

# The Organic Farmer

The newspaper for sustainable agriculture in Kenya



Nr. 15 July, 2006

## Kazi mingi, malipo kidogo

Many farmers in Kenya face the same struggle every day: Will my farm bring enough income to sustain my family? To pay school fees? To afford the long overdue repair of the roof of my house? While the government has put the minimum salary for the agricultural sector optimistically at 4812 Kenyan Shillings per month, most farmers and their families still survive with not even half of this amount. "We have no money to buy seeds or bring our produce to the markets," are only some issues *The Organic Farmer* hears its readers complain about. Bad roads, pests and diseases, losing lots of money to middlemen and unreliable rainfall are other problems which make farming in Kenya so challenging.

Why do the Kenyan farmers work so hard yet earn so little, and what can be done to change this situation? We try to answer this questions on page 3. (TOF)



## A new maize disease in Kenya

*The grey leaf spot disease has already spread to important maize-growing areas of the country.*

**Dr. Z. M. Kinyua**

Maize farmers face a new disease that has recently hampered the production of maize grain. The grey leaf spot disease, which is caused by a fungus known as *Cercospora zeae-maydis*, appears in the form of necrotic lesions (dry brown-yellow wounds or patches) on the leaves of maize plants.

The wounds may merge to cause extensive leaf blighting (burnt appearance). This reduces the plant's ability to manufacture its own food from sunlight (photosynthesis). It causes poor grain filling of the maize cobs and therefore reduces the maize yields and farmers income.

### Mid-altitude areas affected

The grey leaf spot disease, which was not known to occur in Kenya before its first appearance in 1995, has become a great threat to maize production in the western and Rift Valley regions of the country, where the highest proportion of maize grain originates. Most of the maize in Kenya is produced in mid-altitude areas, which unfortunately are also favourable for the development of the disease.

The devastating disease has reached epidemic levels in important maize-producing areas such as Kakamega, Vihiga, Kisii, Migori, Lugari, Bungoma, Bomet and Nandi districts. Other mid-elevation areas are also affected, but with less damage to maize crops. *Continued on page 2*

## Dear farmers,

Every day, local newspapers are full of stories about our fellow Kenyans entrusted with leadership positions in government, parastatals, companies and even civil society organizations, who loot or mismanage public funds. Corruption is so widespread that it now threatens every sector in our country. The agricultural sector has not been spared. Look at what used to be our best performing co-operative societies — they have collapsed owing to mismanagement by the farmers elected to lead them. We have emphasised on several occasions the need for farmers to come together and solve some of the day-to-day problems that they face in production and marketing. However some of these groups also have problems of leadership. This is because some farmers' group leaders put their own interests before those of their members. There are those who fight for leadership positions for personal gain. Indeed, it is our feeling that some of these groups are set up for selfish motives.

Such group leaders will attend workshops and conferences that deliberate on the critical issues that affect farmers, but they will never pass this information on to fellow farmers when they go back home. They attend these meetings only because of the benefits they receive, like allowances and per diems.

Lack of transparency in financial management is another problem. Those given the responsibility of marketing various commodities on behalf of fellow farmers often short-change their friends. The rot also extends to out-grower companies that contract farmers to grow commodities for local and export markets. Many of these companies never pay farmers the true value of their produce.

From the many letters we get from farmers, we can clearly see that they are a demoralised lot. Our advice to farmers is that they should wake up to these realities and find ways to overcome them. Only people with a known track record should be given leadership positions. Group members should always demand accountability from their leaders. How can we complain of exploitation of smallscale farmers if the farmers themselves cannot help each other?

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If well composted, chicken manure is a valuable source of nutrients.	

**MY OPINION**

Any food that contains essential nutrients such as vitamins and minerals, promotes our health and the general well-being of our families. Many farmers know this fact but they ignore it. Despite being the producers of very nutritious farm products, very few farmers rarely consume the products. Instead they take them to the market for sale. For example, it is common to find a farmer selling all eggs and milk, leaving none or little for their malnourished children. They will then buy a kilo of sugar, soap and other household items which they think are more important. Of course, we need the money, but let us take care of our families' health first.

Michael Barasa, farmer Bungoma

**The Organic Farmer**

*The Organic Farmer* is an independent newspaper for the Kenyan 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)

**Disease remains in crop residue**

*There are many methods, including crop rotation, to reduce the spread of grey leaf spot disease.*

**Dr. Z. M. Kinyua**

It is estimated that the grey leaf spot (GLS) disease can cause yield losses of between 30 to 50%. Higher yield losses have been recorded in other countries, where the disease has had a longer existence. The level of leaf damage caused by the disease and the resulting yield losses are higher when the fungus attacks maize plants early in the growing cycle. Unfavourable environmental conditions also contribute to its development. Severe levels of the GLS disease are particularly prevalent under prolonged conditions of high relative humidity (which is common under cloudy, misty weather conditions) and moderate to high temperatures. These conditions encourage rapid multiplication of the fungus, thus leading to the development of the disease.

**Early recognition**

The earliest noticeable symptoms of grey leaf spot are small yellowish dots which are the size of a pin-head on maize leaves. Slightly advanced symptoms include small, necrotic (dead), pale brown or yellowish-brown wounds that are largely rectangular in shape and generally run parallel to the leaf veins. The wounds may have a whitish-grey cast over them. This happens when the fungus that causes the disease has matured to produce spores. Such spores, which act as seeds for the fungus, are easily dislodged and carried by wind to cause new infections on leaves. The development of the disease is more readily noticeable around the tasseling stage of maize plants. The symptoms become more easily recognizable when the leaves become blighted, especially during the later stages of crop growth.

**Research on control measures**

Since the grey leaf spot disease is relatively new in Kenya, a lot of research towards its control is being planned. Breeding of resistant maize hybrids and varieties is high on the research agenda of the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI). This requires considerable time and resources.

Varieties such as Kakamega synthetic 1&11, KH634A, H614, SC



An infected maize leaf. (Photo TOF)

Duma 41, and SC Simba 61 have been reported to have some tolerance to the disease. These varieties may be tried in areas where the problem is common. In the meantime, sound management of crop residues is seen as part of an integrated approach against this disease.

**Destroy crop residues**

The fungus that causes the disease mainly survives within infested maize crop residues on the soil surface. Removal and destruction of such residues after harvest would therefore help to kill the fungus, thus reducing the level of disease during subsequent cropping seasons. Crop rotation is also very important. Factors that favour the development of the grey leaf spot disease include over-crowding of plants with poor air flow and low sunlight penetration among plants, improper soil nutrient and irrigation management, and poor soil drainage.

**Farmers unable to identify disease**

Effective management of grey leaf spot requires a concerted effort among farmers within affected areas. However, investigations carried out by KARI in partnership with CAB International have revealed that the vast majority of maize farmers do not recognize the grey leaf spot symptoms on their crops. As a consequence, the farmers make little or no effort to control the disease or even seek more information about it. This lack of information and awareness is to blame for spread of the GLS disease in most of the affected maize-growing areas in the country.

# Why don't Kenyan farmers earn enough?

Despite working hard to improve their income, Kenyan farmers face many problems in realizing their goals.

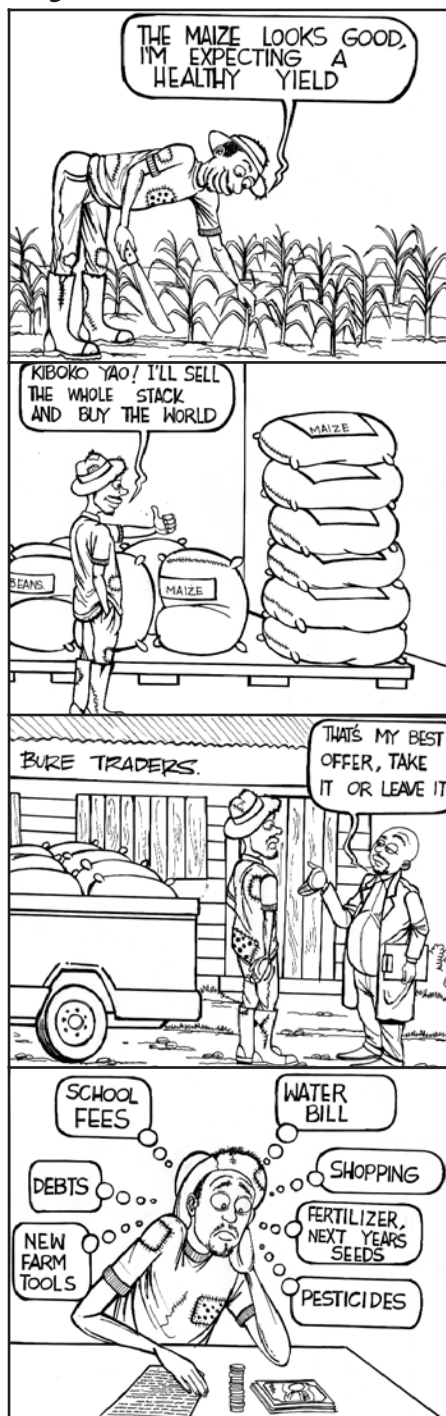
Anja Bengelstorff

Farming is a daily, labour-intensive task, and many Kenyans and Kenyan farmers are hardworking people. However, according to a Government statistic, 87 % of all poor households live in rural areas, where their main activities are in agriculture, yet about half of all Kenyans might not have enough food for their families. We need to take a closer look at how farming in Kenya is practised.

The importance of the agricultural sector in Kenya is clear: It provides the livelihoods for close to three-quarters of the population, it accounts for 60% of the country's export earnings and contributes 26% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) directly, plus another 27% indirectly through linkages with other sectors such as manufacturing and distribution. During the first two decades after Independence, the economy recorded an impressive growth rate of 6%, with the agricultural sector playing the dominant role. However this declined to only 3.5% in the 1980s and to even less in the late 1990s and early 2000s, to only 1.3%. What has happened?

## Marketing neglected

For too long, the experts agree, the Government's policies have focused too strongly on producing agricultural goods, and by far not enough attention has been paid on marketing them. This means that vegetables, fruits and other crops were produced in large amounts, but the farmers were not able to find enough buyers. Talking to farmers all over Kenya, TOF knows that this is still one of the biggest obstacles in farming. For a long time, there was not a single expert in marketing in the Ministry of Agriculture. It is only recently that the Government took action in this regard. In its ambitious "Strategy for Revitalizing Agriculture", launched in 2004, the Government acknowledged the key role of domestic marketing and promised to give priority to developing the infrastructure and to the training of farmers. In addition, the Ministry of Agriculture now has an Agribusiness Division. Agronomist Dr. Joseph Kariuki from



the consultancy firm Agrisystems Ltd. knows that despite the good will, however, funds are lacking to make these plans come true.

To complicate matters further, the agricultural sector is currently governed by about 130 pieces of legislation, many of which are obsolete/out of date, or inconsistent. The issue of land ownership is another "hot potato" which needs to be worked on.

## Soil quality declining ...

Apart from governmental regulations, the natural conditions in Kenya are raising problems for farmers.

Because the available land has to provide food for an increasing number of people, it is getting overused, and the soil's fertility and productivity are declining. As a result, the soil is becoming useless for farming purposes, erosion occurs more frequently and severely, and the semi-arid and arid portions of land are growing. According to Joseph Kariuki from Agrisystems, only 20% of the Kenyan land is suitable for farming today. Furthermore, the rainfall in Kenya is less available than in our neighbouring countries. He therefore strongly suggests that farmers be trained in conservation techniques.

## ... and not enough training

Another reason why agriculture is not keeping pace with population growth, if not the most important one, is the fact that Kenyan farmers do not consider their profession as a business. "Most of them see it as a way of life", Joseph Kariuki says. Another expert, Reimund Hoffmann from the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), which promotes the Private Sector Development in Agriculture, agrees. "We have to see the difference between farmers and rural dwellers", he points out. One reason, both say, is the lack of sufficient agricultural training, not least in the business aspects of farming. Kariuki stresses another point: "Yes, there are many farmers' groups, but they are scattered and not organised on a higher level. A higher degree of organisation would enable them to better access markets, to negotiate with middlemen from a stronger position than individual, uncoordinated farmers' groups can do. As a larger group, they could make bigger investments at reduced costs. They need a stronger voice for their cause."

He admits, however, that the funds are lacking here as well, both on the side of the farmers and the Government. Yet something can be done. Kariuki advocates for transforming the farmer who now pays his or her small annual membership fee to their group and then leans back, "from a mere spectator to an active participant" of their farmers' group. If, for example, they suggest that the fee should be increased for the purpose of investments for the group, the individual farmer will be more interested that the money is used respon-

*continues on page 7*

# Farmers get more money with asparagus

*Asparagus growers in Gilgil want certification to reach markets and increase their earnings.*

**Peter Kamau, Gilgil**

"This crop is now our only source of income", says Hannah Wambui, a member of Kigogo Farmers' Group in Gilgil. She is referring to asparagus, a vegetable crop that has become an important cash crop for farmers in the Gilgil area of Nakuru district. Unknown by farmers in the area before they began to grow the crop, asparagus production is now a major source of income for farmers in the region.

## They were told it was fodder

Benson Chege, the Group's secretary, says he discovered it by chance: "A local farmer started growing it back in 1987, but he told the other farmers that it was fodder for his cattle", says Benson. His niece, who was working for a local flower company, saw the plant during a visit and told him that it was a major export crop for the company. She convinced him that the local farmers could grow it for the local market too, as the demand for asparagus is high in Nairobi.

"On her next visit she brought me some seeds", Benson says. "I planted and tended it, as I had been shown, and harvested. On delivery, a tourist hotel in Naivasha bought all my asparagus at Ksh 140 per kg."

## A steady income for farmers

From the proceeds of the sale, Benson bought more seeds and increased the area under asparagus production on his family farm. Other farmers also learned from him and started production. Asparagus production has continued to increase, bringing a steady income to farmers in the region. The major market for asparagus is Nairobi.

At one time pyrethrum was the main cash crop for the majority of farmers

in Nakuru district, including Gilgil. But farmers' earnings dwindled when the Government failed to pay them for their deliveries. Most of them stopped pyrethrum production altogether. The discovery of asparagus as an alternative crop therefore came at the right time. The crop does not require a lot of rainfall, which means it is well-suited for production in Gilgil, an area that receives moderate and sometimes below-average rainfall.

"Asparagus has really changed the financial status of most of the farmers in this area", says Benson. "Most of

them now have a regular source of income, unlike in the past when they relied on pyrethrum and other farm products."

## Corrupt middlemen

Overproduction and supply of asparagus in the last few years has come with its own problems. The entry of middlemen has made the situation worse for asparagus growers. The middle men have formed cartels which frustrate farmers by making it difficult for them to sell directly to buyers in Nairobi at a much higher price.



Su Kahumbu (right) shows Gilgil farmers a drip irrigation system. (photo TOF)

## Gilgil Farmers get certification training

The Kigogo Organic Farmers' Group in Gilgil is the first farmers' group to benefit from *The Organic Farmer Support Programme*, which our newspaper launched in April this year. As part of its first anniversary gift to farmers, *The Organic Farmer (TOF)*, together with the Swiss foundation BioVision, has arranged to support 10 farmers' groups in the country to help them get certification for their organic produce and at a price that is higher than that offered for conventional produce.

This capacity-building initiative will be a milestone for the organic movement in Kenya. Not only will TOF help the 10 farmers' groups start organic production according to the set standards, but it will also assist with price negotiations with the buyers. Moreover, TOF newspaper has arranged a training programme. The

trainers are our newspaper advisor, Su Kahumbu; an agronomist and farmer, Anne Ng'ang'a; and the technician/farmer Dominique Wanjihia.

In the last several weeks we have received a lot of applications from farmers' groups who want to be considered in the programme. We have started with the training of the first four groups. They were the first to apply for assistance.

The Kigogo Organic Farmers Group has 44 members. Started two years ago, it is the first to benefit from *The Organic Farmer Support Programme*. The certification process for the Group started in the second week of June, with training sessions on organic production at Gilgil. "We really hope that the marketing of our produce will improve once we get certification," concludes Hannah Wambui, one of the Group members.



Asparagus, can fetch good prices in the market.

# FPE energizes and protects plants

*Fermented Plant Extracts when combined with EM boosts plant growth and controls diseases and pests.*

## The Organic Farmer

Many farmers have used Fermented Plant Extracts (FPE) for years. They are prepared from a combination of plants with medicinal properties that give the plants more energy and protect crops from diseases and pests. A farmer can use any plant that is known to have these properties to make the extract. When applied to a plant, the FPE triggers a defence mechanism which enables the plants to resist diseases and pests. One of the reasons for this response by plants is that the extract contains many natural compounds. They combine to fight harmful bacteria and fungi that are responsible for plant diseases. In addition, some of the plant extracts help to repel pests and therefore reduce damage to crops. If prepared in the correct way, FPE improves health in crops and an

Plant/herb	Pest problem
Marigold	Nematodes, cutworms, caterpillars, ants
Red peppers, chilies	Ants, aphids, army worms, caterpillars
Onion, leeks, garlic	Ants, aphids, army worms, caterpillars
Stinging nettles	Maize stalk borer, banana, weevils, storage pests and weevils
Black jack	Aphids ants beetles, cabbages, mites caterpillars, crickets, white flies and termites
Tomato leave solution	Cabbage butterfly, caterpillars and other insects
Lantana camara	Potato weevil, cassava weevil, grain weevils
Neem	Maize stalk borer, banana weevil, storage pests and weevils
Pyrethrum	Most of the pests mentioned above

increase in the overall yield.

Various plants in combination can be used to make FPE (see table above). Most of them are very popular with the farmers in Kenya. Tithonia and comfrey provide the best foliar feed that can be used to enrich the FPE. It is advisable to use a mixture of weeds in the preparation of FPE, because different weeds are effective on specific pests. This also increases the variety of active substances and natural organisms that control diseases and pests. Weeds and other material to be used in the preparation are best cut in the morning.

### Enrich the Extracts with EM

Effective Microorganisms (EM) are a mixture of beneficial and naturally occurring microorganisms that can be applied to the soils to improve plant growth, yield and quality. It consists of microorganisms of lactic acid bacteria, a limited number of

photosynthetic bacteria (which help turn carbon dioxide and water into plant food by use of energy from sunlight) and yeast. These three groups of microorganisms help to condition the soil, suppress disease causing bacteria and speed up the decomposition of the organic matter for the benefit of plants.

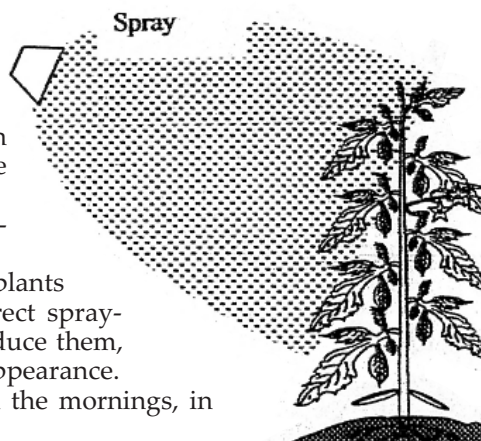
If you add EM to the Fermented Plant Extracts, this makes it even more effective in promoting plant health. It also improves the ability of the plants to withstand diseases. It is not a fertilizer but it produces vitamins, organic acids and minerals essential for plant growth when it comes into contact with organic matter. This increases the humus content in the soil. EM promotes germination, growth, flowering, fruiting and ripening in crops.

*EM and Molasses can be bought in all Agrovet-shops.*

## The correct application of plant extracts

The mixture of FPE-EM is not a chemical pesticide. Its application is different from that of the chemicals used to control pests and diseases. To ensure healthy plant growth, the solution should be sprayed as a preventive measure, regularly before the incidence of any plant pest or disease

This mixture can be applied onto plants directly once or twice weekly. Direct sprayings onto pest populations will reduce them, eventually leading to their disappearance. The mixture should be sprayed in the mornings, in the evenings or after rains.



### How to Prepare FPE

Container - 200 litre drum

#### Ingredients

- Tithonia
- Stinging Nettle
- African marigold
- Comfrey
- Optional
- Onion leaves
- Chilies

#### Preparation

1. Chop all the vegetation used for the extract into very small pieces.
2. In the drum add 4 litres of EM 1 and 4 litres of Molasses plus 20 litres of water, mix thoroughly.
3. Add chopped vegetation to this mixture, the vegetation should fill the drum approximately half full.
4. Now fill the drum completely with water and mix vigorously.
5. Cover the tank completely; fermentation must be anaerobic (with no air entering from the lid) Leave to ferment for 7 to 10 days.

#### Mixing rates

1. For spraying crops: 200ml (two cups) of FPE/EM mixed with 20 litre of water
2. For use in irrigation on soil: 100ml (one cup) of FPE/EM mixed with 20 litres of water (ground rule: 1 litre FPE/EM: 100 litres of water)

## How to control nematodes in tomatoes

Samuel Njoroge of Nakuru wants to know the organic practices that can help control nematodes in tomatoes.

1) Use Cassava (*muhogo*) obtain the juice by crushing roots. Dilute 1:1 with water, and spray immediately using 4 litres diluted extract per square metre of soil. This remedy is said to be very effective. Wait for 20 days before sowing. Also try using cassava peelings as a mulch against nematodes.

2) Grow African marigold in rotation to fight nematodes.

3) A common spray using papaya can be made by finely shredding 1 kg of leaves and adding to 4 litres of water. Shake vigorously and add a little soap (20 g or 20 ml). Spray or water into the soil (this is good for cut-worms too).

## Very common: Early and late blight

"Is there an organic chemical that can be used to control early and late blight in tomatoes", asks Samuel Njoroge in Nakuru?

Controlling early and late blight in

tomatoes is not easy, but you can try the following organic recipes:

- 1) Garlic bulbs may be dried and crushed and used as a dust. The dust can be made into a spray. This is recommended for mildew, bean rust and tomato blight.
- 2) Spray every 10 days with a mixture of 1 litre milk to 10 -15 litres water to control mites, blights, mildew and other fungal diseases, and mosaic virus.
- 3) Castor oil plant: Dig the leaves or oil cake into the soil to kill fungal diseases. (Remember castor oil seed/cake is very toxic to people and animals.)



Early blight (Courtesy Clemson Univ.)

## Chicken manure is good fertilizer

George Oyeng want to know if he can use chicken waste to control yellowing of maize?

Yes, George, you can use chicken manure as a fertilizer for your maize, since yellowing is a sign of deficiency in nitrogen.

**As a compost:** The manure will be more effective if it is first composted with some form of bedding material or simply added to your compost pile for some time. The resulting soil improver will supply bulk that will help to build soil structure and pro-

vide nutrients, which are made available to the plants as the manure decomposes in the soil. Urine is the main source of the plant nutrients, particularly nitrogen, and potassium is found in the manure. It is soaked up in the animal bedding. In poultry, the urine is the white portion of the bird droppings, and can be very rich.

**As a liquid manure:** Poultry manure can be added to water at the rate of 10 kg manure to 100 litres water. Leave this for 7 - 10 days, then dilute 1:4 and feed the plants. I would not advise you to use this as a foliar feed, but rather as a pour-on over the soil for heavy feeders. Adding Effective Microorganisms will help to reduce the smell.

### Be cautious

If used alone, chicken manure may 'burn' your crops. Also, keep manures well covered at all times, as valuable nutrients can be washed away with the rain or damaged by the sun. Lastly, remember that poul-

## How can I avoid damping off?

Another question from Samuel Njoroge: "Is there an organic way of treating tomato seeds while sowing the nurseries beds, in order to prevent damping off?"

Damping off is caused by a fungus. It is best prevented by using good plant management. Do not plant tomato seed in beds previously planted with same family type, for instance egg plant or peppers, or that were planted with tomatoes the previous season. Plant good quality seed, sow thinly, water carefully, and make sure seedbeds have adequate ventilation. Avoid sowing seed in cold wet soil and make sure not to over-water. If disease occurs, remove the patch of seedlings affected.

Natural fungicides can be made using sweet potato leaves, African marigold or tithonia. Try the following: 1) Crush and soak sweet potato leaves 1:1 with water (1 part leaves to 1 part water), dilute 1:1 again, use as a spray. 2) Crush 100-200 g leaves, roots and flowers of African marigold, pour on 1 litre boiling water over the leaves, soak for 24 hours, then add 1 litre cold water and use as a spray.

## Please, come to our aid!

Maragua farmers sent us an SOS. Arrow roots (nduma) farming in Maragua is threatened with extinction. An unidentified insect has camped everywhere in our sprawling riverside gardens and boring holes on edible parts. Crop experts, scientists, please come to our aid!

This is bad! After I called you, I got some more information from you. With this information, I asked some agronomists since I do not know anything about this insect. Even the agronomists were helpless. So *The Organic Farmer* discussed the damaging work of this insect with specialists at ICIPE. For a clear analysis they need some living examples of this insect. If it is possible, send a dozen of these insects to: Dr. Bernhard Löhr, ICIPE, P.O.Box 30772 GPO 00100, Nairobi

try droppings can carry harmful bacteria. Therefore strict hygiene must be followed during handling of this type of manure to avoid all types of contamination.

## Su Kahumbu answers your questions



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# Letters to the editor

## We want dairy goats

We are very grateful for you have kept in touch with us. Since that time we started getting the copies, we have been practicing organic farming that has improved the quality of our produce and the yields. We thank the organization for supplying the magazines that enables us to utilize available resources correctly. The copies have reached every member of the group and they are happy for it is realistic and self-explanatory. From the copy of September/October issue, there was information about dairy goats. We would like through you, to get in touch with the farmers having them so that we can start it as a project. By now we have set project of dairy cattle and poultry that is successful. We hope that you will be sending to us the newspapers every month. I encourage mixed farming for one can easily utilize manure on the farm, which will be appropriate for soil fertility.

Phillipine Nyongesa, Inua Society, P.O Box 446, Kimilili

## Send me past issues

I thank you for the advice given by your newspaper. I have only read No.10 from one of the farmers in our area. If possible please send me the previous newspapers so as to catch up with you.

Shaaban Hassan Saidi, P.O Box 1512-20300, Nyahururu, Tel.0720551105

## We need information

We are happy to write to you with the above plea in our mind. We represent 35 squatter groups and one of the agenda discussed recently was to give the squatter groups with agricultural education so that they can boost farming and sustain themselves economically. With that in mind we resolved to write and kindly ask you to send the paper to us. After perusing one of the papers we found that it is of much help to our squatter groups.

Chairman, Trans-Nzoia Squatters Alliance, C/o CJPC Kitale Diocese P.O Box 4656, Kitale

## Newspaper motivating

First and foremost I would like to congratulate you for your tireless efforts to make us knowledgeable in the use of organic material in farming. Fortunately I came across your issue No.8 and after reading it, I was motivated to try organic farming. Our members are organized small-scale farmers engaged in poultry, agro-forestry, tree nursery, bee keeping and horticulture. The group is registered by the department of social services and has 32 members. We will be grateful if you can send us monthly copies of the newspapers.

Rulas Mosoh Barango, Muungano Youth Group, P.O Box 319, Nyamira Tel. 0735 913319

## Get grassroots support

I am very pleased to inform you I really enjoyed and shared ideas on TOF magazine with my neighbouring groups. For the newspaper to achieve its set goals, it should work closer with farmers from grass root level. This can be done if there was one contact person in every region who can give details to the TOF of what is exactly going on in the field. The magazine will motivate farmers' countrywide. I am working with almost 20 groups and need your assistance in everything within Longisa and Sigor divisions of Bomet district.

Peter Kipngeno Kilele, Lelaitich Primary School, P.O Box 57 Sigor

## An eye opener

I would like to say that a lot has been done by your efforts on the publica-



## Prize winners!

When *The Organic Farmer* sent out the questionnaires in November last year, we also set a prize: We promised to invite 20 farmers who responded to our questions, to come to Nairobi to visit the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE), the Biop Company and Su Kahumbu's vegetable farm. Now it is time to fulfill our promise! Our Secretary, Lucy Macharia, (blindfolded) picked out 20 of the nearly 400 questionnaires we got back from you. We congratulate the lucky farmers; they will be informed individually. Once more, we thank all those who responded to the questions. We assure them that the information they gave will go a long way in improving the quality of our newspaper in future.

tions on a monthly basis; this has been an eye opener to the farmers. It has helped many of them at local level. This should continue because it has assisted us community and development agents to quicken the trainings we offer to the farmers at the local level.

Peter Mwaura P.O Box 3128 Nakuru Tel. 0726-841863. slidekenya@yahoo.com

## 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 send us (with sms) your contacts. We shall get back to you!

Tuma maoni yako! Asante.



## farmers income... continued from page 3

sibly. In other words, the farmer becomes a monitoring person.

The future is promising nevertheless. Kenya has many advantages in comparison to its neighbours. The country has a long experience in commercial agriculture, a well developed seed industry, and a booming consumer market. The demand is there, but, "We ruin the markets by not having standards", Kariuki warns. In the long run, organic farming with its approach of soil conservation is, for this expert, the only way forward, since the population will continue to grow further.

The Government of Kenya seeks to raise the annual growth in the agricultural sector to 3.1% per annum by 2007 and to 5% thereafter. Every single Kenyan farmer should be involved.

## tips and bits

### Problems with retained placenta

Retained placenta (when there is no automatic release of the placenta after delivery), is one of the common problems facing dairy farmers. Veterinary doctors give various reasons for this problem, such as lack of proper diet during pregnancy, a cow not having enough strength to push, or a disorder in hormone levels. Private veterinary doctors have been charging a lot of money for treating this disorder, ranging from Kshs 800 to 2000. Many farmers have not been able to afford this amount. Due to the high fee charged for this service, most of the farmers have resulted to using herbal medicine. Two common herbal methods are:

- 1) A plant called wanjiru wa ruui (any common or botanical name so we can identify it). This plant is commonly found in central Kenya. It is prepared by boiling ½ kg of the plant in 1 litre of water for about 30 minutes. Give it to the cow as drench of ½ litre of this tea twice a day.
- 2) Mango seeds: Remove the inside part of the mango seed, crush about five seeds and give the cow in her feed. This traditional method should be given immediately after delivery, or 3 days after delivery in case of the retained placenta.

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### Many other uses of African marigold

In our area, if not the whole of Kenya, we consider African marigold as a weed which uses up and weakens soil fertility. A garden full of the weed often results in poor crop yield. Early weeding is the only safe way we use in our gardens to curtail its spread. A dry marigold plant stump when cut or broken is poisonous if by bad luck it pricks a human being. A wound lasts a long time before it heals.

The marigold plant has an unpleasant smell that of course is not pleasing. Farmers use it to repel red safari ants (sisimizi) when they invade their homesteads or animal cages, stables or houses. We also use it as an inhalant

for treating headache caused by cold and fever.

There is no special technical way of preparation or application when repelling safari ants. To drive away safari ants, you can pick three to five marigold plant stalks, then flop them directly over the heading-invading ants. The ants will eventually retreat and drift away from the scene. For headaches, pick a few green leaves of the marigold plant, and then compress them between your palms. Directly inhale for a few seconds then throw them away.

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### Extra fodder from maize



Start removing the lower leaves of the maize plant for feeding the cattle 3 weeks after the maize cob has produced silk. Remove one leaf per week, starting from the bottom going towards the top. Do not remove the leaf directly below the cob and the one above it. By doing this, it is possible to produce 450 to 600 kg of feed

per acre of maize. After the maize grain reaches the soft dough stage, remove the part of the plant above the cob for feed (topping). This method produces better quality feed without affecting grain yield.

Source: *More forage, more milk. Technical Handbook No. 33, published by World Agroforestry Centre, Nairobi*

## Market place



**Service to farmers.** Many farmers have been calling or writing to us asking for past issues of The Organic Farmer. We are no longer able to give you these back issues because the stock has run out. However we can still assist those of you who need these copies—we will photocopy them for you. But we cannot do this for free. Any farmer interested in getting the copies will have to buy stamps worth Ksh.350, put them in an envelope and send it to us. We will then send you the copies between April 2005 and April 2006. Please do not forget to give us your full address!



**Market.** Do you have any organic products for sale? A marketing group in Nairobi is looking for organic vegetables, fruits, maize, beans and related cereals and legumes. Farmers with these products should get in touch with the buyers through the following address: Michael Waweru, KOF & Group, P.O. Box 58440, 00200, Nairobi, Tel. 0724 634 492

**Land for sale.** 2.2 hectares, prime agricultural land situated at Meru farm next to Kitale Showground in Kitale Municipality. Interested buyers should get in touch with the owner. Contact Kihara Mwai, P.O.Box 24214,005200, Nairobi, 0722-575 816

**Do you keep dairy goats?** Many farmers want to buy dairy goats. We would therefore like to request all farmers rearing dairy goats in the country to give us their full addresses and telephone numbers. We will publish them in our August issue. This will help other farmers near you to contact you whenever they need the goats or information regarding them. The address list will help more farmers acquire the goats. Please SMS or call us through: Tel. 0721 541 590/ 0721 793 759/ 0733 713 105.

**Seedlings.** Are you interested in buying indigenous vegetable seedlings. The Rural Outreach Programme has many varieties. Contact: Thomas Mutuli, P.O.Box 29086, 00625 Nairobi, Tel. 0733 568 824