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Farmers’ and academia’s views”

## Trends and prospects of wheat self-sufficiency in Egypt

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### Abstract

Egypt is the most populated country in the Arab World and the third most populated in Africa. For centuries, wheat has been central to Egypt as the most important food crop and diet. Today Egyptians derive one-third of their daily caloric intake and 45 % of their protein intake from wheat-based food, mainly in the form of subsidised bread called baladi. Wheat is mainly produced along the River Nile and in the Nile delta by millions of smallholders. However, Egypt is the world’s largest wheat-importing nation, with only less than half of the national consumption being met by domestic production. 80 % of wheat imports in Egypt come from Russia and Ukraine. Upon this backdrop, gaining wheat self-sufficiency is an overall aim of the Egyptian government. This study provides an overview of the degree and trends of wheat self-sufficiency in Egypt between 2000–2019, followed by an analysis of the concerning external pressures and system-immanent drivers to achieve wheat self-sufficiency in a sustainable way. Empirical data were collected in the River Nile delta in the 2020/2021 growing season. Interviews were collected with 246 smallholder wheat producers in four divisions in Beheira Governorate. Additionally expert interviews and focus group discussions with smallholders, agriculture cooperative representatives and extension agents were conducted. The analysis stresses some of the weaknesses of the wheat production system in Egypt that should be addressed to make production more efficient. The study underlines some critical external pressures and system-immanent drivers influencing wheat cultivated area and productivity. Wheat producing smallholders need to have more active participation in decision making to contribute to more food security in Egypt.

**Keywords:** Egypt, food security, self-sufficiency, sustainable agriculture, wheat