



**FEED**<sup>THE</sup>**FUTURE**

The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative



# EMPOWERING WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Photo by Ashley Peterson, Land O'Lakes

Feed the Future is America's initiative to combat global hunger. With a focus on smallholder farmers, particularly women, Feed the Future helps partner countries harness the power of smart agriculture to address the root causes of poverty and hunger.

[www.feedthefuture.gov](http://www.feedthefuture.gov)

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## WHY WOMEN?

Women play a vital role in ending global hunger. They participate in all aspects of the food system, from farming and research to trade and marketing to entrepreneurship, leadership and caring for family members.

But women face multiple constraints in many of the activities they pursue. Relative to men, women tend to own less land, have limited ability to hire labor, and have impeded access to credit, extension and other services.

Closing this “gender gap” can have a measurable impact on agriculture in developing countries, where many people depend on the sector for a living. When women advance, it has a ripple effect throughout their families and communities. Studies show that women are more likely than men to reinvest their income back into their household to support the family’s nutrition needs, healthcare and school fees.

- ✓ Women make up a significant proportion of the agricultural labor force in developing countries – up to 50 percent in sub-Saharan Africa.
- ✓ If women had the same access to productive resources like land as men, they could increase farm yields by 20-30 percent.
- ✓ This increase in agricultural output could reduce the number of hungry people in the world by up to 150 million.

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## INVESTING IN WOMEN

Feed the Future helps women – from business owners to farmers to health workers and more – overcome barriers and constraints to reaching their full potential in the agriculture sector, including helping them gain more empowerment and leadership in areas such as decision-making, involvement in community groups, and control over income and their time.

Feed the Future also fosters policy changes that increase women’s land ownership and strengthens their access to financial and business services. The initiative provides training and opportunities for women to use new agricultural technologies and develop innovations that increase their productivity, reduce unpaid work and improve nutrition.

In 2016, Feed the Future helped 680,000 women-led agribusinesses access business development services to grow and improve their companies. The initiative also helped 420,000 women access agricultural-related credit, including more than \$110 million in rural loans.

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## ENGAGING MEN

Feed the Future has effectively increased women's leadership roles in their communities by working through community-based organizations, changing gender norms, and engaging men to support women's empowerment efforts.

One area of particular focus for engaging men has been nutrition. Data show that greater equality within households is nearly always associated with positive nutritional outcomes, denoting the importance of a household working together to generate good nutrition for the family. The initiative engages men in child nutrition and care while promoting more gender-equitable attitudes

and responsibilities. In Ghana, videos have helped fathers better understand good nutrition practices, facilitated conversations between wives and husbands, and encouraged couples to more equally share responsibility for child nutrition and care. In Senegal, "gender champion couples" model the involvement of men in the household, gardening and hygiene.

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## MEASURING EMPOWERMENT

Early in the initiative, Feed the Future and its partners developed the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index – the first tool of its kind – to make empowerment measurable.

The initiative has used it as a diagnostic to inform and shape programming as well as to monitor and measure impact. Today, partners around the world are using the tool to collect data in more than 47 countries. This data has even moved governments such as Bangladesh's to design new programs aimed at addressing the greatest constraints women in agriculture face.

The Index tracks rural women's roles and engagement in agricultural activities relative to men's in the areas of: decisions over agricultural production, access to and decision-making power over assets and resources, control over use of income, leadership roles within the community, and time use.

Initial results showed that access to credit and heavy workloads were key constraints to empowerment in the areas where Feed the Future worked. Since then, at least half of Feed the Future countries have reported significant improvements in these areas, as well as greater control over income. For example in Bangladesh, data first showed in 2011 that only 27 percent of women were empowered to do things like make decisions and manage household income. When Feed the Future measured empowerment again in 2015, the percentage of empowered women had increased to 41 percent.



Photo by Fintrac, Inc.

## BUSINESS SERVICES LEAD TO GREATER GROWTH IN HONDURAS

Through a program in Honduras, Feed the Future helped women-owned small- and medium-sized businesses improve their sales by 50 percent above baseline, increasing their incomes by 81 percent. One of these businesses is Café ARIMEL, a coffee processing company run by two sisters in Santa Rosa de Copan.

In 2012, with help from Feed the Future, they conducted a business diagnostic to identify opportunities for growth. Based on this diagnostic, project specialists provided a suite of trainings in market-driven production, improved productivity, and finance and administration. As a result, Café ARIMEL increased its total sales by 35 percent over two years. “We expect to grow by at least 100 percent over the next five years,” Eunice Arita said.

The sisters have invested in new equipment and are expanding their distribution network. Moreover, their success is proving to the larger community that women are capable of running efficient and profitable businesses — something long assumed to be the purview of men.



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