Small pack fertiliser for Nigeria

In Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa, affording fertiliser when it is needed most is a real problem for many small-scale farmers. Fertiliser tends to be delivered late, is expensive and may be adulterated or of poor quality. But recently, the Notore chemical company, which runs Nigeria’s only urea fertiliser factory, has done a pilot project to sell fertiliser in small, 1 kilo bags. It’s also promoting the packs through village demonstrators. Aveseh Asough goes to Katsina state in the north of the country to find out more.

Summary

In Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa, affording fertiliser when it is needed most is a real problem for many small-scale farmers. Fertiliser tends to be delivered late, is expensive and may be adulterated or of poor quality. But recently, the Notore chemical company, which runs Nigeria’s only urea fertiliser factory, has done a pilot project to sell fertiliser in small, 1 kilo bags. It’s also promoting the packs through village demonstrators. Aveseh Asough goes to Katsina state in the north of the country to find out more.

Suggested introduction

Farmers know that the right amount of fertiliser at the right time can make a huge difference to yield. But affording fertiliser when it is needed most is an annual headache for millions of farmers in sub-Saharan Africa. In Nigeria, as elsewhere, fertiliser tends to be delivered late, is expensive and may be adulterated or of poor quality. But with 70% of the population depending on farming to make a living, creating an efficient system for the distribution and sale of fertiliser should be a top priority.

In our next report, Aveseh Asough visits a pilot project being run by the Notore chemical company - Nigeria’s only domestic producer of urea fertiliser. The company has a big and ambitious goal - to generate a green revolution in Africa. And to achieve that it has launched a new product - urea fertiliser in small, 1 kilo packs.

TAPE IN “It is the beginning of the ...

TAPE OUT … reporting from Katsina in northern Nigeria.”

DURATION 7'09”

Suggested closing announcement

An exciting project in Nigeria to make urea fertiliser available and affordable for small-scale farmers.

For further information

Innocent Okuku - innocent.okuku@notore.com
Leslie Flagg - lflagg@propcom.org

Making the most of this interview…

How do your listeners cope with the challenge of getting fertiliser at the right time and an affordable price? Are there things farmers can do, either as individuals or as a group, to make it easier and to use fertiliser to best effect? And what do they think about the small packs being sold by Notore? Would they be more likely to buy fertiliser if it was available in small amounts?
Small pack fertiliser for Nigeria

Innocent Okuku - Head of Agricultural Service, Notore, Nigeria
Shehu Ahmed Danmala - Small pack fertiliser demonstration farmer
Malam Awal Sani - Village promoter for small pack fertiliser

Transcript

Asough

It is the beginning of the farming season in Nigeria and the rowdiness you hear is what normally goes on during fertiliser sales. For many years now, farmers in Nigeria have had tough times getting fertilizers for their farms. Innocent Okuku is the head of Agricultural Services at Notore Chemical Industries. He gives us a picture of how the situation has been with fertiliser distribution in Nigeria and what Notore is doing.

Okuku

Small scale farmers in Nigeria have had challenges with having access to fertilisers and there are two reasons why that has been the case. First their location, most people who sell fertiliser sell fertiliser in relatively urban or peri-urban places which is quite a distance from where these farmers actually are. And second problem of access is the problem of financial access. This means fertiliser before now typically comes in 50 kilo bags but a 50 kilo bag sells for about $35, $40 US. For a smallholder farmer whose daily income is somewhere between $1 and $2 a day, that is not something that any smallholder farmer that has got responsibilities is capable of doing. This is what inspired Notore to think about how we can address the access problem.

Asough

Apart from embarking on domestic production of fertilisers, Notore has begun a pilot project to make fertilizer available in small 1kg packs. This is small enough to be affordable even for small-scale farmers. I asked him what Notore hopes to gain with the small pack fertilisers?

Okuku

The small pack, if we improve access of smallholders to fertiliser, what it means is that they are able to improve their production, they are able to increase their income, their well-being improves. And of course we are not going to sell at a loss. We have some profit on it, it is not a huge profit but I mean something that keeps us in the business. So it is a win-win business model for us.

Asough

In November last year, Notore started a pilot project in Katsina State in northern Nigeria to allow farmers to try out the small pack fertilisers on their fields and see if it can improve their yields. I made a trip to Katsina State to see what has been happening.

I am in Katsina State in Northern Nigeria and I am standing on a vegetable farm belonging to Malam Shehu Ahmed Danmala.

Danmala

I have been farming vegetables since my childhood, that is about 30 years now.

Asough

Mr Danmala tells me about his experience of using the 1kg fertiliser pack on his farm.

Danmala

One thing surprises me. I was picked as one of the farmers to test this type of fertiliser. So the application there obviously gave me a surprise. Thinking that the fertiliser is not all that good I only took about two or three inches away
from my tomato and then put a little of this fertiliser. What actually happened is that all the tomatoes there just burned up. I went to them and asked them what actually happened and they directed me how to use it. And now that I use it according to instructions definitely I am surprised by the power this fertiliser has.

**Asough**

Notore and other partners have been working with village promoters in Katsina state to support the distribution and sales of the small fertiliser packs. I met with Malam Awal Sani, one of the top performing village promoters.

**Sani**

What we have done was to use our money, transport the product to nearby villages, form cooperative associations among the farmers and try to give them some soft loans so that after their harvest they redeem back, and now that the dry season is almost over they have their money now and they want to buy more product from us so that they will use it in the on season.

**Asough**

How did you come about that kind of idea giving soft loans to these farmers?

**Sani**

We have many farmer groups here and each group has about 100 members and they are registered and they have very strong leadership. That is why we are ready to give out loans to them because we know that we are sure they will give back our money.

**Asough**

Like any new development, the project has had challenges. These according to Mr Sani include transportation, pricing and the quality of packaging. Innocent Okuku of Notore is aware of these challenges.

**Okuku**

These complaints we have also gathered in the field. So we have gone to the drawing board. We have studied the process of packaging and we have improved it. As the volume ramps up we are changing the whole mechanism for packaging to a more automated process which should deliver us better quality packaging. On the subject of price we understand that if we package the product in small bags and farmers cannot afford to buy them we will not be achieving the objective of the intervention. So what we are doing in terms of looking at the price we have introduced some dimension of discounts. Also as we continue in this exercise and do it for a longer period, our efficiency in the process improves which means our cost of labour and the production process is capable of dropping. We also want to introduce a discount from that dimension.

**Asough**

Notore’s small pack fertiliser project is a whole new idea in Nigeria. How would the company stand up to competition when it eventually arises?

**Okuku**

Let me say clearly that the market for farm inputs in Nigeria is big enough. Nigeria actually should be using like ten million metric tons of fertiliser and beyond. Annually Nigeria uses less than a million metric tons today. Now if this small pack strategy creates the opening that pushes the consumption high then we are creating a demand and we actually need competition to join us to fill. Really what we want as an organisation is to champion a green revolution and we think Notore actually believes in partnership and we think we would not be able to do it alone. Rather than see them as competition in that light we are realising them as complementation. And if we blazed a trail in a good intervention that helps the smallholder and creates wealth at rural level, then it would be great to have many people come on the scene.
Asough

So Notore is blazing a new trail in the distribution and sale of fertilisers in Nigeria. Farmers may soon have a smile. Notore plans to spread to 12 other states in the scale up project. I am Aveseh Asough reporting from Katsina in northern Nigeria. End of track