

A-maize-ing Partnerships

Maize is the most important food crop in Kenya, providing on average 44% of peoples' calorie intake. However, farmers are unable to increase their productivity unless the problems of plant diseases, reducing soil fertility and increasing soil acidity are overcome. This is the aim of a private company, Farm Input Promotions Africa (FIPS-Africa). FIPS is working in collaboration with scientists at the Kenyan Agricultural Research Institute, Embu, to improve farmer's access to production information and inputs.



Many soils cannot produce healthy maize plants – however the addition of Mavuno and manure consistently produces plants like that held on the right



Farmer proudly displaying Western 505 maize cobs

FIPS has an agreement with the Athi River Mining Company to produce a new blend of fertiliser called 'Mavuno' (harvest). Not only does this fertiliser contain the micro-nutrients which are often lacking from the heavily denuded Kenyan soils but it also contains lime to reduce the soil acidity. To stimulate demand, FIPS and KARI scientists have set up demonstration plots to show farmers combinations of technologies – improved maize varieties, fertiliser

and herbicide. These trials have shown that with improved seed and 'Mavuno' it is possible to triple yields. To provide the supply, FIPS has developed a network of agricultural retailers through whom it markets its inputs. These are supported by promotional days, when megaphones are used to broadcast oral messages whilst laminated posters visually show farmers maize nutrient deficiency symptoms.



Mavuno fertiliser, packaged in handy 1 kg packs, sells at KSh30

Conventionally, fertiliser is retailed in 50 kg quantities at a price unacceptable to the risk averse farmer. So, the key factor here is that the inputs are retailed in relatively small quantities that are affordable to the farmers. Farmers can buy 'Mavuno' in quantities as small as 1 kg, costing only KSh30 (22p). And with every pack, a 150 gm packet of improved certified seed, such as Western Seed Company variety Western 505, is given away free of charge. This high yielding, disease resistant variety is very popular amongst farmers and traders.

So far FIPS have supplied promotional 1 kg packs to approximately 100,000 farmers and demand is outstripping production. The project has shown that after buying a 1 kg bag most farmers subsequently buy larger quantities. In addition Monsanto have agreed to package small packets of granular herbicide at 20 shillings (14p) a packet which can be used for conservation tillage. There are ambitious plans for expansion and the success of the project looks set to grow and grow.

R8219: Improved access to appropriate farm inputs for integrated maize crop management by small-scale farmers in Embu and Kirinyaga Districts, Kenya

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