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Compatible Technology Develops Innovative Equipment for Hand-Processing Pearl Millet

New agricultural technology could help feed the world's poorest populations

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Jan. 19, 2010 — Compatible Technology International (CTI) has built the first hand-operated system for processing pearl millet, a breakthrough that could more than double the food supply in parts of the world most vulnerable to famine. CTI, a St. Paul-based nonprofit, has designed equipment for hand-processing pearl millet at the village level, unlocking the potential of this difficult to process grain.

More than 500 million people depend on pearl millet, a highly nutritious cereal grain that thrives in harsh growing environments. Village farmers in Africa typically process pearl millet by smashing it by hand or driving over it with a truck or tractor, which contaminates the grain. These methods capture only 30 to 40 percent of the grain. In addition to being wasteful, these efforts are time consuming, inefficient and unhealthy.

With CTI's equipment, struggling farmers can capture about 90 percent of the grain, giving those living in drought conditions a dramatic increase in food production and newly available time to sell their excess yield in local markets for profit.

CTI engineers, volunteers, and partner organizations have been working for several years to develop the components to process pearl millet in three phases; stripping, threshing, and winnowing, to separate the grain from the stalk and other plant debris. In December 2009, CTI conducted field tests in Mali of its pearl millet hand-processing equipment.

"When I traveled to Mali, it blew me away to see the expressions on the farmers' faces when they saw the grain after the pearl millet completed processing using our technology," said Roger Salway, executive director for CTI. "You cannot imagine the impact this will have on these communities. Not only does our technique improve the yield, but it reduces the drudgery associated with the old processes"

The development of post-harvest technology for pearl millet produces more grain in less time and with less waste. It maximizes the potential of this food that is vital for the world's poorest populations.

Photo caption: Compatible Technology International volunteer Thom Haubert (right) demonstrates how the organization's new pearl millet system can dramatically increase food production to Malian farmer.

Compatible Technology International (CTI), a St. Paul, Minnesota nonprofit, was founded in 1981 by a group of food scientists, missionaries and research engineers to address the post-harvest needs of the food chain. The team sought ways in which their knowledge, expertise and human kindness might help the poor in developing countries to resolve food problems and increase food supply by using local resources. CTI's mission is to improve the lives of people in developing countries by designing food and water technologies that are sustainable and appropriate to local cultures, and by collaborating with in-country organizations to identify needs and to achieve widespread use of our technologies to relieve hunger and poverty. CTI has extended its work to many parts of Africa, Central America, the Caribbean, India and Bangladesh, where its post-harvest processing devices are used on a daily basis. For more information about CTI, visit www.compatibletechnology.org.