the previous year's harvest.

To ensure that vulnerable farmers were able to obtain seeds, USAID sponsored a seed fair where seed vendors came from near and far to sell and distribute their wares. One villager from Wawara, south-central Niger, explained how difficult it can be to obtain seeds: "Without this fair I would not have had access to the seeds produced and sold by [seed vendor] Sarkin Noma. He sells his seeds in Tanout or Zinder City, and we don't usually have access to them." Tanout and Zinder are about 60 miles away from Wawara, and the villager has no way to get there.

Another farmer from Garin Bagala, not far from Wawara, said "The seed fair was an opportunity for me to stay and plant my field. Without the fair, I would have not had the means to sow my field. Last year, I didn't even harvest so much as one grain, because I had no seeds in my granary."

Years ago, a village hosting one of the USAID-sponsored seed fairs north of Tanout had a very popular market. But because of the dwindling water table in the area, the market was deserted for five years. Efforts had been made to revive it, but nothing had worked. The village chief was thrilled on the day of the fair, and thanked USAID and its partner Catholic Relief Services for reviving his market, at least for one day. If the villagers and farmers have their way, the market may well continue to thrive: they have invited the vendors to return during the season every week for market day.