

The Organic Farmer

The newspaper for sustainable agriculture in Kenya



Nr. 22 March 2007



Well-bred cows are healthier and produce more milk.

(Photo TOF)

Inbreeding is a big problem

Most Kenyan dairy farmers and artificial insemination service providers do not practise artificial insemination (AI) services in the right way. This is to blame for the increasing cases of inbreeding. The result is deterioration of the quality of dairy cattle and low milk production in the country.

Inbreeding occurs when animals sharing great grandparents, grandparents or parents are mated. The

practice among a section of small-scale farmers is to use a home-bred bull to serve their animals whenever they come on heat. One reason why most farmers use such bulls is to avoid the high cost of artificial insemination (it costs Ksh. 600 to serve one cow). This is regardless of whether or not the bull and the animal are related. Use of village bulls can also spread venereal diseases from one cow to another, leading to abortions and related complications.

What most farmers may not know is that the semen used in AI services comes from the same bulls based at the Central Artificial Insemination Service (CAIS) station in Nairobi. Each of the bulls at the station has a name and number. For example, unless a farmer has kept records giving details on the bull that served a particular cow on the farm, there is a high probability that later on the artificial inseminator will end up serving the daughter of that particular cow with semen from the same bull - its father! (TOF)

See pages 4 and 5

in this issue



Good market for asparagus

Benson Chege, a Member of Kigogo Farmers' Group from Gilgil, delivers organic asparagus to The Organic Shop in Gigiri Nairobi. The farmers' group is one of the beneficiaries of The Organic Farmer Support Programme, launched in April 2006. Demand for asparagus from the group has gone up since they started growing it organically. See page 8

Helpful earthworms

Read more about this friend of the farmer on page 6.



Dear farmers,

The month of March is an important period in the farmer's calendar. It is time for preparing the land in readiness for planting. However, it is also a difficult time for the majority of the farmers in the country: Having harvested and sold their maize, many farmers have various financial commitments, the most urgent being the payment of school fees. As a result they may not be able to prepare the land in time, or even buy fertilizer and seeds in readiness for the planting season.

Although the Government has made considerable progress in restructuring the agricultural sector in the last four years, one area in which it has performed dismally is in the provision of credit to small-scale farmers.

Whenever the farmers complain about lack of credit facilities, the Government is always quick to point out that it has allocated billions of shillings to the Agricultural Finance Corporation (AFC) for lending to farmers. But the AFC Act is clear that only farmers with 5 acres and above can qualify for the loans. Applicants must also possess a title deed as security for the loans. Due to the increasing population, land subdivision has increased in most of the high potential areas in the country; this means that more than 80 percent of farmers have less than 5 acres (less than 2 hectares) of land. Therefore a large proportion of our farmers have no access to credit.

In the past, the Government operated the Seasonal Credit Scheme for this category of farmers, but it was discontinued. Clearly there is something seriously wrong. Otherwise one cannot understand how a Government can deny such a big section of its farming population any form of credit, yet they play such an important role in the country's food security. If farmers are such a risky group to lend to, then the Government should look for other options that would allow them access to credit. One of these would be to channel the loans through SACCOs, which have few cases of defaulting. A number of local banks have also launched lending schemes for farmers. We encourage farmers to look around and find the best lender. They should not wait for other people to solve their problems.

MY OPINION

In sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture is the lifeline of the economy. Women are key farmers, food producers and natural resource managers. In the region, women produce 60-80 percent of domestically produced food and provide nearly half the farm labour. Women work almost twice as many hours as men. In Kenya, women form the core of the smallholder farm labour force. Nearly all rural women (96 percent) work on family farms, providing 75 percent of the farm labour and 60 percent of farm-derived income.

Sustainable agriculture extension manual for Africa (1998).

The Organic Farmer

The Organic Farmer is an independent newspaper for the Kenya farming community. It promotes organic farming and supports discussions on all aspects of sustainable development. *The Organic Farmer* is published monthly and distributed free to farmers. The reports of *The Organic Farmer* do not necessarily reflect the views of ICIPE.

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Layout

In-A-Vision Systems (k)

Preparing seeds for germination

Different types of seeds germinate under different temperature conditions. Care should be taken while doing pre-treatment.

Jane Kigo

Seeds become dormant during the period of storage, and many woody species have hard seed-coats that do not enable the seed to take in water. Water is crucial for germination of plants and if the seed cannot absorb water then it needs pre-treatment (making alternations in the seed coat to enable the seed to absorb water) before satisfactory germination can occur. Different methods of pre-treatment are recommended for several types of dormant seed to help ensure the rapid germination of the maximum number of seed sown in the improved nursery. Different types of seeds germinate under different temperature conditions, hence care should be taken during the use of either cold or hot water methods. For example, spinach seeds do not germinate well under warm conditions and thus soaking them in cold water for 24 hrs immediately before sowing induces quicker and better germination. Soaking in hot water will mean destroying or killing this kind of seed.

Cold water method

This is recommended for pre-treating most types of seeds, whether dormant or not, since cold water aids in accelerating germination. Soak the seeds in cold water for 24 hrs. The empty seeds will float and can be discarded. The healthy seeds absorb water, swell, and fall to the bottom of the pot and are removed and sown immediately. This method is commonly used to pre-treat maize. It also works well with beetroot, which is very slow to germinate and is soaked in cold water for 24 hrs, after which it is sown.

Hot water method

Steeping the seed in hot water softens the seed-coat, hence making it permeable to water. Heat the water but do not let it boil. Pour this water into the container with seeds and leave them for some hours. Remember not to boil the seeds because this will kill them. After a while the seed will absorb water, swell and sink to the bottom; then it is ready for sowing. Seeds which do not become swollen within 24 hrs should be discarded because

they are most likely to be unviable. This method is used to pre-treat seeds such as asparagus, artichoke, parsley and many more.

Burning

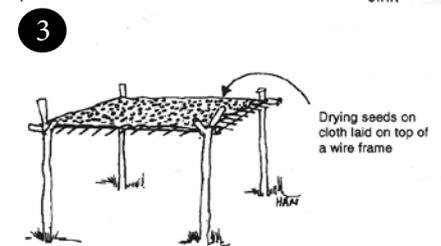
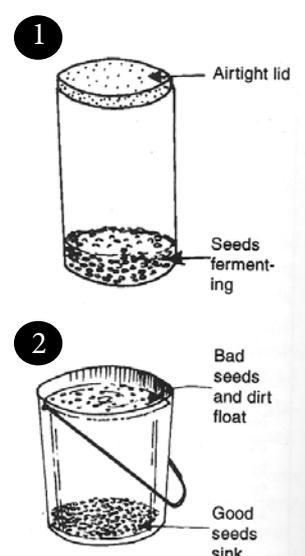
Burning is used for very tough seed-coats of woody species such as acacia and it serves the same purpose as hot water pre-treatment. Place a patch of soil on top of the seed, pile trash on top of the soil, and burn it. When the fire has burned out, the seed can be retrieved and is ready for sowing. The seeds of some species appear to be dormant, even though the fruit is ripe. However, if seed from multiple fruits are planted fresh, the germination rate is usually high. It is therefore recommended that such seed should be sown as soon as possible after removal from the fruit.

How to process fleshy fruits and wet seeds:

1. Put healthy seeds in a container and close it. Leave it for 4 to 7 days; the mixture will ferment.
2. Close the lid tightly, then shake the fermented juice gently; pour it into a bucket and add clean water.

The good seeds will sink to the bottom and the bad ones will float.

3. Pour off the water with the bad seeds. Put the good seeds in a sack and let them dry for 2 to 4 days. (This



method is suitable for eggplant, cucumber, gourds, squash, etc.)

References- *Agricultural Review 1997-1999 Gardening in East Africa.*

By Gabu Remnant

Are you ready for the planting season?

Lack of proper planning and use of the wrong inputs is to blame for poor crop yields and poor earnings by most farmers.

The Organic Farmer

As we have mentioned in previous issues of *The Organic Farmer*, the planting season is one of the most important in the farmer's calendar. Planting means planning; a clever farmer writes down all the inputs they will need, including the cost. Proper planning will enable you to get the desired results, because at the end a farmer can find out if they have made a profit or loss. This involves making decisions on which crops to grow, and the amount of compost fertilizer or seeds required. An organized farmer will know the right quantity of compost they will need, for example to plant 2 acres of land. If you planted maize last year or the last few years on the same parcel of land, it is also important to practise a bit of crop rotation or intercropping.

Careful preparation will enable farmers to utilize the first rains, which often start in mid-March or April. Many farmers end up planting late due to lack of early preparation, which reduces their yields considerably. It is important that farmers keep to the following guidelines to ensure they get maximum yields from their farms:

Land preparation

Land preparation should be done early enough before the rains, preferably when the soil is still moist. Early preparation allows time for large lumps of soil to break up and also for the uprooted weeds to die on the surface under dry conditions. If it is a large-scale farm, it is important to use a tractor. If the land size is small, farmers are always advised to use hand digging, which has been found to be more appropriate because use of tractors on a small piece of land tends to compact the soil, making it harder for air circulation and survival of soil organisms.

Seeds

There are three types of maize seedlings, local, hybrid and composite. Local seeds are traditional varieties that are low-yielding (sometimes local people prefer them due to their taste). Hybrid seeds are high-yielding, but they require more fertilizer than local seeds. Hybrid seeds cannot be planted



Land preparation

(Photo Pelu)

again and the farmer has to buy new seeds every year. Composite seeds are stabilized during propagation and the farmer can replant the same seeds each year without affecting the yield. (Examples of composites are Katumani, Coast composite and DLCI). As we said in the last issue, farmers should always plant the right seeds for their own areas. It is important to buy seeds from certified stockists appointed by seed companies who can also give advice.

Planting

Proper timing of planting has its own benefits. Many farmers tend to wait until the rains have started before planting. Seeds germinate well when the soil temperature is still high. When it rains, the soil temperatures tend to go down, affecting germination of the seeds. Research shows that a farmer loses up to 2 ½ bags of maize per week if they plant after the rains have started. Maize planted early also benefits from nitrogen flash. This is a process where nitrogen in the soil is readily available for uptake by the newly planted seeds before it is lost through leaching when the rains come. Maize should be planted at a depth that will protect the seed from

rodents and birds. This will also facilitate contact with warm moist soil for good germination. A planting depth of between 2.5 cm to 5 cm is acceptable. In case of dry planting, a depth of 5 cm is preferable to avoid germination promoted by false rains.

Spacing

The common practice of many farmers is to plant closely in the belief that the yield will be higher. When the plants are crowded, growth is poor because the seedlings compete for sunlight, water and nutrients, becoming weak and reducing the yield. The correct spacing should be 60 cm (2 ft) between one hole and the next. Spacing between rows should be 75 cm (2 ½ ft). Ensure only two seeds are planted in each hole. Maize can be intercropped with a second or more crops that do not compete for nutrients with it. Beans are the most common intercrop in Kenya.

Fertilizer application

When using manure, farmers are advised to ensure they use only well decomposed manure, at the recommended rate of 10 tonnes per hectare (about 5 tonnes per acre). For areas with low rainfall, 8 tonnes per hectare (about 4 tonnes per acre) are recommended. The farmer can apply two handfuls of well prepared compost per hole at planting time.

Thinning

If at planting more than two seeds were used per hole, then thinning should be done early, preferably within 14 days after emergence. Timely thinning minimizes the use of soil nutrients and moisture by the extra plants. For easy pulling of the extra plants, thinning should be done when the soil is moist.

Weed Control

Weeds compete with maize for nutrients, moisture and light, so it is important to control them early. Within the first month after germination, the maize crop is most vulnerable to stress, because that is the time when all the ears and leaves start to form. It is important that weeds are controlled within this period to minimize stress. The field can be kept weed-free by hand weeding. The first weeding needs to be done within 3 weeks after seedling emergence. In high rainfall areas, weeding three times may be required. ■

Advice from top cattle breeder

Recordkeeping is a most important exercise for a dairy farmer. Lack of proper records is responsible for inbreeding.

Peter Kamau, Njoro

Going around James Karanja's 18-acre Pokea Farm in Njoro, one can easily mistake it for any other farm. But a closer look at the Holstein Friesian herd of dairy cattle reveals they are no ordinary dairy cows. Their bigger body frame, good udders and general health clearly distinguishes them from other cattle. This is by no means a coincidence, because James Karanja is a renowned Friesian cattle breeder in the country. Over the years, he has managed to produce prize winning bulls and cows. Some of his bulls are being used by the Central Artificial Insemination Service (CAIS) to provide farmers with quality breeds in the country. Animal breeding is a process whereby a farmer produces high quality cattle for milk or beef through upgrading with semen from top bulls whose characteristics and potential are well known.

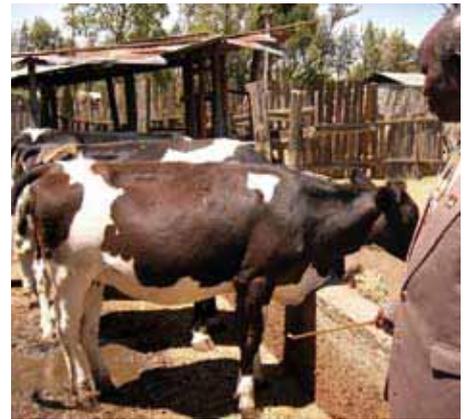
High-yielding cows

Karanja's passion for cattle breeding started back in 1980 when an inspector identified a bull he was rearing then as a pure breed (pedi-

gree quality). Soon after, a senior provincial administrator bought the bull for Ksh 25,000. "After selling the bull I immediately decided that breeding was my line of business in farming", Karanja says. Learning how to produce high quality animals from other breeders in the area, the farmer perfected his skills and has never looked back since.

Today he has seven high-yielding dairy cows. Due to his reliance on animals produced by the best breeders in the world, some of his Holstein Friesian cows give between 50 to 60 kg of milk per day. Many local livestock breeds in contrast, give an average of 15 kg a day. The main reason for this low milk production among local farmers, he says, is lack of knowledge on modern breeding technology.

"Until the white settlers left the country, local people were not allowed to own livestock. After independence, African farmers started livestock keeping without any knowledge of breeding. The few breeders who have acquired the knowledge have to struggle on their own, since there is little support from the Government", Karanja says. Although parastatals such as the Kenya Dairy Board were supposed to play an important role in farmer education or even support the Kenya Livestock Breeders Organisa-



Karanja with his dairy cows (TOF)

tion (KLBO), they did not. This is to blame for the deterioration in the quality of animals that many farmers keep today.

Inbreeding and poor management

It is out of this situation that Karanja has embarked on an education programme to sensitise farmers on the need to upgrade their dairy herds through proper use of artificial insemination (AI) services to stop inbreeding, which is mainly to blame for low milk production and even livestock diseases. Improved breeds, on the other hand, give more milk and income to the farmer.

Poor management is also to blame for low milk production, Karanja says. "Recordkeeping is the first and most important part in any serious farming enterprise. Many farmers do not keep any records on their animals. The most basic records that a farmer must have are names of the cow, dates of birth, age at service, number of services, and the breed and name of bull from the CAIS which sired (whose semen was used to serve the mother cow) to avoid inbreeding", Karanja says.

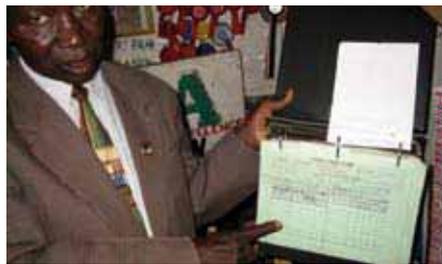
These details are important

For breeders, all the animals must be registered with the Kenya Stud Book (KSB). This is a secretariat that maintains records of all breeders who are members of the Kenya Livestock Breeders Organisation (KLBO). They must also maintain a milk record book where daily milk production records for each dairy cow are entered and sent to the Dairy Recording Services of Kenya (DRSK) on a monthly basis. The records should also indicate the cow's details, calving intervals, number of services, and health records such as treatments, vaccinations and deworming. ■

How to upgrade your dairy cows

James Karanja says that selection of a cow for breeding purposes has to be done carefully with the help of an inspector. Once the inspector identifies the cow, also called 'the foundation', the farmer has to look for a pedigree bull with certain characteristics, for example one that sires cows with high milk productivity, good udder position, a good pregnancy rate and has no complications while giving birth. The cow is then registered with the KSB as a foundation. When it comes on heat, it is served with semen from the selected pedigree bull.

The daughter of this cow should also be registered as soon as she is born as 'intermediate stock'. When the daughter comes on heat, she is served with semen from a different pedigree bull of the same breed. Farmers should always take care not to use semen from the first bull which served the mother as this will amount to inbreeding. The granddaughter,



This is how to keep records (Photos TOF)

known as 'the appendix' is also registered with the KSB and served with semen from a high grade pedigree bull of the same breed. Finally, the great-granddaughter is now 'the pedigree'. He says the breeder can maintain the pedigree line by continued use of semen from high quality bulls from CAIS or other artificial insemination (AI) providers.

Farmers' groups or individuals interested in acquiring skills on breeding can contact the expert farmer at the address given below:

James N. Karanja, Pokea Dairy Farm, P.O. Box 157, Njoro, 20107, Tel. 0733 555 621.

Dairy industry threatened by inbreeding

The majority of dairy farmers do not understand the problems caused by mating cows with the same bloodline.

By Peter Kamau

Lack of information on animal breeding is one of the major obstacles facing the development of the dairy industry in the country. Although the majority of those involved in milk production are small-scale farmers, most of them do not possess even the most basic skills in utilization of artificial insemination services. Figures available at the Central Artificial Insemination Service show that more than 90 percent of the 3.3 million dairy cattle in the country are served with CAIS semen. Unfortunately, most farmers do not keep any records of their animals. This has contributed to increased cases of inbreeding. Inbreeding is the practice of mating closely related animals.

Inbred cows have many problems

Research findings undertaken by the Kenya Dairy Development Project (KDDP) showed that of the 3.3 million dairy cattle in the country, only 5 percent of the cattle had breeding records. This means that a large percentage of farmers are yet to adopt practices that help upgrade their livestock and prevent inbreeding. More than 75 percent of the dairy cattle in the country (mainly owned by small-scale farmers) are exposed to inbreeding because the farmers do not worry about mating cows with the same bloodline.



Dr. Dan Omollo, a vet, inseminates a cow in Kiambu

(TOF)

To understand the problems associated with inbreeding, let us look at the relationship between animals and how it affects their health and productivity. All animals carry genes that determine certain characteristics such as size, height, colour, shape, milk yields and fertility. Although all cattle carry good genes, some have bad genes that usually remain hidden if their young ones are born of parents who are not related. Animals from the same parents have many similar genes or traits, including bad ones, and when they are mated, the young ones will get these bad traits from both parents. Animals born of related parents have many problems such as giving birth to dead calves, small calves, poor fertility, frequent diseases and even deformities. In order to avoid the occurrence of these poor offspring, scientists recommend that animals sharing great grandparents, grand parents or parents should not

be mated. This means that family records of the bulls and cows should be checked before any mating is done so as to make the correct choices of bulls and cows.

Privatisation of AI services to blame

Before the privatisation of veterinary services back in 1992, the Government, under the Kenya National Insemination Services, could control the problem of inbreeding through a number of measures. One of these was the rotation of bull semen between regions after 2 years of use. Farmers using the artificial insemination service were issued with a red file with cow index cards; each cow's identification was made by ear notching to give each cow a unique identity. The inseminator had to carry a minimum of two bulls' semen of each breed, and was expected to check on the breeding information in the file before carrying out an insemination to avoid inbreeding. Artificial insemination officers in charge maintained farm record cards with details of each farmer and each cow inseminated for supervision and follow-ups. A team of veterinary officers from the veterinary headquarters would make follow-up visits on selected farms to ensure the system was observed. Since the privatization of the AI services, however farmers do not maintain any of these records any more.

According to a survey of 80 small-scale farms, it was observed that the majority of the farmers did not keep any farm records. They had only mental records of milk production and cow-offspring relationships. Persons who had records did not have any entries in them, while others could not produce even the most recent insemination records as they could not remember where they kept them. ■

Farmers can avoid inbreeding

Farmers can take several measures to upgrade their animals, improve milk productivity and reduce the dangers of inbreeding by observing a few simple rules:

- Always maintain records of each animal, e.g. date of birth, AI records such as name of bull that sired it, date and age at service, number of services, calving, interval etc.
- Avoid using village bulls to stop transmission of venereal diseases. Separate the bull from the cows at all times to avoid inbreeding.
- Try and register your graded animals with the Kenya Stud Book. An animal whose records are registered with KSB fetches a higher price in the market than one which is not registered.

- Do not throw away the semen straw when your animal is served through artificial insemination for future reference. All straws are labelled with the name and code of the bull, to avoid serving the daughter with the same bull, which will cause inbreeding.

- Always use semen from high quality bulls whose potential is already known. Using semen from known service providers such as CAIS will upgrade your cows, improve their milk production, health and accelerate their growth rate.

Additional information obtained from a report by Dr. Lucy Muthui, Senior Assistant director of Veterinary Services- Artificial Insemination Service.

Earthworms, small fertilizer factories

Many farmers send us questions concerning earthworms. These worms are very helpful, by increasing the nutrients in the soil significantly. The earthworm is a farmer's best friend, however most farmers are unaware that the presence of earthworms is a sign of fertile soils. Generally, we can see the effects of earthworms on the environment in various ways.

Earthworms enrich the soil

They accelerate decomposition of organic matter. During digestion, they mix organic and mineral soil particles and build stable crumbs of soil which help in maintaining the soil's structure. Their excrement (casts) contains 5 times more nitrogen, 7 times more phosphate, 11 times more potash and 2 times more magnesium and calcium than normal soil. They are, then, the smallest fertilizer factories which keep working at no cost to the farmer. The work is done on the spot



without fossil fuels and no transportation is involved. The earthworm also works as a "fine drainage maker", as their tunnels promote infiltration and water drainage, and thus prevent soil erosion and water logging.

In its travels through the soil, the earthworm's digging stirs and loosens the soil and aerates it, allowing water and air to enter. The earthworm improves and enriches the soil, making it easier for plant roots to get nutrients, thus making the plants healthier. For example, it has been shown that in orchards with a high

population of earthworms, the trees have up to 40% larger root systems. Often roots follow the burrows and feed on the more available nutrients in the immediate vicinity. An amazing fact is that roots often seek out the earthworm waste. This happens even if the roots have to grow upward! The reason for this is that the earthworms (or the tiny organisms present in their gut) have concentrated high amounts of growth factors and vitamins in the casts.

Earthworms need good soil ...

As with all life phenomena in the soil, earthworms are susceptible creatures and will not survive the application of poisons and aggressive chemical fertilizer. An earthworm cannot live in poor soil, it will starve and die. Water is another major necessity of earthworms, as they contain about 80% water by weight, and lose about 15% of their body weight per day. If moisture is not available, they will dig deep into the soil to find it. The rate of water uptake is related to the surrounding temperature.

... and are hardworking

Earthworm manure, or castings, are far richer in minerals than the soil which the earthworm feed on, and it is said that on average an earthworm will produce its weight in castings every 24 hours. The earthworm burrows down as deep as 6 feet into the ground, aerating it and making holes for the rain to penetrate. The burrowing of earthworms helps bring up minerals from the lower layers of soil to the upper layers. At the same time the lower horizons get enriched with the organic matter from the upper A and O horizons. This intermixing plus the increase of oxygen and water penetration to the lower layers of the soil increases the depth of the topsoil. As much as a 2-cm (1-inch) thick layer of subsoil may be brought to the surface each year by the burrowing of earthworms.

Pest control by earthworms

Earthworms generally feed on organic matter that has started to decompose, including mammalian dung. The deep burrowing species (geophanous species) feed on soil, and some even feed on nematodes. It has been found that nematode population may decrease by as much as 60% when earthworms are added to soil.

Soil organisms also play an important part of the earthworm diet, and earthworms actually prefer organic matter with high concentrations of soil organisms.

Interesting worms

An earthworm is a segmented worm; its body is divided into segments, and the animal has well developed organs and systems. A single worm has both male and female parts. Pairs come together and exchange sperm. Eggs are laid by depositing egg cases full of sperm into the soil. The eggs hatch, and the little white thread-like worms are now on their own. Each egg case contains several tiny worms about 16 mm long. Earthworms are found everywhere on the earth's surface except in extremely cold northern and southern latitudes. ■



Dung Beetles – nature's composters

There are around 30,000 species of dung beetle, and here in Kenya, there are three types of these wonderful beetles. They all have one thing in common: they survive on fresh cow dung! Beetles of the first type roll manure into small balls. They either feed on the animal droppings or deposit their eggs in them. The second group can be characterised as a dung-burying beetle. They take the manure to underground chambers where a ball is constructed to house an egg. The ball is plastered over with clay or packed for feeding or egg incubation. While performing this task, the cow dung pile may disappear in a day or less. The third group feeds on the dung and completes their life cycle in the cow dung itself.

Nature has produced solutions to all of its challenges with the ultimate intention of sustainability. These natural biodegraders automatically start to process the bovine dung, and in so doing, bury the rich, ripe materials in underground burrows.

Su Kahumbu answers your questions

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Letters to the editor

Newspaper has improved our farming

First and foremost I would like to congratulate you for your effort in making us gain knowledge in organic farming. As a group we have received several articles and our group has improved very much in farming through reading your educative magazine. Mavuno Self Help Group has 20 members who are strong farmers. Working together as a group, we have 10 bee hives in the project where we harvest at least 20 litres of honey every three months. We have 200 chicken layers and fish farming. We also practise horticultural farming, growing vegetables like kale and different types of seeds such as passion fruit, bean seeds, soya beans and pumpkins. We have encouraged every member of the group to plant more bananas.

The group has improved most in fish farming. Through information we got from the Fisheries Department, we have adopted new fish farming methods. More advice from your magazine will help us improve. Through the newspaper, we have known many types of seeds. We have tried some and they have given us positive results. The group has learnt a lot especially on marketing of our produce without incurring much loss. Please, if you know of a good market where we can sell our bananas we will supply them. Lastly, we thank you for being educative and available to us.

Jared Namanga, Mavuno Organic Group, P.O Box 3, Nyamira

Impressed with newspaper

I am pleased to inform you that I really enjoyed *The Organic Farmer* issue No 15. I read with my group and we were motivated to try organic farming. This group is registered with the Department of Social Services and has 30 members. We undertake several projects like maize farming, horticulture, poultry, beekeeping and intend to start a mushroom project, although we have scanty information. Please send us at least 10 copies which we will use to educate other members. Thank you in advance for your motivating information.

Bright Wamela, Kwa U Youth Group, P.O Box 947, Kitale



Send plant extracts issue

There are about 10 additional farmers groups who have been requesting me for copies of the newspaper. I would appreciate if you could increase my allocation from 20 to 30 to cater for the request of those 10 groups. If possible include or post separately a copy of reprint in English of plant extracts which appeared in September/October 2006 issue.

J T Muriithi Simba, SOHGRO, P.O Box 12, Sagana

Visit us

I take this opportunity to thank you most sincerely for the newspapers. We received the five copies. It's the wish of the farmers to request for the addition of the newspaper to 10 copies. The group wishes to invite Su Kahumbu to visit the group and give a word of advice on the various activities of the group. Thank you in advance for the immediate action pertaining to the above matter.

Jacob Rware, P.O Box 453, Embu

We need training

First and foremost I would like to congratulate you for your tireless efforts in educating us on organic farming. Our groups are organic and organized small-scale farmers engaged in poultry, agroforestry, tree nursery, beekeeping and horticulture. The group is registered by the Department of Social Services and has 50 members. The aim of writing to you is to request for monthly copies of the newspaper. Also, please remember our group whenever you organize farmers' tours or training. All this will motivate farmers and encourage them to practise methods that help improve soil fertility.

The Chairman, Tulukuyi Farmers Group, P.O Box 1128, Kimaeti Market

We need assistance

We are an organized farming group wishing to learn more from you and we request you to facilitate us with the following:

First we request *The Organic Farmer* newspaper for our 32 members. We are also looking for an organization to contract this group to grow any identified crop either organic or inorganic for the benefit of the farmers' income, e.g. watermelon, pepper, etc. We would also be grateful if you can identify a donor to finance our farmers to implement most of the projects in our organization. Any other project that can assist the farmers so as to eradicate poverty would be welcomed by members. Your assistance and response will be highly appreciated. Thank you.

Joseph Muigai, Muriganio Farmers Group, P.O Box 44, Solai

Thank you for your letter. However we would like to inform you that TOF's main objective is to educate farmers to be self-supporting in all the activities they undertake. Currently there are very few donors willing to offer financial support to farmers' groups. We would encourage your group to work hard in planned income generating activities. In this way they would raise all the finances they require to develop their farms.

Put us on mailing list

We write to request for *The Organic Farmer*. We are a group of 25 registered farmers based in Kinangop plateau doing organic farming. We would be grateful to be receiving copies of the monthly magazines. The group is in charge of another 20 common interest groups registered under the Department of Social Services doing the same work. We hope you will consider our case.

James Kangethe, P.O Box 565, Naivasha

Dear Farmers,

If you have any questions or ideas for articles, or if you would like us to publish experiences about your shamba or within your farmers' group, please contact us. We shall get back to you!
SMS ONLY



Tuma maoni yako! Asante.

tips and bits

from farmers for farmers

Wangige group registered

Certification has made it possible for the group to access organic markets.

Philomena Nyagilo

For the Wangige Farmers Group, January 15 this year was a big day; the group reached a first step on the way to the registration as organic farmers. The registration enables them to sell their produce as "under conversion", meaning that they are in the process of getting full certification as organic producers after one or two years. With the registration, the produce from the group will carry a logo showing their food items are in organic conversion, therefore selling at a higher price than ordinary produce. The group is one of the beneficiaries of *The Organic Farmer* Support Programme, which was launched in June last year with funds from BioVision.

First in the country

Charles Kimani, the group Chairman of Wangige Farmers says: "This is a big step forward for our group and better things seems to be coming our way. With the certification we believe sales will go up. We are happy with *The Organic Farmer* newspaper for initiating the programme." Since September last year, the group has been selling their produce to The Organic Shop at Gigiri owned by Su Kahumbu who runs a question and answer column in our newspaper. This is a major achievement as it is the first farmers' group to be registered in the country. "They will now be able to sell a wide range of organic products as they can now prove their products are organically produced", says Kahumbu.



Members of the Wangige Farmers Group with their organic registration certificate.

(Photo TOF)

Currently the group supplies bananas, tomatoes, avocados, mangoes, beetroot, cucumber, pumpkins, potatoes and organic honey to the shop.

Getting good prices

Rahab Wairimu, another group member, says that the prices being offered by The Organic Shop are much higher than what they used to get in the conventional market, for example a banana finger is sold at Ksh 5 in the organic shop, while in the conventional market 4 or 5 fingers go for Ksh10, she says.

The road to success has not been easy; the Wangige Farmers' Group had to undergo a rigorous training programme on methods of organic production. The Encert Certification Company then trained the group on certification requirements. The inspection of the farms was later carried out to ensure the farmers met all the requirements for organic certification.

Group to open stall

To expand the market for organic produce, Charles Kimani says the group has already approached the local council to allocate them a stall at the Wangige market, which will offer consumers of organic produce in the area an outlet where they can get their supplies.

A milestone

For *The Organic Farmer*, the registration of the group is a major milestone in the development of organic farming in the country. This program was started after complaints from farmers that they could not get a market for their organic produce.

After carrying out a survey among the organic farmers, it was discovered that the problem was not the lack of market, but the fact that small-scale organic farmers lacked certification. The Wangige group has shown a lot of initiative and hard work during the certification process. We hope other farmers' groups will follow their example to make organic farming a profitable venture in Kenya. ■

Marketplace



Calliandra: I would like to buy Calliandra seeds for planting. Anyone with the seeds can get in touch with me.

Karago Tel 0734 961391 Ngorika, Nakuru.



Beeswax: I am a young beekeeper and I have 500 g of propolis. Any one interested in buying it may get in touch with me at the following address:

Benard Kirono Marisin P.O. Box 245 Molo Tel.0726 736250 0736 617 134.

Tissue culture bananas: I would like to buy 500 tissue culture bananas for planting. Those interested in selling should get in touch with me. Please indicate prices.

Call Tel. 0721 311 541

Rabbits: I am a farmer from Gatundu and would like to know where I can get Californian rabbits. If you have any for sale, please get in touch with me on

Tel. 0724 873 347

Tissue culture bananas. Do you need organically grown tissue culture bananas as from January 2007? Contact J G Njoroge, 3N-Harvest, P.O. Box 82 Saba Saba Tel. 0721638034.

Organic Vegetables: I have organically grown capsicums, butternut, carrots and courgettes. Interested buyers can get in touch with me at the following address: Joseph Njoroge, P.O. Box 52542, Nairobi, 00100 Tel.0721 647 618

Amaranthus: I have 100 kg of amaranthus seeds (cream colour variety). Farmers interested in buying them can contact me on the following address:

Solomon Sangalo, P.O. Box 2015, Bungoma, 50200 Tel. 0725 660 213.

Articles wanted. Do you have something interesting you would like to share with other farmers? From now on a grateful TOF will award gift items for every article published.