

Radio Scripts

Package 80, Script 9

March 2007

Growing Potatoes Brings Increased Income to Farmers in Kabale, Uganda

Notes to Broadcaster

Niche crops are specialized crops for which there is a very particular but limited market. Niche crops can provide both needed income and food security for farming families. Potato is one example of a successful niche crop in cooler parts of Africa.

Potato is an important cash and subsistence crop in the highlands of south western Uganda and in other highland areas of central, eastern and southern Africa. But potatoes are prone to insect pest and disease problems, so farmers must employ sound farming techniques in order to be successful.

In Uganda, before 1995, potato production was disorganized, with no clear differences in production practices between seed potato and potato for food. To improve potato production and increase its competitiveness, national and international organizations in Uganda worked together to boost adoption of best production practices, including making quality potato seed available at an affordable price to farmers. A Farmer Field School (FFS) method funded by international agencies and involving a regional potato research network called PRAPACE was used to train farmers to profitably grow potato. The farmers were trained in integrated potato pest and disease management, integrated crop and nutrient management, and farming as a business. The training and increased productivity resulted in increased income, due to the efforts of the organizations to identify a market for the potatoes. As a result, there is now a farmers' group, Nyabyumba United Farmers (NUF), which operates a successful potato enterprise producing quality table potatoes for French fry processing. Farmers have increased potato production per unit area and time. This script focuses on the activities of the Nyabyumba United Farmers, an organization that has evolved from seven smaller groups formerly started at Farmer Field Schools.

This script shows the value of effective farmer groups. As a broadcaster, you can help farmers by knowing about farming groups in your area, by broadcasting information about how effective groups are created and maintained, and by broadcasting inspiring success stories which show effective groups in action.

Introductory music for five seconds, then fade.

Program jingle (a cock's crow).

Host: Once again it's time for "Farmer's Voice." If you are seated at the bar waiting to be given a sip by your friend, you are not at the right place! If you are waiting to take a gulp... goooooo back to worrrrk!! Today, we will talk with a potato farmer who will tell us how he became successful. Maybe you can learn from him and become successful too! We are going to talk about where to plant your potatoes, and the importance of cultivating your crop and acquiring clean potato seed for planting. *(To his guest)*. Welcome to our program, sir. Can you please tell our listeners who you are, where you come from, and how you became a successful farmer.

Mr. Byarugaba: Good morning dear listeners, my throat is sore this morning but I will try to manage. *(Clears his throat)*. I am Byarugaba, a church catechist and also a successful farmer from Nyabyumba United Farmers.

My son *(addressing the host)*, farming is not a piece of cake. You need dedication if you want to be successful. I did not go to school to study English like the professors, but I am proud I can sit with professors and they will listen to what I tell them. Way back in 1999 I was poor as a church mouse. I depended on the little produce I could grow in the garden. This was not enough for my family to eat, never mind any surplus for selling so that I could get school fees for my children. But now this memory is long gone.

Host: "A memory long gone!" Please tell us how you became successful, with whose help, what resources were needed, where

you found them and so on.

Mr. Byarugaba: The year 1999 will remain in my memory. I had only two plots of land that I considered to be useful since they were located at the valley bottom. I thought they were the only hope for my family. The other plots were barren pieces of land on the hilltop, and I didn't pay much attention to them because I knew they were good for nothing.

I was invited to a village meeting organized by two organizations called the National Agricultural Research Organization or NARO and Africare. They wanted to work with some local farmers. To participate, a farmer had to have land on the hilltop. I just laughed and thought nothing useful was going to come out of this project. But I was ready to give up my land since I considered it useless, and I wanted to see the miracle the two organizations could do with it.

Host: Why did the organizations want farmers with hilltop land?

Mr. Byarugaba: They said that hilltop land was the best because it was free of major diseases - unlike the valley bottom land. I had grown potatoes in the valley bottom before, but the crops were always attacked by diseases such as bacterial wilt and late blight. One would plant a bag of potatoes and harvest very little, because half of the crop would rot away.

We were told by NARO and Africare that the potatoes rotted because of bacterial wilt which had been in the soil for a long time. Poor and diseased seed was another cause. We didn't believe this until we proved it ourselves after the first season's harvest.

Host: Thank you, Mr. Byarugaba, for this information. After a break we will be back and our guest will tell us more.

Musical break.

Host: We are back. Can you tell us more about the first potato planting with NARO and Africare?

Mr. Byarugaba: The two organizations promised to provide us with clean seed and we started to prepare the seed bed on the abandoned hilltop plots. We cultivated the plots and then we were given clean potato seed. We planted the crop with mineral fertilizers, spacing the seed potato at 70 centimetres by 30 centimetres. We were taught to spray the crop to prevent it from diseases like late blight, so that there were enough leaves on the plant to make food for the tubers in the soil. Then we weeded to make sure the plants had enough light and so that the weeds didn't compete with the crop for soil nutrients, and we continued to control pests. After 90 days, we harvested lots of potatoes. This was the beginning of the road to success, my son.

Host: Do you think other people can become successful in the same way you have?

Mr. Byarugaba: Let them try, and maybe one day I will be listening to them tell their own stories on the radio!

Host: Thank you, Mr. Byarugaba, for participating in "Farmer's Voice" on Kachwekano FM 103.7. We will take a short break. When we come back, will you tell us how the project has benefited you as an individual and as a group?

Mr. Byarugaba: Yes, with great pleasure.

Program jingle (a cock's crow), followed by music about agriculture.

Host: As we promised before the break, Mr. Byarugaba will now tell us about his farmers group. Mr. Byarugaba?

Mr. Byarugaba: Our Nyabyumba United Farmers Group has benefited very much from our involvement in participatory research with scientists. Now we are able to grow different sizes of potatoes - for eating or for sale. Together we have established a collecting center where farmers can ship their potato bags and sell them collectively. But we have not stopped there! Our bargaining power with business men and middle men has increased, and we can now determine when is the best time to cultivate, to sell, and to target the market.

Host: That is impressive. And I understand you have formed a Farmer Run Field School, is that correct?

Mr. Byarugaba: Yes. We have been ranked best of the farmer field schools by NARO and Africare. As a result, we have also formed what is now called a Farmer Run Field School. As a group we have bought a vehicle to carry our potatoes to the market. The best news is that a regional potato research organization in Uganda called PRAPACE helped us to secure a contract with a fast-food restaurant in Kampala to supply potatoes for French fry chips throughout the year. And the price is appetizing! What else can I tell you, my son? Now we can send our children to school, improve our families' diet since we have money, and "talk

...ise can I tell you, my son! NOW we can send our children to school, improve our families' diet since we have money, and talk like any other man." (*Ed. Note: this expression is used to refer to someone with money.*)

Host: Thank you, Mr. Byarugaba. I hope our listeners will find your actions and success an inspiration! If I can summarize your instructions about growing potatoes, I would say that a farmer should remember to use improved varieties and clean seed, and to control insect pests and diseases. It's also important to manage weeds so that they don't compete with crops for soil nutrients and so that insect pests don't build up on the weeds. Farmers should seek advice from agricultural specialists who are knowledgeable about growing potatoes. It's also important to plan in groups and attend village meetings. And of course, you have to work hard!

Mr. Byarugaba: Yes, that is right.

Host: I thank you for the message you passed on to our listeners today on "Farmer's Voice."

Mr. Byarugaba: Thank you for inviting me. I hope farmers out there have their hoes ready to practice what I have just told them! Let them try and see. We have a saying that "taste and believe." Let the listeners taste, and blessed are those who believe without seeing. Thank you and may God bless "Farmer's Voice."

Host: Dear listeners, thank you for being part of the program and we hope you will be tuned to our program next time.

Closing music for five seconds, then fade.

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