



'We used our cassava as fertilizer. There was nowhere to sell it.'



 **Oladolem Nasir**
CASSAVA FARMER

Every day across Nigeria, cassava finds its way to the plates and tables of most homes in the country. One of the most important staple crops in the country, it is turned into a rich variety of dishes. But this hardy crop, which is tolerant of many types of soil and can stay in the ground for up to three years, has a very delicate nature once harvested – it must be eaten or processed within 24 hours, after which it begins to deteriorate and becomes unpalatable. On the other hand, if left in the ground for too long, it becomes fibrous and inedible.

Cassava's short shelf life has always posed one of the biggest challenges to farmers seeking to make a living out of it, and is a major cause of food loss. "We used to harvest only what we could eat," says Oladolem Nasir, a cassava farmer in Ado Awaye in Oyo State, south-western Nigeria. "I thank God that we had food, but I did not make any money for my efforts, because there was nowhere to sell the cassava. If it stays in the ground longer than three years, it becomes unpalatable, so what we didn't eat we would just dig back into the soil and use as fertilizer. It was a complete loss."

In 2017, charged with finding a solution to this conundrum under the Rockefeller Foundation's YieldWise program in

Nigeria, IDH (the Sustainable Trade Initiative) introduced a block farming model in which processors would give land to clusters of farmers around their factories to grow cassava for them, agreeing on the quantities to be produced and when, thus ensuring that they had a steady supply. In turn, the processors would provide training and



Oladolem Nasir at the offloading area of Psaltry International. Outgrowers' associations provide a regular supply of cassava to the factory, which provides a ready market for the highly perishable crop.



A farmer takes care of his crop in one of the outgrower farms belonging to Pсалtry International, which will buy all his crop, assuring him of a steady income and no loss of yield.

agricultural extension support to the farmers, and buy all their produce. One such processor is Pсалtry International, based in Ado Awaye.

Oladolem is the chairperson of the Pсалtry Outgrowers' Association, made up of 3,000 farmers who produce cassava for processing at Pсалtry International. The company processes 400 tons of cassava daily, producing high-quality cassava flour, laundry starch, glucose, sorbitol and animal feed.

"I have been farming for 15 years, but before Pсалtry, I had serious challenges, as did many farmers," recalls Oladolem. "We would plant haphazardly, harvest haphazardly, eat what we needed and sell what we could to *garri* (cassava flour) processors. We used to dig our farms manually and plant many crops together – cassava, yams, maize, vegetables, name it. We didn't know any better. We did not even know how much we were harvesting. Nobody weighed or measured anything."

The block farming method aims at industrialization of cassava farming in order to encourage increased

Rockefeller Foundation's YieldWise initiative was launched in 2016 with the goal of reducing post-harvest loss in select countries and value chains by up to 50 percent. More than 40 percent of fruits and vegetables in developing regions spoil before they can be consumed.

Using a multi-pronged strategy, YieldWise sought to improve millions of rural lives by increasing incomes, increasing the availability of food and protecting finite environmental resources.

The initiative targeted tomato and cassava production in Nigeria, mangoes in Kenya and maize in Tanzania.

YieldWise Initiative in the cassava value chain in Nigeria is implemented by IDH. IDH, The Sustainable Trade Initiative brings governments, companies, CSOs and financiers together in action driven coalitions.

production and absorption of crop. "When we began working with Pсалtry, we learnt that farming is a business and should be approached like a business," says Oladolem. "We learnt the importance of organizing ourselves into a cooperative, of techniques such as mechanized farming, and use of chemicals and fertilizers to improve production. We changed the way we did our farming and began to look carefully at what we planted, how we planted it and what the yield was. I learnt that one hectare should take 12,500 stems. Before, our produce was not weighed when we sold it. I estimate that I used to harvest about six tons from one hectare, but now I get about 22 or 23 tons."

Working with Pсалtry, he adds, has changed his life and those of his fellow farmers. "I now know what the benefits of farming are. I have cows, and I have bought a truck to transport my produce. The lives of many farmers have changed as well. Many have been able to make pilgrimages to Mecca and Jerusalem. And now, farmers are calling me from far and wide, asking to join the cooperative so that they too can sell their produce."