

There was a time when Immaculée Mukarusanga relied on farming just to feed her two teenage daughters.

These days, she grows enough beans, maize and potatoes to sell to a range of buyers in Nyaruguru district, in Rwanda's Southern Province, including the World Food Programme (WFP).

She has also bought cows and is exploring ways of further developing her agricultural and livestock produce.

The turnaround was made possible through the Farm to Market Alliance – comprising six global agri-focused organizations including WFP – which provided training on improving crop quality and volume, as well as reduced losses after harvest.

Immaculée also has crop insurance to protect her from climate-related threats such as droughts or floods. She secured this through the Government's National Agricultural Insurance Scheme, again with support from the alliance.

Other farmers, within a cooperative, have also benefited from the support, with over 30 metric tons of maize and 60 metric tons of beans sold last season with WFP's support.

"We get good markets for our maize and beans, we get money to support our families, and we can pay medical insurance on time – we have stability," says Immaculée. "Before joining this farmer's cooperative, I didn't have the skills to produce enough for the market. I am also happy because in a cooperative like this, we learn from each other and support one another."

Immaculée says the support meant she could also buy a cow and join a savings group, allowing her to plan more for the future.

"I'm happy I produce food to sell in good markets and I'm happy to have milk from my cows," she adds. "My children and all my family drink milk now."

Immaculée primarily grows iron-rich, single-variety beans, then sells them through the farmers' cooperative which she has been a part of since 2015. WFP buys beans from the cooperative for its home-grown school feeding programme in Rwanda. In fact, it has become one of the group's main buyers.

"WFP not only trains us, but also comes back to buy our produce," says Immaculée. "Before, getting buyers was not so smooth. What excites me most is knowing that WFP buys this produce to distribute in school meals. It feels good to know that your produce is reaching children in your very own community."

She explains how the project also increased farmers' resilience to the effects of COVID-19: "During lockdown, we couldn't sell any produce, but we were lucky to be able to take back and eat the produce we sent to the cooperative. We didn't make any money but at least we got some food to eat."

Immaculée's cooperative has about 330 members, of whom 151 are women. It started receiving support from the Farm to Market Alliance programme in 2018. In total, the alliance supports more than 85,000 smallholder farmers in Rwanda.