DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- Bring listeners in the project area the latest information on natural resources, the environment and agriculture
- Focus on solutions, what works and what people can do
- Encourage listeners to share both their questions and solutions (African solutions for African problems)
- Raise awareness of issues that need to be discussed to affect public policy.
- Bring the latest solutions and practices that have relevance to this region from around the world
- Identify and link other NGOs working in the region share the project interests and goals
- Give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on these issues

Focus: Conservation Agriculture

Adoption of conservation agriculture (CA) is very low in most part of Africa; however, in Zambia it's been seen as a technology option that can increase yields for a wide range of crops by resource-poor farmers even in agro-ecological regions with little water.

CA has widely been defined as an agronomic practice with three interrelated main principles. They are minimum mechanical soil disturbance, permanent organic soil cover and diversified crop species in rotation.

CA is increasingly being promoted as one of the options for addressing food shortages. Farmers across Zambia have shown a growing interest in the technology.

However there have been arguments that CA adoption is low due to the socio-economic conditions in which it is implemented.

The Problem: Conservation Agriculture Adoption Challenges

The Zambian government views agriculture as the best alternative to mining due to its contribution to the gross domestic product or GDP. Farming contributed nearly 19% to GDP in 1995 and just over 17% in 2000.

The smallholder farmers in Zambia heavily depend on land and rainfall for their agricultural activities. However, with increasing land constraints in most areas, fallow periods have also drastically declined.

With deterioration in land productivity due to soil degradation and erratic rainfall, which is obvious to farmers themselves, one would expect them to support conservation agriculture and give up traditional farming systems that no longer work effectively due to population pressure and changes in climate.

Still, adoption of CA practices in Zambia have been very low and is influenced by several factors such as: high cost of supplies and equipment and the lack of availability of crop residues in dry season since most farmer's burn their field. Another challenge is conservative farming benefits aren't always immediate -- and most farmers want to see quick results.

Solutions: Activities for Journalists

Use your community radio station to help citizens understand advantages of adopting conservation agriculture (CA) in Zambia.

Discuss with communities how they view CA as a farming practice. It's a practice that involves a complete change in the mindset by farmers.

Discuss benefits of conservation agriculture as compared to the traditional farming system.

Discuss the role of the Ministry of Agriculture in providing extension services for CA.

Conservation agriculture covers a broad range of practices such as reduced tillage, minimum tillage, zero tillage, mulch tillage and strip tillage.

Soil fertility practices refer to soil conservation practices that directly provide nutrients to the soil. For instance, crop residue can be used as fertilizer – once the residue decomposes.

Conservation agriculture uses a combination of practices that result in improved crop yields and less fertilizer and labor.

CA is critical in the face of climate change for adaptation and food security.

CA improves soil fertility and allows minimum disturbances to the soil suitable for climate change mitigation.

Conservation Farming Unity of Zambia and the National Farmers Union in collaboration with Golden Valley Agriculture research has been encouraging conservation farming for more than 20 years in Zambia and some positive result have been recorded – such as increased crop yield compared to conventional farming practices.

Conservation agriculture can make a significant difference by using water more efficiently and effectively – increasing the quality and health of the soil, a greater capacity to withstand extreme weather and it contributes to carbon sequestration – that is putting less carbon into the atmosphere.

Questions for journalists

Do farmers in your area using conservation farming techniques? If so, have they noticed increased crop yield from these practices compared to traditional farming system?

Invite an extension agent to discuss the importance of conservation agriculture as compared to conventional farming techniques.

Encourage farmers who are using these innovative techniques to produce radio programs – with your assistance – so they can help other farmers adopt these "green" practices.

Useful Links

Information about farming and the environment: Makweti Sishekanu, National Farmers Union Zambia: +260-211-252-649 or +260-965-098-360. Email: makwetiskanu@yahoo.com

Good source of information: Vincent Ziba, National Coordinator, Community-based National Resource Management Forum, Zambia; Email: vinceziba@yahoo.com. Phone: 0966-246-924

Good source of information; Mwape Sichilongo, WWF Conservation Manager.

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