

SUCCESS STORY

Bringing Better Seed to Malawi

Quality seed improves drought resistance for Malawi's crucial corn crop



Strategic Partnership Grants

The grant to Capstone is part of USAID's Strategic Partnership Grant (SPG) Program, which encourages private sector investment from South African organizations into the Feed-the-Future focus countries of Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia starting with the maize, soy and groundnut value chains. The objectives of the SPG are to:

- Improve regional food security through increased private sector investment in agriculture
- Accelerate the transfer of improved production (including inputs), processing, storage, and marketing technologies to actors within the maize, soy and groundnut value chains
- Expand and improve partnerships between South African and regional companies and organizations

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The USAID Southern Africa Trade Hub provided a grant of US\$100,000 to Capstone Seeds SA (PTY) to accelerate commercial access to drought-tolerant hybrid maize seed in Malawi. Capstone, an independent South African seed company, entered into a joint venture with Peacock Enterprises Ltd of Malawi to multiply and market "CAP9001" in Malawi. This variety was developed specifically with the needs of the region in mind, to address productivity and maximize yield potential in small scale, rain-fed, drought-vulnerable farming systems. Approximately 80 metric tons of certified hybrid seed maize were produced through this grant project.

Research into improved seed varieties, especially drought-tolerant ones, is vital for improving food security in the Southern African environment; CAP9001 has been approved by the Drought Tolerant Maize for Africa Initiative (DTMA) of the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT). However, DTMA cites the lack of multiplication and commercial distribution as the "greatest obstacle" for getting seed to farmers, which is exactly the challenge this grant addresses.

The grant not only supported the production of 80 metric tons of new hybrid seed in Malawi, but also paired independent seed companies in South Africa and Malawi to bring new seed products to the market effectively. Through the grant, Peacock Seeds was supported to purchase parent seed and receive technical assistance in best practices for seed production operations. Both parties stress the importance of a strong local seed industry to bring competition and varied products to the market. Capstone Seed Director, Philip Taylor, explains, "It is very important that this grant supports two independent seed companies. Real competition and innovation will only come from stronger local seed producers, and a more competitive seed market ultimately benefits the farmers of Malawi."

Peacock Seeds marketed the seed directly to small holders in 10 kg packs, targeting approximately 8,000 farmers in the first year. But the first year is just the start. As Director of Peacock Enterprises, Felix Jumbe, says, "This partnership means that the variety will now be consistently available to the farming community. We hope to increase our outreach through our dealer network which currently numbers 15. Demand is increasing and we are confident that small-scale farmers will achieve the yield potential for our variety. Now working with a credible seed company from South Africa and distributing certified seed on the market, Peacock is happy to be part of Malawi's agriculture development."