

# Plenty of hope – and so far, it seems justified

## Leading farmers take a liking to a new variety

Our [Tef Improvement Project](#) aims to raise yields of this crucial Ethiopian cereal. The program has now produced several new varieties. The first of these was *Tesfa*. What do farmers think of it?

Tesfa means “Hope” in the Ethiopian language Amharic. It has shorter, more stable stalks than conventional tef. Tesfa can therefore better withstand the windy conditions of the Ethiopian uplands. Stronger stalks also enable farmers to apply fertilizer that benefits grain growth rather than merely increasing the risk of “lodging” (falling over).

Scientists at the University of Bern (Switzerland) and Ethiopia’s Debre Zeit Agricultural Research Center have tested Tesfa extensively. But as with new varieties of any crop, what really matters is farmer acceptance. Several hundred lead farmers have already had the chance to put Tesfa through its paces. On a scale of 1 to 5, a sample of 100 growers gave Tesfa at least a 4.6 for the criteria surveyed. These were grain yield, grain filling, plant height, and tolerance of frost and a particular insect pest. Each lead farmer provides field demonstrations for about 15 neighboring colleagues.



**Project leader Zerihun Tadele (r.) listens to farmers’ views on Tesfa**

Farmers have also given the scientists a number of comments. They find Tesfa easy to identify, because unlike other varieties it has a round compacted panicle. Farmers can also readily see the high number of seeds per panicle. The stalks are less leafy than other tef. As a result, grain and straw quality deteriorates less if the plant does fall over. Tesfa is easy to thresh, and animals like the straw. Very importantly, it also produces better *injera* than many other varieties! This bread is the daily staple produced from tef, and an essential part of Ethiopian cuisine.

As well as subjective surveys, the Tef Improvement Project has also measured Tesfa’s performance in farmers’ fields. With an average over four years of 2.31 tonnes per hectare, it scored better than all three comparison varieties.

Here’s more on [Ethiopian R&D](#) and on matching [breeding](#) to farmers’ needs.