



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

Focus: Fertilizers

Fertilizers are chemical materials that provide nutrients needed for plant production.

Fertilizers can be either inorganic or organic. Inorganic fertilizer, also known as commercial fertilizer, is mined from mineral deposits or manufactured from synthetic compounds.

Organic fertilizer is composed of natural ingredients of plant or animal origin. A benefit of inorganic fertilizers is that they work more quickly than organic varieties because they contain a higher percentage of nutrients; however, long-term use of inorganic fertilizers may contribute to soil depletion. This is because they contain certain materials not suitable for the soil. Organic fertilizer provides a suitable soil condition for plant production; however it takes time as it needs to decompose unlike inorganic fertilizers that are readily available for use.

The Weekly for Zambia

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

The Problem: Increased Price of Fertilizer

The main disadvantage of inorganic fertilizers is that it's much more expensive than organic fertilizers. Another disadvantage of inorganic fertilizers is that it contains certain elements that a plant is unable to use and can damage soil over a long period of time. These compounds build up in the soil and can even change the soil completely. This can make the soil less suitable for future use. Too much inorganic fertilizer can also burn or destroy the plant.

In Zambia, the price of fertilizer has increased approximately 100% from the price during the last

growing season.

The government has also reduced the fertilizer support programme allocation of one pack per family from eight – 50 kilo bags to four – 50 kilo bags. This is to promote inclusion of conservation agriculture practices in the farming sector. However, most Zambian farmers have not diversified fertilizer sources for their agricultural activities, and still depend on commercial inorganic fertilizer for crop production.

In view of climate change impacts like flooding or drought inorganic fertilizer does not benefit much crop production as it can easily be lost or can damage crops.

Solutions: Activities for Journalists

Ask listeners what are their main sources of fertilizer for crop production.

The government programme for fertilizer support has been reduced and the prices of commercial fertilizers have increased. How has this affected farmers?

Ask farmers if they have any alternatives to government fertilizer support? Ask farmers how much inorganic fertilizer they use. Which is more readily available in the shops – organic or inorganic fertilizer?

Ask farmers what are the main sources of organic fertilizers in their area.

Soil improvement determines the yield from crop production; most farmers in Zambia are small scale and have average yields of one ton of maize per one hectare against potential yields on average of eight tons per hectare. Any slight disturbance of the crop production process, especially due to climate change, reduces the yields significantly.

Have farmers noticed big changes in the climate in the last few years? What sort of changes? How have these changes affected them? What are they doing to adjust to any changes?

Are any farmers using organic fertilizers in your community? What do they think in terms of crop yields compared to inorganic fertilizers?

Conservation farming promotes the use of manure. A can of Coca Cola filled with manure has been promoted by conservation

farming to reduce the demand for commercial fertilizer per planting station.

Ask farmers if they have tried mixing organic fertilizer with commercial fertilizer?

Organic fertilizers can be applied directly as manure, plant agroforestry or composting of any animal waste for use by plants.

Climate change is likely to lead to higher global temperatures. In fact, the World Bank 2015 report states that global warming will drive an additional 100 million people into poverty by 2030. The World Bank also predicts that significant increases in food prices in regions like sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In Africa, prices could shoot up by as much as 12 percent by 2030 and 70 percent by 2080.

Ask listeners how much they are involved in climate change adaptation programmes?

Ask farmers how much they are involved in climate smart agriculture which includes sustainable soil management and use?

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, FAO Zambia, Zambia; Email: vinceziba@yahoo.com. Phone: 0966-246-924

Mwape Sichilongo, WWF Conservation Manager. Email: mwapesichilongo@wwfzam.org. Phone: +260 966442540

Conservation Farming Unity, Mr Sinya Mbale , Phone:+260 965 238 008