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Better Grain Leads to Brighter Future for Women



An employee of Danaya Cereals washes millet before it is dried and packaged for consumers.

Photo credit: Devan Wardwell

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- Halatou Dem

Danaya Cereals Finance and Operations Manager

In Mali, women-owned and operated farms for sorghum and millet crops are common, but it is rare to find women managing the companies that transport and process these grains that are staples in Malian diets.

That is just one reason Danaya Cereals is remarkable among food processors in Mali. Led and largely staffed by women, Danaya has become an industry leader in recent years, creating more income and jobs as demand grows for the company’s popular line of cereal products. At the head of the 36-person firm is Aissata Thiam, who is training her daughter (and Danaya’s current finance and operations manager), Halatou Dem, to eventually take over the family business.

Since 2009, when a Feed the Future program began working with the company, Danaya Cereals has more than doubled its annual sales. To help meet increased demand, Feed the Future helped the company partner with a wholesaler for the first time, leading to a contract with Keita Cereals that enabled Danaya to aggregate purchases from more than 120 farmers, guaranteeing a more consistent supply of raw material. This grain is also higher in quality – Feed the Future recently financed a new grain blower to help Keita reduce impurities from ten percent to less than one percent.

Danaya staff are also receiving training in accounting, marketing and supply chain organization, as well as assistance in business negotiation so the company can seek financing from banks. “Before working with [Feed the Future’s] business development team, our finances were disorganized and difficult to track. Now, we have a computer and finance software – and I can manage our accounting properly,” Dem says.

In 2013, Danaya secured a \$158,000 loan from Mali’s BICIM Bank to finance completion of a new production plant. With this money and the new space and industrial equipment, the company can now triple its production capacity.

Productive enterprises like Danaya are critical for growth in Mali’s agriculture sector, since processing companies boost demand for smallholder farmers’ crops and allow them to sell more of their surplus. More revenue for both smallholder farmers and business owners means Malians across the agricultural value chain can improve food security and invest in their families’ futures.