Horti Nigeria

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE & INCLUSIVE HORTICULTURE SECTOR

Addressing Tomato Price Volatility in Nigeria:

Strategies for Supporting Farmers

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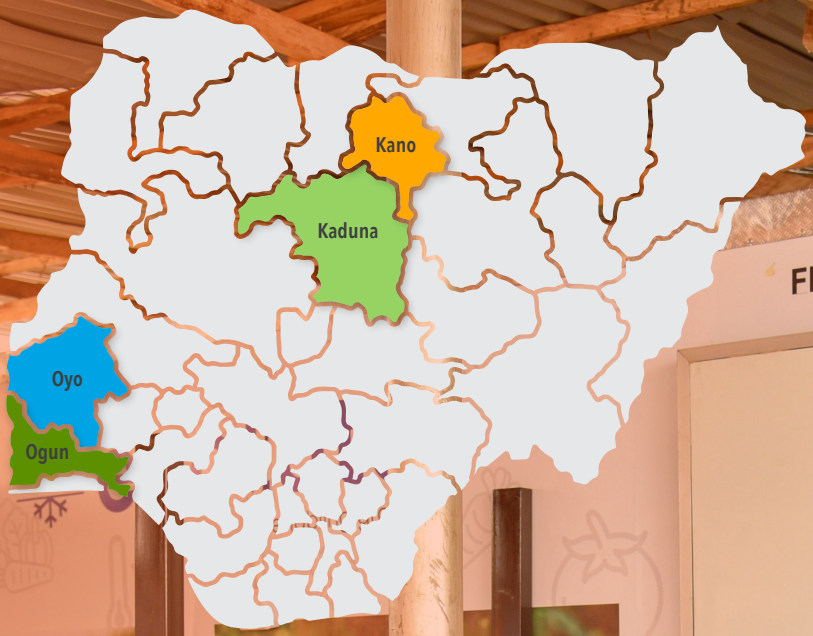

EcoTutu's solar-powered cold storage unit in Mile 12 Market, Lagos State

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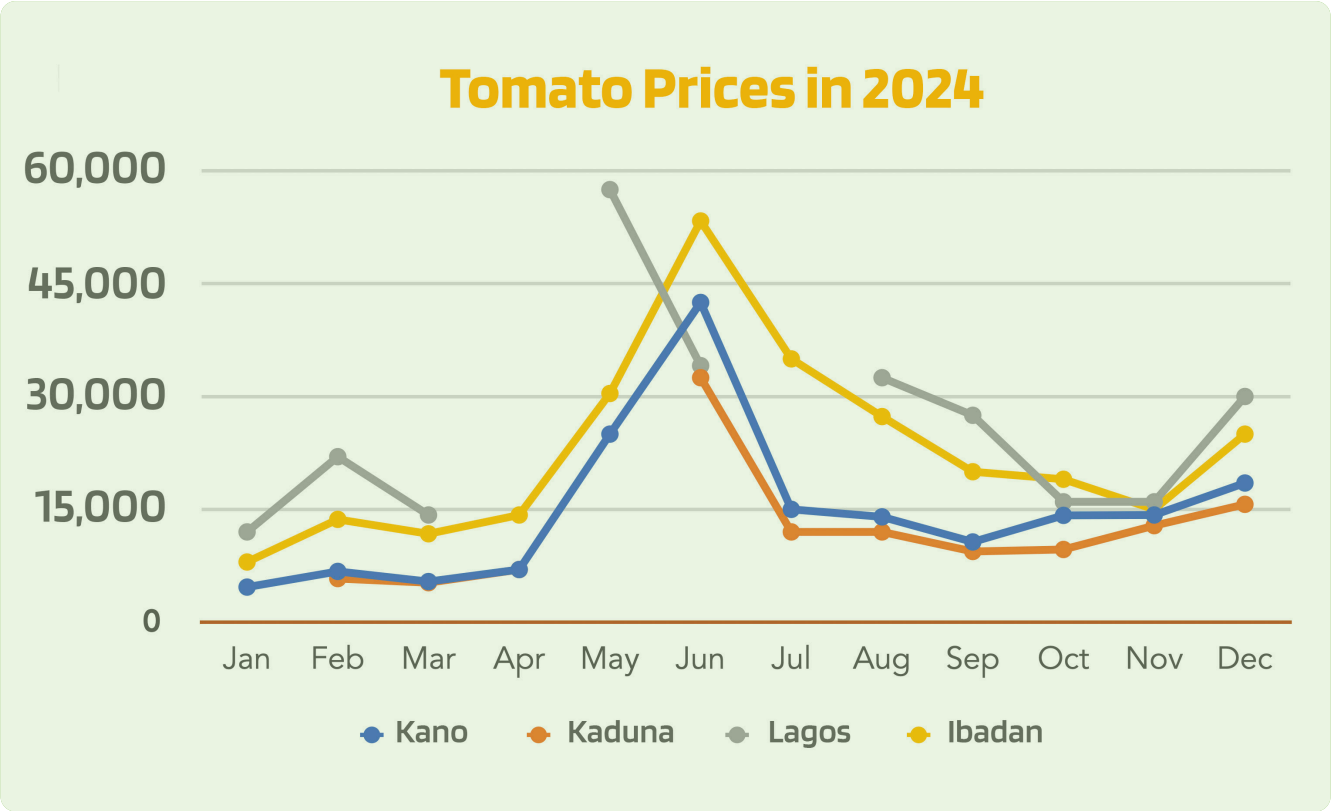

Figure 1: HortiNigeria Market Price Information 2024

Tomato farmers in Nigeria have faced serious challenges due to unstable prices for a long time. Price swings make it difficult for farmers to plan effectively, directly affecting their incomes and disrupting the food supply chain. This article explores the root causes of tomato price fluctuations and highlights how HortiNigeria is actively responding to the issue across its intervention states—Kaduna, Kano, Ogun, and Oyo. Through a range of innovative solutions, including improved storage, real-time price information, access to finance, policy advocacy, and awareness campaigns on pest and diseases, HortiNigeria is partnering with government agencies, private businesses, and community stakeholders to build a more resilient and equitable tomato value chain.

Introduction: Tomato Price Volatility in Nigeria

Tomatoes are a dietary staple in virtually every Nigerian household and serve as a vital source of income for thousands of farmers. Nigeria produces over 2.3 million metric tons of tomatoes annually, making it the second largest producer in Africa, after Egypt and 11th in the world.[1] Yet, despite this abundance, tomato prices fluctuate wildly throughout the year, creating serious hardship for producers and consumers alike. These fluctuations have worsened in recent years, driven by climate change, pest outbreaks, policy changes, and infrastructural gaps. Prices often

1 Ajenifujah-Solebo, S. O., et al. (2025). Tomato production in Nigeria: Status, challenges, and prospects. IntechOpen. https://www.intechopen.com/online-first/1214132

skyrocket between April and August (as seen in Figure 1 above) due to heavy rains and seasonal demand spikes during religious observances like Ramadan. Meanwhile, from November to March, dry-season harvests in the north drive prices down, sometimes causing a glut. In contrast, farmers in the south face higher pest pressures and labour shortages in the dry season, creating regional disparities in tomato availability.

Recent government reforms—including the removal of fuel subsidies and exchange rate liberalization—have made it more expensive to farm and transport goods, pushing tomato prices even higher. As the cost of fuel, seeds, and fertilizers continues to rise, farmers struggle to keep their operations profitable. The volatility ripples through the entire supply chain, ultimately reducing food access for Nigerian families.

Causes of Tomato Price volatility and HortiNigeria's Response

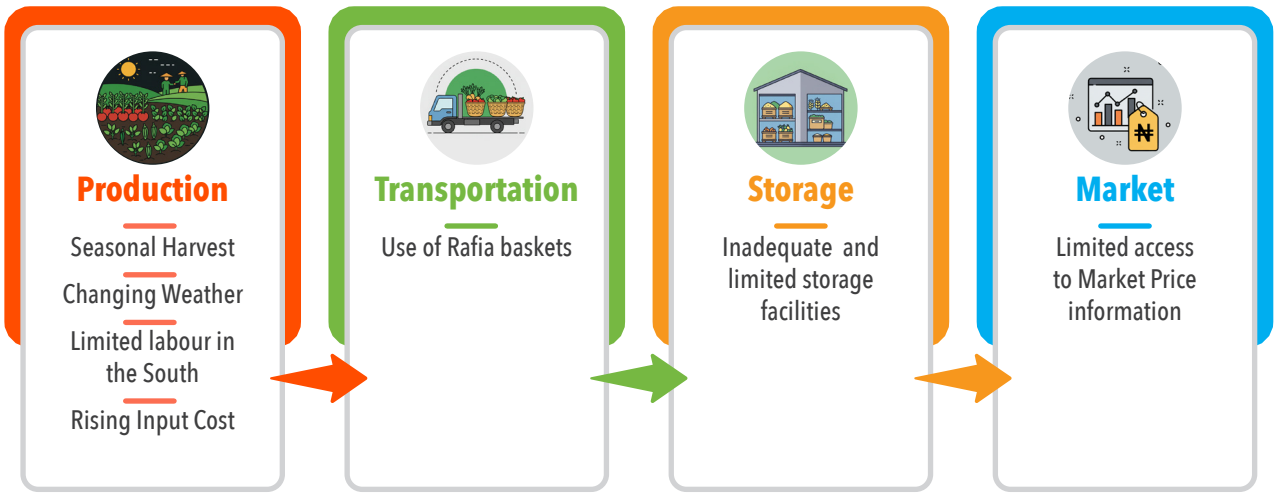

Figure 2: Visual Representation of the Tomato Supply Chain in Nigeria Highlighting Key Drivers of Price Volatility at Each Stage

1. Seasonal Harvests and Changing Weather:

Tomato production is heavily influenced by seasonal patterns. Northern Nigeria dominates the dry season harvest (Nov-March), contributing to temporary oversupply and price crashes. During the rainy season (April-August), production falls due to disease outbreaks, raising prices. To tackle this, HortiNigeria in its intervention states has introduced and piloted solar-powered irrigation pumps that enable all year round farming, helping to balance seasonal availability. Furthermore, the program has piloted localized weather forecast systems delivered via SMS, allowing farmers to anticipate weather changes, adjust planting calendars, and reduce seasonal crop losses.

2. Pests and Diseases:

The tomato leafminer, *Tuta absoluta*, is a destructive moth responsible for devastating losses. In 2025 alone, outbreaks in Kano and Kaduna led to crop losses exceeding ₦1.3 billion,[2] pushing 50 Kg basket prices from ₦5,000 to almost ₦60,000. In response, HortiNigeria launched a robust *Tuta absoluta* campaign in Kaduna and Kano to raise awareness among farmers on effective control measures. The initiative combined training on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) using farmer-based demonstration plots with ongoing radio broadcasts in local languages. It also established linkages with agro-dealers and female led agrobusinesses to support the distribution of pheromone and sticky traps, bio-pesticides such as neem oil, safe chemical pesticides, and promoted cultural control practices. These efforts aim to reduce pest damage, stabilize tomato supply in the region, and cushion price spikes.

2 The Sun. (2025, April 8). Farmers lose ₦1.3bn as tomato ebola hits farms. https://thesun.ng/farmers-lose-n1-3bn-as-tomato-ebola-hits-farms/


Tomatoes rot in raffia baskets

3. Post-Harvest Loss and Storage Limitations:

Nearly 50% of tomatoes in Nigeria rot before reaching the market due to poor storage, lack of processing facilities, and damaged roads.[3] HortiNigeria is combating this by deploying local Zero Energy Cool Chambers (ZECC) in Kaduna and Kano and by upgrading cold storage units in Ogun and Oyo in partnership with Eupepsia Place and NIHORT. These facilities extend the shelf life of tomatoes, enabling farmers to wait for better market prices instead of selling at a loss immediately after harvest.

To further reduce transit-related spoilage, HortiNigeria has collaborated with LECON Finance, NIRSAL, National Plastic Crate association, Celplas and Mile 12 Market stakeholders to introduce plastic crates into the supply chain. Unlike traditional raffia baskets, which bruise tomatoes and contribute to spoilage within two days, plastic crates offer better ventilation and cushioning, preserving produce freshness for up to three to four days. This not only curbs post-harvest losses but also improves produce quality at market and increases farmer earnings.

4. Lack of Timely Price Information:

Without up-to-date market data, farmers often oversupply markets, leading to crashes, or miss out on high-value sales opportunities. Since 2023, HortiNigeria has addressed this by sharing real-time price updates across its social media platforms, enabling growers to make informed marketing decisions. This reduces market glut, prevents panic sales, and improves overall supply chain efficiency.

5. Labour Shortages in Southern Nigeria:

In the South, many farmers face difficulties hiring labor during key periods like planting and harvesting. To solve this, HortiNigeria organized a stakeholder roundtable to assess the problem and linked farmers with platforms such as Farmcas, an agrobusiness that connects farmers with verified on-demand farm workers. This model improves workforce reliability, reduces operational delays—enhancing supply consistency and moderating price fluctuations. Even though this has improved labour availability, we are still working on identifying more labour-providing organizations to reduce this issue to the barest minimum.

6. Policy Instability and Rising Input Costs:

Policy shifts, such as fuel subsidy removals and inconsistent implementation of agriculture strategies, increase the cost of doing business for farmers. In response, HortiNigeria actively engages with policymakers, submitting memos to the National Council on Agriculture and collaborating with groups like the Nigeria Agribusiness Group (NABG). In 2024, the program influenced revisions to the 2017/2021 Tomato Policy, helped push for increased Credit Risk Guarantees (30% to 50%) for plastic crates, and supported the rollout of frameworks for organic agriculture. These actions aim to reduce input costs and create a more enabling environment for horticulture.

3 Tomato Jos. (n.d.). Reducing post-harvest waste through tomato processing. https://tomatojos.net/reducing-post-harvest-waste-tomato-processing/

How Tomato Price Volatility Affects Farmers and Consumers

When prices fall sharply after harvest, farmers without adequate storage are often forced to sell their tomatoes at a loss. Conversely, during periods of scarcity—often driven by weather shocks or pest outbreaks—they may have little or no produce left to benefit from rising prices. This unpredictability prevents farmers from making sound financial plans, reinvesting in their farms, or accessing credit. As a result, many remain stuck in cycles of low income and food insecurity. The instability also discourages young people from pursuing opportunities in the horticulture space weakening long-term sector resilience and undermining national food supply strategies.

Tomato price volatility disrupts farmers and consumers, threatening food security and economic stability.

For consumers, tomato price volatility has equally serious consequences. During times of shortage, prices can surge dramatically, making this essential cooking ingredient unaffordable for low-income households. For instance, when the price of a 50kg basket of tomatoes soared to almost ₦60,000 during the 2025 pest outbreak, many families were forced to reduce their consumption or switch to lower-quality alternatives. This not only affects dietary diversity and nutrition but also places additional strain on household budgets already impacted by inflation and rising fuel costs. Inconsistent pricing further disrupts planning for small-scale food businesses and street vendors who rely on tomatoes as a core input, leading to broader economic ripple effects in urban and rural communities alike.

Other Key Interventions from HortiNigeria

Market Linkages to Processors: By connecting farmers with processors like Berra Tomatoes, SIMKAY, Mix Condiments, Tomato Jos, and Olanreforward, HortiNigeria ensures stable demand even during surplus periods. This reduces market saturation and provides predictable revenue for growers.

Access to Finance: Collaborations with Sterling Bank, LAPO Microfinance, FCMB, and others have improved farmer access to loans. These funds help them buy quality inputs, scale operations, and withstand price pressures. The program also trains farmers on record-keeping and financial literacy, building long-term business capacity.

A truck delivers fresh tomatoes to Tomato Jos in Kaduna State

Recommendations to Address Tomato Price Volatility

1. Scale Up Off-Season Production Support

Stakeholders should expand access to solar-powered irrigation systems and localized weather forecasting tools, especially for smallholders. This would allow consistent production during both rainy and dry seasons, reducing seasonal gluts or scarcities that drive price swings.

2. Invest in Scalable Post-Harvest Infrastructure

Federal and state governments, with private sector partners, should prioritize the deployment of low-cost storage solutions such as Zero Energy Cool Chambers (ZECC) and upgrade cold chain logistics nationwide. Additionally, incentives should be given to local processors to absorb tomato surpluses, stabilizing demand during harvest peaks.

3. Strengthen Farmer-Market Linkages with Digital Price Intelligence

Real-time price dissemination should be scaled up by FMAFS, through a dedicated horticulture desk within the Ministry of Agriculture, transitioning HortiNigeria's efforts beyond social media to include SMS-based alerts, radio broadcasts, and community price boards in key markets. This enables informed selling decisions, helping to reduce panic sales and oversupply

4. Enhance Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Outreach

Insititutions like NIHORT should Expand community-based demonstration plots and training on IPM practices, particularly for women and youth groups. Agro-dealer networks should be strengthened and monitored to ensure availability and affordability of bio-pesticides, pheromone traps, and safe chemical alternatives

5. Establish Labour Cooperatives and Mechanisation Hubs

To mitigate labour shortages, especially in southern states, stakeholders should promote labour cooperatives and deploy subsidized mechanization hubs offering shared access to harvesters and planters. Collaborations with platforms like Farmcas can further streamline labour availability

6. Develop a National Tomato Observatory Platform

To support the implementation of the National Strategy on Tuta absoluta and reduce price volatility, a centralized data system, managed by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, should be established. This platform would track key indicators such as production levels, input costs, market prices, demand, and post-harvest losses. Timely insights from this system would enable early warning alerts and rapid responses to pest outbreaks or supply disruptions, helping to stabilize the tomato value chain.

Conclusion: A More Stable Future for Tomato Farmers

Tomato price volatility has long undermined the potential of Nigeria's horticulture sector. But through a multi-pronged approach—encompassing solar powered irrigation, storage, pest control, labour solutions, market linkages, policy reform, and financial inclusion—HortiNigeria has laid the groundwork for a more stable, inclusive, and prosperous tomato value chain. These efforts benefit not just farmers but also consumers, businesses, and policymakers working to strengthen Nigeria's food systems. With continued public-private collaboration and implementation of the above listed recommendation, a future where tomato prices are predictable and farming is truly profitable is within reach.

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