

Solynta, PepsiCo join forces to empower Ethiopian potato farmers

Solynta and PepsiCo's Ethiopia-based Foods Unit, Senselet Food Processing (Senselet) have launched a joint project to introduce hybrid true potato seeds (HTPS) to Ethiopia. Together, the parties will enrich and expand the country's growing potato sector by introducing advanced potato genetics with Solynta's innovative non-GMO hybrid breeding technology. Hybrid breeding enables focused breeding of desirable traits like pest resistance and hardiness in potatoes, improving food security and ensuring more sustainable income for local farmers.



Source: Couleur via [Pixabay](#)

Over the next three years, Ethiopian researchers and private farmers will test HTPS under local conditions to ensure their success. Solynta and PepsiCo will simultaneously work closely with Ethiopian authorities to establish the legal framework for the import of HTPS, the registration of HTPS varieties and the certification of HTPS seed tubers.

Under the agreement, public and private researchers, officials, extension workers and farmers will all be trained to achieve maximum genetic potential from hybrid true potato seeds. Participants include researchers and officials of the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR) in Addis Ababa and Amhara Agricultural Research Institute (ARARI) in Bahir Dar.

Potato seed technology

"Our teams will develop with farmers the best practices, for Ethiopian conditions, for sowing true seeds, raising seedlings, and transplanting seedlings into the field to grow a healthy crop," said Charles Miller, Director of Business Development at Solynta. "Hybrid breeding drives the rapid development of new high-yielding, multi-resistant potato cultivars. These will significantly affect crop practices, productivity, and reliance on pesticides."

The partnership aligns closely with the goals of the Ethiopia-Netherlands Seed Partnership (ENSP), which has been established by the governments of Ethiopia and the Netherlands to strengthen the seed sector in Ethiopia.

The mission of ENSP is to "enable the private sector in Ethiopia to deliver farming men and women high-quality seed of improved varieties much needed for food security and nutrition, and climate resilience." Solynta and PepsiCo's cooperation serves this mission, aligning seamlessly with each company's values and sustainability goals to improve the livelihoods of individuals in their respective agricultural supply chains and communities.

Since the 2017 establishment of Senselet in Ethiopia, the company has formed strong business partnerships with local farmers and commercial partners. Its latest partnership with Solynta represents an agricultural partnership to ensure the quality and availability of ingredients. PepsiCo is the leading Ethiopian potato processing company based in the country's capital, Addis Ababa. The announcement of its cooperation with Solynta closely follows the recent news of PepsiCo's \$40m cash injection to expand its business further in Ethiopia, a country poised for significant economic growth.

Food system sustainability

"This investment will further allow us to leverage PepsiCo's global expertise to boost the business' potato sourcing programmes, as well as its manufacturing and go-to-market capabilities. The potential market for chips here is much larger than the existing market, and as such, there is a great need for higher quality potato products," said Chris Wijnterp, GM of Senselet at the time of the investment announcement. "We want to help build a more sustainable food system in Ethiopia by meeting human needs while bolstering global economic and social development within the planet's natural boundaries."

The project furthers PepsiCo's commitment to strengthening the potato value chain as part of its Pep+ (Pep positive) agenda, a new commitment to a strategic end-to-end transformation for the company. The Pep+ strategy centres around sustainability and provides guidelines for how the company will create growth and value by inspiring positive change for the planet and people.

Potatoes are an instrumental source of nutritious food in Ethiopia, produced by about one million farmers supplying crops for local consumption as well as for the chip processing market. Solynta's partnership with PepsiCo will support farmers to access the resources, starting material and training they need to produce successful yields.

"Solynta is excited to enrich Ethiopian farming practices by learning from local farmers about their unique practices. By providing high-quality starting material, we are providing smallholder producers with the tools they need to achieve success," says Miller. "Introducing our hybrid true potato seeds (HTPS) will guarantee clean starting material and help farmers overcome environmental challenges posed by disease and seed tuber transport. Through this partnership, we are dedicated to uplifting farmers by enhancing existing agronomic practices through grassroots training and capacity building."