

Improving soil health and smallholders' income

Partners aim to revitalize Kenyan fields with new crops and advice

Mono-cropping has depleted many East African soils. More rotation crops could improve soil quality, but smallholders find it difficult to diversify. A new partnership aims to help them.

Nairobi/Basel, World Food Day 2019. In many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, continuous cereal mono-cropping overuses soil nutrients and encourages specific pests and diseases. However, many farmers there find it hard to change their production. They lack access to good seed of suitable rotation crops, as well as to relevant advice and markets. A new partnership between Agventure Ltd. and the Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture (SFSA) addresses these challenges in Kenya.

“Smallholders are broadly aware of the principles and benefits of diversified production systems and more sustainable practices”, says Dominik Klauser, SFSA’s Program Lead for Soil Health and Sustainable Agronomy. “Our partnership aims to remove the barriers to more diversified farming. Agventure represents a community of forward-looking farmers. The company has already successfully introduced canola, green peas and other crops as ‘disease-breakers’ in Kenya, and established the necessary market links and processing infrastructure. That has given farmers a remunerative alternative to cereals.” Combined with appropriate agronomy practices, such as minimum tillage, diversified cropping also improves soil water-retention. Farmers can then grow rain-fed crops even during very dry seasons.

Don White, Managing Director of Agventure, comments: “When they realize the disadvantages of continued mono-cropping, farmers want to diversify. But adding one breaker crop is not enough for long-term sustainability. Farmers need more rotation options, such as legumes and pulses. Working with SFSA, and especially its Seeds2B program, we can greatly improve smallholders’ access to rotation crops and better varieties. Thanks to SFSA’s experience in working with smallholders, we can also offer these farmers appropriate extension services and market opportunities. That will make smallholder farming more resilient and remunerative.”

Agventure and SFSA have signed a partnership for four years. The collaboration covers the whole process of market-building from sourcing seed of appropriate varieties through to linking farmers with reliable markets for their produce. Agventure’s existing Centres of Excellence will test rotation crops and agronomic practices, and engage with smallholders on extension and purchasing. The partners will analyze the economic and environmental impact of the proposed changes, to ensure that smallholders benefit from the best possible advice and service.

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Agventure Ltd, established in 2010, drives the adoption of conservation agriculture practices in East Africa to address declining yields and soil degradation in grain farming. Having successfully established a market for canola rotations in Kenya, Agventure intends to apply a market-based trialing model for additional non-cereal rotation crops including engaging smallholders in supplying these markets. <http://www.agvke.com/>

The Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture, a non-profit organisation headquartered in Basel, Switzerland, helps smallholders become more professional growers. The Foundation works with partners in developing countries and emerging markets to extend science-based know-how, facilitate access to quality inputs, and link smallholders to markets in profitable ways. This adds value for rural communities, and sustainably improves food security. www.syngentafoundation.org