

The Organic Farmer

The newspaper for sustainable agriculture in Kenya



Nr. 25 June 2007

Bees give honey and money

A wise farmer diversifies their farming activities to maximize their sources of income. One way they can do this is to start beekeeping. Here, a beekeeper uses a smoker to calm bees while harvesting a Langstroth hive. See page 4 and 5

Photo P. Luthi



Solving seed potato problems

Allow small-scale farmers to produce seed potatoes for their own use and sale to other farmers.

The Organic Farmer

There is a severe shortage of certified seed potatoes in the country. Small-scale farmers are suffering because they cannot get clean planting material, which has forced them to use commercial potato stock as seed. The practice has led to the spread of bacterial wilt disease to areas that were previously unaffected. To overcome the problem of seed potato shortage, the Ministry of Agriculture with assistance from The German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ) and the International Potato Centre (CIP), has trained 120 potato seed growers across the country who it was assumed would multiply seed and sell it to other farmers. However, the Seed and Plant Varieties Act (1975) says that only seed produced by the KARI

National Potato Research Centre (NPRC) and multiplied in its sub-centres at the ADC farms in Molo, Njabini and Marindas in Meru under strict supervision by the Kenya Plant Health Inspection Service (KEPHIS) can qualify as certified seed.

Change the law

The problem is that most of the land previously owned by these institutions has been 'grabbed' and they

TOF on air!

On Thursday of every third week of the month, you can hear *The Organic Farmer* on the Kiswahili Service of KBC from 8.30 pm to 8.45 pm. The programme is shared with the Agricultural Information and Resource Centre. Learn more about organic farming by tuning in to this programme, Every third week of the month, starting from 8.30 pm!



are currently unable to produce the required quantities of potato seed. "Since these government institutions cannot meet the country's seed requirements, we feel the best way to solve the problem is to allow small-scale farmers to produce the seed and sell it to fellow farmers", says Dr Jackson Kabira, the NPRC director. He says about 99% of seed potato in the country is grown by small-scale farmers, but without changing the Seed and Plant Varieties Act, these potatoes cannot be legally sold as seed. See also page 3. ■

Dear farmers,

Apart from good soil fertility, another requirement for the successful farmer is quality seed. If the seeds are of poor quality, farmers will incur crop failure, which lowers their own income and also affects the country's food security. In the last few years, many seed companies have been licensed to sell seed in Kenya. However, the quality of some of the seed varieties has raised questions, because there are many reported cases of crop failure and even diseases which have not been seen before. This clearly indicates that something is very wrong with the seed industry in the country. Either the regulatory authorities are not doing their work as expected, or there is a problem with the legal framework under which they operate. In this confusion, how sure are we that the country is not being made a dumping ground for all manner of seed, including genetically modified varieties which are banned locally?

Last month, Agriculture Minister Kipruto Kirwa set up the Seeds and Plants Tribunal, whose mandate is to handle complaints from farmers over the quality of seed sold to them. But the question is: How many farmers are willing to spend their money filing cases against seed companies once they discover the seed sold to them is not of the right quality? Clearly there is a need to overhaul and streamline the seed industry. One area that needs changing urgently are the many archaic laws that are no longer in line with the rapidly changing situation in the agricultural sector. Two years ago, we wrote about the shortage of certified potato seed following the spread of the devastating bacterial wilt disease. The government institutions mandated to multiply seed for sale to farmers had failed to do so because most of the land used to multiply seed had been grabbed.

In developed countries, seed production is done by the private sector while the government's role is only regulatory. But in Kenya, the Seed and Plant Varieties Act does not allow individuals to produce seed. What needs to be done is to change such laws which stifle rather than develop the agricultural sector.

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MY OPINION

A farmer gets sent to jail, and his wife is trying to hold the farm. She's not very good at farm work, so she writes a letter to him in jail: "Sweetheart, I want to plant the potatoes. When is the best time to do it?" The farmer writes back: "Honey, don't go near that field. That's where all my guns are buried." When the prison warders read the letter, they all run out to the farm and dig up the entire potato field looking for guns. After two full days of digging, they don't find one single weapon. The farmer then writes to his wife: "Honey, now is when you should plant the potatoes.

A farmers joke

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 by ICIPE 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)

Organic nitrogen is best

All plants need nitrogen. Organic farming has many ways to add this important nutrient to the soil.

The Organic Farmer

Farmer Paul Macharia in Nakuru likes organic farming, as he writes to our newspaper. "But if I plant hybrid maize, I need to use artificial fertilizers containing nitrogen, such as DAP, urea or CAN, to get a good yield. Otherwise my harvest will be so little, that I will not even recover the cost of the inputs. Nitrogen is the key to a good harvest."

In one way, Paul is right. Even the handbook of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) says that chemical fertilizers offer large amounts of nutrients to the plants in an easily available form. "They can lead to an impressive increase in the yield." On the other hand, these fertilizers are not only expensive (1 bag now costs Ksh 2000/=), but they also disrupt the natural growth and development of plants.

Damage to soil structure

They do not feed the soil, but merely supply a limited range of nutrients to the plants themselves. Over-supply of nitrogen leads to a softening of the plants' tissues, resulting in plants which are more sensitive to diseases and pests. In addition, soluble nitrates may reduce the numbers of beneficial soil organisms which are essential for stabilising soil structure. This can result in increased soil acidity and a tendency to erosion.

Feeding the soil

Another real problem of using chemical fertilizer is that about half of the applied nitrogen fertilizer usually gets lost through runoff, leaching and evaporation. If there are strong rains or long dry periods, the efficiency of nitrogen may be even lower. This is the reason why farmers often mix these fertilizers with compost or with



Desmodium: Nitrogen fixing (Photos TOF)



Lablab: Nitrogen fixing

manure, so it cannot be washed away and so goes slowly into the soil and to the roots.

Organic and sustainable farming does not allow the use of chemical fertilizers. Sustainable agriculture is the approach to agricultural production that stresses the improvement and preservation of the soil while increasing productivity. Organic farming feeds the plants indirectly by feeding the soil with organic matter. It is the main nutrient for the plants. Organic manures usually contain all required nutrients in sufficient amounts and in a balanced composition. Deficiency of a single nutrient can in most cases be avoided by applying compost, animal manure and other organic sources.

Organic soil improvers

Green manure: Green manures are plants grown to improve the soil.

These plants may fix nitrogen, protect the soil from drying, improve soil structure via roots, suppress weeds by fast growth, and control pests by harbouring predators. Fallowing is recommended to create a rest period for soils. They may be ploughed back into the ground or cut and left to use as a top mulch or may be cut and used in the compost pile. Examples of good green manure plants are amaranthus, crotalaria, lablab, beans, peas, purple vetch, lupin, mustard or rye.

Animal manures: These manures must be well rotted or composted before use. They are best incorporated together with the bedding of the animals, as this will have most of the nitrogen that is in the animal urine. The bedding will also provide bulk, which will further improve the soil structure.

Compost: All garden vegetative waste can be composted. Animal bedding, cereal straw, maize stalks, etc. are all good. Additional inputs like wood ash sprinkled between layers of material, as well as bone meal and/or rock phosphate are added if required.

continued on page 3

New method to control bacterial wilt

A seed plot can always provide a farmer with stock of disease-free seed potatoes

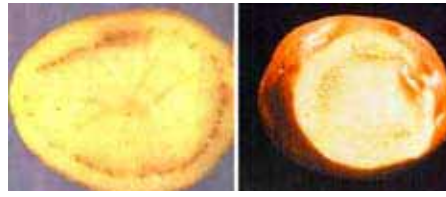
The Organic Farmer

Most potato growers nowadays hardly manage to get good potato yields due to lack of quality seed, pests and the increasing threat of potato bacterial wilt, among other diseases. Lack of certified seed has forced farmers to recycle their commercial potato stock and use it as seed.

The main problem here is that farmers will select the large sized potatoes for the market while leaving the under-sized ones for use as seed. The small-sized potatoes do not make good seed. They are also prone to bacterial wilt and other diseases. Researchers have developed a method of making the best use of good quality seed potatoes and maintaining their health to enable farmers to get maximum potato yields. In this method, called the seed plot system, potatoes meant for multiplication as seed are grown on a separate plot from the ware potatoes (potatoes for sale or home consumption). The farmer takes good care of the seed plot by ensuring that they are free from diseases and pests.

Requirements for seed plot

The land to be used for the seed plot should be left fallow or planted with crops that cannot be affected by bacterial wilt, such as maize or beans, and preferably a short season crop. The land should not have a history of potato production nor of other crops of the potato family such



Infected potato tubers (Courtesy KARI-NARL)

as capsicums, tomatoes, bananas or egg plant. The seed plot should be established on fertile land, and there should be no runoff water in and around the plot.

Use disease-free potato seed

Farmers should buy seed potatoes from a reliable source, preferably a seed production centre or a recognized seed dealer. Potato seed tubers should be 2.5-5.5 cm in diameter.

Land preparation and planting

Mark out the beds to about 2 metres wide and a sufficient length depending on your seed needs. Loosen the soil to a desirable depth and break the crumbs to make it fine. Spread well decomposed manure and rake it in. Make holes at a spacing of 20 cm (8 inches) by pushing a spade handle or similar tool through the soil to a depth of 15 cm (6 inches) and plant a well-sprouted tuber in each hole. Cover the hole with fine soil.

Weeding and hilling

Hand weeding is recommended. Making hills as is done in commercial potato fields is not necessary so long as the farmer uses the recommended planting depth of 15 cm.

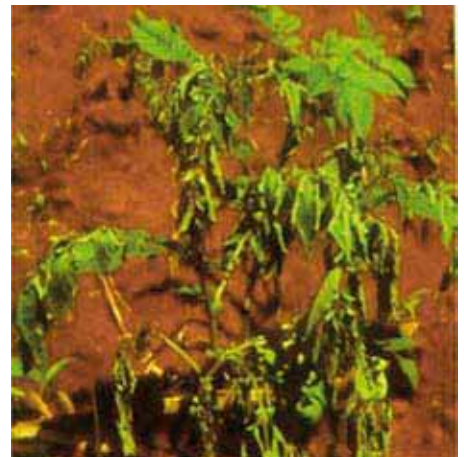
Disease and pest control

Seed plots need to be inspected regularly to ensure that pests such as aphids, the potato tuber moth and others are controlled. Diseases such as early and late blight should be controlled promptly. Farmers can use plant extracts (read the April 2007 issue of TOF on plant extracts) for

pest control. The fungal diseases can be controlled by use of copper oxychloride, which is allowed in organic farming. Removal and destruction of diseased plants, good field hygiene and crop rotation (avoid planting crops in the potato family) should be practised. This will help control bacterial wilt and other diseases.

Harvesting and grading

Seed plots must be harvested 3 weeks earlier than in the case of a ware potato crop. Potato vines (stems) must



Affected potato plant (Photo KARI-NARL)

be removed about 2 weeks before harvesting to allow the potato skin to harden. Grading involves selecting unbruised, disease-free tubers, which are 2.5 – 5.5 cm in diameter. Potatoes larger or less than this size are unsuitable for use as seed.

How to use seed potatoes

Harvested seed potatoes should be divided into two lots: One lot is used in establishing a new potato seed plot as explained earlier and the other lot planted in the commercial potato field at the recommended spacing of 30 x75 cm and following the usual potato management guidelines. ■

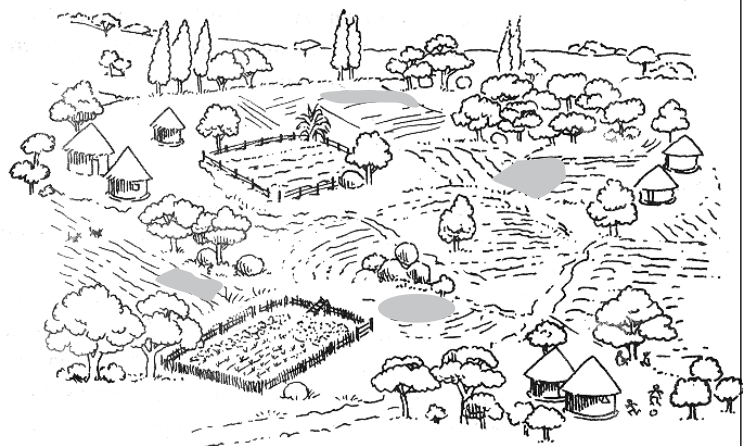
Organic nitrogen ...

continued from page 2

comfrey and tithonia leaves added to compost act as a compost activator as well as adding micronutrients. Addition of Effective Microorganisms (EM1) can also help speed up your composting time by adding a ready source of microorganisms.

Permitted organic fertilizers: Organic fertilizers are products of plant, animal or mineral origin that generally release nutrients slowly over time. Some are compound mixtures e.g. bone meal, seaweed meal and, fishmeal, rock phosphate and potash. These organic fertilizers are normally used where there is a deficiency in the crop. One must therefore learn to identify the deficiencies and strive to correct the cause of the problem. ■

In every farm there are suitable sites for seed plots (in grey): virgin land, bushland, homestead, but not where you have previously grown potatoes or other plants of the potato family such as tomatoes, capsicums etc.



Beekeeping is a good sideline for farmers

Honey fetches a good price on the market. Beekeeping is not too difficult, but a farmer needs some knowledge.

The Organic Farmer

Beekeeping can be an ideal source of income for small-scale farmers. It does not need a lot of expensive investments, and it does not need a lot of land or good soil. On the contrary, hilly and rocky land which is not arable can be used productively, provided that there are flowers and flower bushes. Bees are very important, as they act as pollinators of many plants. Bees transfer pollen grains from the stamens (male parts) of flowers to the stigma (female parts) of other flowers, enabling pollination and fruit formation to take place. In this way, bees increase the quality of flowering crops, e.g. coffee, pawpaw, banana, avocado, mangoes, etc. Without bees and other insects, many plants would disappear, for instance onions, cabbages, carrots, fruits, lucerne and cotton. In addition to their pollination activities there are many direct benefits for the



beekeeper: Honey is healthy, it is high in energy, is helpful against coughs, ulcers, wound, etc. It is also a source of cash; beeswax is used for making candles, shoewax or soap and in the manufacture of cosmetics; propolis has antibiotic properties and is used in medicine. Royal jelly is used in medicine and pharmaceuticals and as a dietary supplement.

Beekeeping skills are necessary

A farmer who is eager to become a beekeeper should have some knowledge on the life cycle of bees. A beginner should always ask experienced beekeepers or join a group already working with bees to acquire the necessary skills. There are also some books on the market (see box on this page); the most informative is the one written by Thomas Carroll, "A Beginner's Guide to Beekeeping in Kenya". It is a wonderful and easily

Inform yourself!

If you would like to know more about bees, there are some books on the market:

- Thomas Carroll, *A Beginners Guide to Beekeeping in Kenya*, Nairobi 2006, ISBN 9966-7078-8-7. Available at Legacy Books Press, Yaya Centre or Baraka Agricultural College, Molo (051 721 091) Price KSh 1,200. It is by far the most informative book. See also www.apiconsult.com
- *Make Money From Bees*, KARI Kitale, P.O. Box 450, Kitale.
- S.K. Raina, *Commercial Insects, A Practical Guide for Raising Silkmooths and Honey Bees in Africa*, ISBN ISBN 0 86098 246 7 Published and available from ICIPE Science Press, P.O.Box 30772, Nairobi, 00100. The book is available in English and Kiswahili versions.

understandable introduction on beekeeping with all the important tips and advice. In our newspaper, we do not have space enough to go too deep into the details of beekeeping. We can only give you some few requirements which a farmer should consider if they want to start beekeeping.

Making an apiary

A farmer should know where to place the apiary (the structure for housing a colony of bees, see opposite page) on their shamba. The apiary should be away from people and livestock, away from a main road or public areas, and should not contain more than 20 hives. The apiary should be



surrounded by a hedge of shrubs; if they are not growing fast enough, the beekeeper can put up a fence (for instance with off-cuts, which is also good against theft). The apiary should have some trees to protect the hives against strong direct sunshine and wind. And, it should provide the bees with water and, of course, shrubs, trees and flowers to provide nectar.

Trees and shrubs provide nectar

As mentioned above, a farmer should know about the life cycle of bees. When there is plenty of food, bees produce more honey for eating in times when there is less food. Each region of Kenya has its own flowering

Continued on page 7

Beekeeping pays!

Every supermarket and most shops sell honey. There is a high demand for it, especially now that Kenya is licensed to export honey to the European Union if it meets export requirements. Thomas Carroll gives a very impressive example of the relationship between costs and benefits in the table below. He takes a farmer with 20 Kenya Top Bar Hives (KTBH) (see opposite page 5), with an 80 percent occupation rate (16 hives are occupied) and an average honey production of 20 kg per occupied hive. Farmers sell honey in bulk at a price of KSh 100 per kg.

| Expenditure | Cost in KSh |
|--|-------------|
| 20 Kenya top bar hives, KSh 2,000/hive | 40,000 |
| 1 Bee suit | 3,270 |
| 1 Smoker | 800 |
| 25 Hanging posts (KSh 150 each) | 3,750 |
| Grease and other various items | 500 |
| Total | 48,320 |

Assuming it is a good year, and 16 of 20 beehives are occupied (80%), the result looks as follows:

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Estimated honey production from one colony | 20 kg |
| Total honey production from 16 occupied hives | 320 kg |
| Estimated price of 1 kg honey in 2007 | KSh 100/kg |
| Estimated income from 16 occupied hives | KSh 32,000 |
| Net income in the first year = KSh 32,000 (sale) minus KSh 48,320 (investments) | - KSh 16,320 |

This means that in the first year the farmer will not have any income. But the equipment has a lifespan of an average of 10 years or more, supposing a farmer works carefully. In the second year, the investments (capital costs) will be paid off and the farmer will get a good income. The Langstroth hive, which has 10 bars instead of only one bar as in the KTBH, will yield even more honey, although the initial cost of the hive is greater.

(Source: Thomas Carroll, *A Beginner's Guide to Beekeeping in Kenya*)

Beekeeping skills are as important as beehives

The highest costs for a beginner in beekeeping are the beehives. Interested farmers can even make their own.

The Organic Farmer

Most farmers in Kenya use a log bee hive in beekeeping practice. Below we introduce you to two types of modern beehives; the Kenya Top Bar Hives (KTBH) and the Langstroth bee hives which are very efficient in terms of the quantity and quality of honey they can produce. The two hives also make honey harvesting and bee management easy for farmers.

On this page, we briefly give details on the two types of beehives. More information can be obtained from books or from an experienced beekeeper.

The Kenya Top Bar Hive (KTBH).

This is the most common hive in Kenya. The cost of a KTBH is about



P. Luthi

Kenya Top Bar Hives hang on a tree branch

KSh 2000. Bee-specialist Thomas Carroll says that KTBH are the most convenient hives for beginners since they are relatively cheap. One can buy them at Baraka Agricultural College, Molo (Tel. 051 721 091) or the National Beekeeping Station, Nairobi (Tel. 020 564 302). Beginners can make the hive themselves if they have some carpentry skills or if they can follow the instructions given here on how to build it.

Advantages of the KTBH

- Easy to check for ripe honey.
- Easier to harvest than the traditional log hives on the top of a tree.
- Easy to manage the bees during scarcity of flowers and dry weather, since food for bees and water can be provided during such adverse conditions to maximise honey production
- Honey extraction is easy compared to log beehives or to Langstroth hives, as there is no need for special equipment.
- The hive keeps swinging and cannot be easily attacked by the honey badger (a nocturnal honey-eating animal). It can fill very quickly in the honey season.

Disadvantages

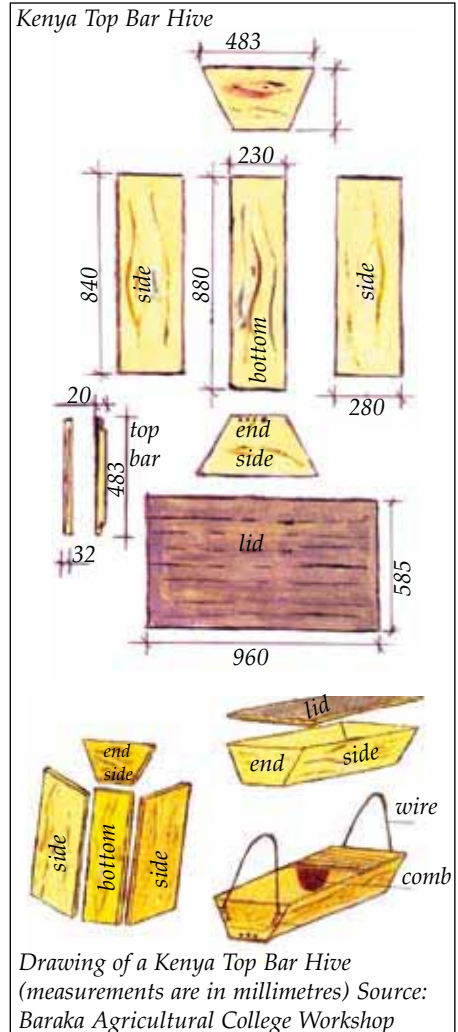
- The combs in KTBH are not supported; therefore, combs tend to break if not handled carefully.
- Beeswax is harvested with honey, forcing bees to build more wax to replace harvested combs, which results in lower honey yields but more harvested wax.

Advantages

- The frames make the combs very strong, especially when transported.
- It produces high quality honey and high yields since combs are not destroyed.
- It allows harvesting of other high-value hive products such as propolis, royal jelly, etc.

Disadvantages

- High initial costs.
- They are more complicated to manage and they require more spare parts such as frames, foundation starter sheets, etc.
- A centrifugal machine is used to extract honey. They are not easily available in Kenya and are expensive to purchase, although groups of farmers can share or even rent one.



- The volume of the KTBH is fixed, so the hive can fill very quickly in the honey season.

Whichever hive a beekeeper chooses, the most important thing is that they are building up their own skills, capacities and knowledge. Even the best hive cannot be productive if a beekeeper is not able to manage it well to get a good harvest!

Important tips

- Grease the posts on the wire loop to prevent pests from getting into the beehive. Cut any vegetation below the hive for the same reason.
- Never use poisonous material for smoking bees while harvesting honey. Some farmers use foam mattresses, human hair, wild fungal material, cypress or tephrosia leaves to smoke. These are dangerous and spoil honey quality. Use only the allowed material for smoking.
- For packing, use clear food-grade plastic or glass jars.
- Maintain a high standard of cleanliness.

The Langstroth hive can give more honey

This is a fairly modern hive (see photo on page 1). It is also called a frame hive since it has frames where the combs are fixed. It has a brood chamber where the queen lays her eggs. She is restricted from moving to other chambers by a wire (the queen excluder). In the super chamber (above the brood chamber) is the honey storage area. The combs are formed on the frames and not on the bars as in KTBH. For harvesting, the frames with honey-filled combs are removed and harvested using a centrifugal equipment. Langstroth hives are relatively expensive, and cost an average of KSh 4,000. You can buy them at the two institutions mentioned above or from private companies such as Honey Care Africa (020 574 448) or African Beekeepers (0722 700 226)

Calliandra is good fodder

I would like to grow calliandra. Please direct me as to where I can get it. Karago from Ngorika 0734 961391

It is a good idea, Karago, to grow calliandra. It is one of the best fodder trees and one of great value, because of its high protein content. It is very useful for adding to livestock feed, especially when they are only fed on grasses like Napier, which are often low in protein.

Calliandra grows to a height of 4 to 6 metres. It requires rainfall that is above 1,000 mm per year. It does better in well-drained soils, as it does not tolerate water logging. Fodder is ready for harvesting in 9 months after planting, and 4 to 6 harvests are possible per year.

Two on-farm experiments and one on-station study were conducted between July 1994 and September 1995 in Kenya to determine the effect of supplementation with fresh fodder of *Calliandra calothyrsus* on milk production. One study used grade Friesian and Ayrshire cows in the second trimester of their lactations. The cattle were kept under zero-grazing systems on small farms in the coffee-based land use system at altitudes of 1500 to 1800 m on the slopes of Mt Kenya. These cows form a pivotal part of the

farming system since they produce both milk for sale and manure for crop production. Milk production was normally in the region of 10 kg/cow per day when the animals were fed on a diet based on Napier grass and crop residues, together with 2-4 kg/day of commercial concentrate.

In terms of milk production, adding 3 kg of fresh calliandra had the same effect on yield as 1 kg of additional dairy meal, and at normal production levels, the effects of the two supplements were strictly additive. Calliandra had a marked positive effect (about a 10% increase) on the butterfat content of the milk, a factor that was highly valued by farmers, even though institutional buyers as yet offer no premium price for milk quality. The average small farm can produce enough calliandra fodder to supplement two dairy cows. You can purchase calliandra seed from any farmer or tree nursery near your area. Most district agricultural offices now have an information desk which can also assist. Alternatively, you can buy seeds from the VI Agro-Forestry Project P.O. Box 2006, 30200 Kitale, Tel. (054) 20 139 or 30 283.



Soya beans

Soya - a source of protein

Can you please explain to me how soya beans (*Glycine max*) looks like and in which parts of the country it can be grown? Augustine Tel. 0723 170756

The above photo, Augustine, is soya bean. It is a good crop to plant. Soya is one of the world's most important sources of oil and protein. Cultivation is successful in climates with hot summers, with optimum growing conditions and mean temperatures of 20 to 30 °C; temperatures below 20 °C and over 40 °C retard growth significantly. The crop can grow in a wide range of soils, with optimum growth in moist alluvial soils with a good organic content. Soybeans, like most legumes, help fix good quantities of nitrogen in the soil.

Turkeys need proper care

I am a small scale farmer and I keep turkeys, but I find it very difficult to raise even one chick. Do you have any advice? Stephen Sino Butere.

We understand your problem, Stephen. Young turkeys, (also called poults) are very delicate to rear, as they easily succumb to adverse weather conditions such as cold and dampness in the housing pen. Once they hatch, it is important to confine them with their mother for at least one week. The chicks should have ready access to food and clean water at all times. Unlike chickens, turkeys require feed with a higher protein content of 27 percent from birth to about six weeks; this can be reduced to 18 percent later as they grow. If chick mash is used, then it should be supplemented with a high protein source like fishmeal. Unlike chickens, turkey chicks have problems locating their feed, especially when you use artificial brood-

ers. Adult turkeys require at least 0.35 kg per day of feed depending on their body weight.

Turkeys are ready to breed at approximately one year and will lay about 20 eggs before going broody (sitting on their eggs to hatch). A hen will make its own nest, but dark well-protected nests can be provided. One mating for a hen is enough for the whole egg-laying period.

The eggs will then hatch within 25 to 28 days. Although artificial incubators can be used, eggs are best hatched naturally. Turkey should be raised separately from other birds since they would otherwise bully them and keep them away from the feeders. Keeping them separately can also prevent cross-infection of diseases. They should be

kept within a fenced area, and a small area should be thatched to protect them from the rains. In the absence of trees, perches for rest should always be provided. (TOF)



Su Kahumbu answers your questions

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Letters to the editor

Useful for our project

We thank you for keeping us informed and educated about organic farming. We are a self-help group of 14 members practising poultry, dairy and horticultural farming and we are looking forward to beekeeping. We came across issue No.14 and found it to be very helpful and informative. We are kindly requesting you to send us a copy of the previous issues and supply us with your monthly editions. We shall appreciate.

Allan Njenga, Chambiti Youth Group, P.O Box 11, Maragoli

Beekeeping as source of income ...

continued from page 4

vegetation that bees like and which do not flower at the same time during the year. Clever farmers know the floral calendar of their region. They are knowledgeable and are sharp observers of their bees and the behaviour of a bee colony. They plant trees and shrubs according to the needs of the bees and write down this information, because it guides them on when to harvest the honey. Trees and shrubs as hedges do not need a lot of space and do not interfere with other crops. In his book, Thomas Carroll gives very good tips for bee forage in the various regions of Kenya and for beekeeping management.

Managing an apiary

The apiary should be kept clean; cut the grass short and trim branches that reach hives to prevent pests, (e.g. ants) from invading the hives. All the tools that are used for harvesting should be kept clean to avoid infection of the bee colony. Good management means producing good quality honey that fetches a good price. Remember one very important piece of advice at the end: When a beekeeper is harvesting honey, he has to remove the honey from the combs (beeswax structures produced and used by the bees to rear brood and to store honey). For extraction of honey, put the bucket with honey in hot water (warm the honey indirectly); if it is warm enough to drip, sieve it through 3 mm mesh or nylon cloth or mosquito net. But be careful when harvesting; Never boil the honey directly. This destroys important nutrients in the honey which are good for your health and also lowers its value. ■



Miriam Mugwe, a Home Economics Officer shows farmers how to use Å Money Maker pump in Kongoni Division, Lugari District

More copies for our district

This is to acknowledge receipt of five magazines of *The Organic Farmer* posted to our office with thanks. However, the district has seven divisions and we were able to dispatch to four divisions. One was retained at the district headquarters information desk. We would appreciate if you would send us three more copies for the remaining divisions since every division has been encouraged to put up information desks to act as reference points for information. We once again thank you very much and we hope to continue receiving such documents with vital information for farmers.

Augustine K Kenduiwo, DAO, P.O Box 54, Kajiado

Thank you for copies

I do request you to send us your September/October 2006 issue that features plant extracts. Also enclosed are stamps worth Ksh 350 for photocopies of past issues. I very much appreciated being put on your mailing list and have received the November 2006 issue. It has thus encouraged us to practise organic agriculture.

Benson Wasike, P.O Box 9, Kapsara

I also need it

I recently came across a copy of TOF magazine through my neighbour. I found it very helpful, as I have an organic kitchen garden.

M. A. Njoroge, P.O Box 62-0029, Nderu

I have gained a lot from your newspaper

When I got *The Organic Farmer* newspaper last month, I went through and I learned a lot and now I am gaining experience in organic farming. As I am the secretary to our farmers' group, I have to inform you that we have formed a group of 15 members and we have been registered at the District Commissioner's office, and now we have a certificate. Before I summarize, I would like to ask you to remember us with the newspaper when you supply.

Protus M Wasike, Safina Self Help Group, P.O Box 1226, Kitale

Send us past issues

We are a group of 6 farmers who share ideas on how to develop our individual farms. We have been impressed by the information contained in *The Organic Farmer* newspaper No.16 and 17, which were given to us by a friend. We would like to get past copies and continue to receive the newspaper as it is published. We enclose postage stamps worth Ksh.350 to assist you in the noble task of educating us.

Samwel N Ngoru, P.O Box 64, Othaya

I will share the newspaper

Thank you for putting me on your mailing list. I will share the copies with other farmers. 0724 732049

Grateful for copies

We are extremely grateful for the 5 copies sent to us for distribution to our farmers. This is to inform you that we have found it most useful and informative (especially for our extension staff) and would want to request that we get 20 copies every month for distribution to our extension staff and farmers in Baringo district. Thank you and may God bless you.

Dan Odhiambo Guda, DAO Baringo, P.O Box 4, Kabarnet

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

East African Organic Mark is tricky

The planned launch of the East African Organic Standard in Tanzania at the end of May is cause for great concern in the organic industry. At the launch, the 'East African Organic Mark' (symbol) will be unveiled, the purpose of which is to help guide consumers to identify regional organic products. Although this appears to be a step forward in the marketing of organic produce in the region, I fear the use of such a symbol in its current form has major implications for organic producers and may even cause more confusion among consumers of organic produce in the five countries, which now include Rwanda and Burundi.

Organic consumers are willing to pay higher prices (premiums) for foods produced without artificial chemicals and pesticides. These products are globally termed as 'Organic'. But: How can consumers be sure that the products they are buying are organically produced? And how do farmers prove that their products are organic? This is where the issue of verification comes in. There are different forms of verification, the most recognized being certification. This is a process whereby farmers wishing to sell their produce as organic have to undergo a process of inspection by an established certification company. Currently there are three such bodies, namely Encert (Kenya), Tancert (Tanzania), and Ugocert (Uganda) in the East African region. In Kenya, the Soil Association (UK) uses the expertise of EnCert CEO Musa Njoka for their inspections of export organic produce.

National identities

Returning to the East African Mark, the Mark neither claims nor indicates that products bearing it are certified. Certified producers in the three countries are currently acknowledged by consumers through certification symbols of their respective recognized certification body (Encert or Tancert or Ugocert). With the huge consumer awareness campaign for allowing the use of the East African Mark alone, producers may no longer require the national certification symbols. This may result in the three national certi-

fiers becoming inspectorates, forcing them to forfeit their corporate identities.

Secondly, what will happen if the certification companies refuse to inspect against the East African Standard for fear of losing their identities? If they choose that option, it means the East African Mark will not see the light of day. I feel we should be supporting our local certification bodies. In the worst case scenario, what if our pioneer certification bodies threw in the towel? The resulting impact would be disastrous; the industry would be back to square one. Our farmers would be left in limbo. The local organic industry would collapse.

Confusing customers

In a brighter scenario, should the Mark succeed, as a producer I would want to use the promotional advantage of the EA Mark as well as guarantee consumers my products are certified, however the cost implications of double labeling may consume any premiums I may realise on my products. Furthermore, as the Mark can be used without a certification symbol, there is a real danger that producers could use the Mark without third party verification by using a more lenient verification system. This in itself will undermine the integrity of the Mark. It may in turn steer certified producers away from using the Mark, thus causing confusion in the organic industry.

Certification symbols

I feel that for the Mark to have any meaning, it must be used in parallel with a certifying body's symbol. This will guarantee the consumer that the products are certified. One way to do this would be to incorporate national certification bodies' symbols into the Mark, indicating clearly that the products are certified organic. Without the certification symbols, the Mark has no relevance.

Su Kahumbu

Clarification

In our last month's issue of *The Organic Farmer*, there is a mix-up of the two passion fruit varieties described on page 2. *Passiflora edulis* is the purple variety and does well in the cool highland areas and is mainly grown for the fresh market, while *Passiflora flavicarpa* is the yellow variety that grows well in lowland areas mainly at the coast, and is used for processing.

Market Place



Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology University (JKUAT) has the following items of interest to farmers:

i) **Mushroom spawn (seed):** Buttons (Agaricus) – Ksh 600 per litre; Oyster – Ksh 600 per litre; Shiitake – Ksh 1000 per litre; Ganoderma – Ksh 1000 per litre.

(ii) **Organic fertilizer:** packed – Ksh 24 per kg, loose – Ksh 10 per kg.

(iii) **Red earthworms:** Ksh 2000 per kg.

iv) **Tissue culture banana varieties:** Chinese Dwarf, Vallery, Grand Naine, Giant Cavendish, Kampala, Matoke, Ugandan green, Williams's hybrid, potted bananas – Ksh 85 per plant.

(v) **Aloe seedlings:** Tissue culture aloe seedlings – Ksh 40 per seedling.

(vi) **Chaff cutters:** Manual – Ksh 24,500; mechanized – Ksh 34,500. Contact the Business Manager JKUAT Enterprises for all the above items at Tel. 067 52420, 0736 524200, 0724 256696.

(vii) **Mushroom production training:** Farmers interested in training for mushroom growing can contact Patrick Kanyi, Tel 0721 167 244 or Tel. 067 52420.

Need organic parsley? I am a farmer based in Limuru. I have about 2000 fully mature plants of organically grown parsley under shade net. Unfortunately I cannot seem to find a buyer. Please contact Irene Ngugi, Field Agronomist, USAID - Kenya Horticulture Development Programme, MPPS Building, Mombasa Road, P. O. Box 3074, Nairobi, 00506 Kenya. Tel: 020 - 556728 / 556807 Fax: 020 - 556804.

Fish for sale: We run a fish hatchery called WISE Fish Hatcheries in Bungoma. We supply quality catfish and tilapia fingerlings. Contact us on Tel. 0723 006508. We can arrange to deliver to the nearest town.

