

CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE NEWSLETTER

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Farming as a Business

*Lilian Zheke, Agriculture and Livelihoods
Technical Advisor for Southern Africa*

Farming as a business (FAAB) promotes farming as a way to maximize profitability. FAAB helps farmers change from a substance mindset to a business attitude. As farmers increase production using methods such as Conservation Agriculture (CA-Plus), they have a greater opportunity to produce not just for consumption but also in order to gain income and other assets. FAAB resource materials can be downloaded [here](#).

A business operates with the aim of earning a profit through providing a service or a product. In farming, inputs such as seed and land are used to produce crops and/or livestock which are sold in a marketplace. Farm business operations start by asking what the market wants. The farmer then assesses the profit potential of different options (enterprises), and sets goals and plans for what he/she wants to achieve. Only after this can they mobilize resources and begin production and marketing activities. At the end of the season, the farmer evaluates if their goals have been achieved in order to help them plan for the next season.



Achieving food security through improved production practices, frees up products for marketing.

BUILDING THE BUSINESS CAPACITY OF FARMERS

For farmers to run their farms as a business, they must make good decisions on production, marketing, and finance in order to reduce costs, secure profitable markets, and maximize profits. In addition to knowing how to grow crops and increase production, farmers need the skills and knowledge to make informed decisions that will increase their profits. Farmers need to:

- Select the right enterprises (crops and/or livestock);
- Identify and access market opportunities;
- Assess profitability and risks;
- Develop business plans and budgets;
- Maintain good records and manage finances.

These issues have a major impact on the performance or success of farm businesses.

FARM BUSINESS PLANNING:

Business planning involves preparing and organizing all the resources required to run the business. It determines what resources will be required, when they will be needed, and where they will come from. A good farm business plan specifies what products will be produced, how this will be done, what resources and inputs will be needed and when, how products will be marketed, and what returns are expected.



Sylvia Muleya, KMTTC Field Officer from Binga, Zimbabwe, works through an exercise on selecting farm business enterprises.

BUDGETING AND PROFIT MAXIMIZATION:

Farmers should maximize profits by analysing the costs they will incur and determining their price in order to attain a profit. A Gross Margin Analysis (GMA) is an estimate of the income, costs and profits of producing a given product. The GMA can be used to:

- Estimate the relative profitability of different crop or livestock enterprises;
- Compare profit potential at different times of the year;
- Determine how costs can be reduced to increase profitability;
- Identify a need to increase prices or access better paying markets.

MARKETING BASICS:

Marketing is crucial for any business. Farmer-level training materials for marketing can be downloaded from [this link](#). Farmers need to select the right product, the right buyers and the best timing of production and sales. In order to do this Farmers should be able to:

- Understand and research market needs and trends (including quality standards, supply and demand, and seasonal fluctuations);
- Plan and act to meet the market requirements;
- Establish long-lasting business relationships with buyers and other market actors;

RECORD KEEPING:

An effective business records everything relevant to the farm in an organised manner and stores that information for future use. Farmers should keep thorough records of production, expenditures, income, marketing and labour. Such records will help them assess if their business is profitable from year-to-year, and establish longer-term trends that may help improve their profitability over time.

RISK MANAGEMENT:

Farmers need to understand the risks of various enterprises in order to decide if their potential profits outweigh their risks, and if they warrant a risk management strategy with costs to the farm business. Making this judgement requires understanding the likelihood of risks happening, their impact on the farm business, the effectiveness of mitigation strategies, and the cost associated with mitigation.

CONCLUSION:

Not all farmers may be willing or able to dedicate part of their production to business purposes. Some farmers may need to solve productivity issues, in order to achieve food security, before focusing on sales. The shift from subsistence production to market-oriented production takes time for most farmers. To support them, project staff need to acquire the same knowledge and skills that will help farmers move towards market and profit-driven farming.

Telling the Story with Photographs

Christina Philips, Director, Resources and Public Engagement

Photographs can illustrate suffering and hunger or they can convey the victories of farmers and communities over food insecurity. The following guidelines describe how photos can be used effectively while respecting and honoring people's dignity.

WHAT MAKES FOR AN ENGAGING PHOTO?



A picture of agricultural production portrays a community as self-sufficient.

FOOD!

Food security is at the heart of the Foodgrains Bank's work and should be reflected in imagery. Photographs showing agricultural production, food consumption and distribution are crucial to telling our story.



Food preparation and consumption also conveys self-determination.

ACTION SHOTS!

Take pictures that show project participants as the active heroes of their own story working hard to grow food and feed their families rather than as passive recipients of assistance. Photographs showing diverse activity, optimism and movement are particularly engaging.



Pictures with movement tell a fuller story.

PREPARING FOR A PHOTO SESSION

- **Budget your time!** Plan for more time than you think you'll actually need for taking photos and videos. Expect to spend time helping the subjects to trust you even before you begin taking pictures. Good photography often takes longer than expected.
- **Create a shot list.** Plan ahead of time what photos will illustrate the story you want to tell. Remember to include action photos! Use the list to guide your photo session.
- **Ensure your camera's resolution setting is high enough!** Your camera's resolution setting may be called "image quality" or "image size," and determines the amount of detail captured in an image. The higher the resolution, the sharper and less blurry an image will appear, especially when enlarged. Choose the highest size possible to ensure a clear image is captured. If the resulting file size is less than 1.0 MB, the resolution will likely be poor. For enlargements (e.g. posters or projected images) the file size should be 5.0 MB or larger.
- **Communicate your purpose.** Explain to the subjects why you are taking photos and how they will be used. Let them know that their photograph may appear in multiple publications and media such as brochures, social media, newsletters etc.
- **Ask for consent:** Some people may be willing to share their stories but not their photos because of privacy and safety concerns. Respect their choice!! Obtain permission in writing, verbally or by video, whichever is most appropriate



This picture of a farmer field school illustrates the members and their families as well as how they are learning to plant cover crops.

CONTEXT!

When you look at a photo, you should get a sense of a story. Including the context of the participant's life helps to do this. For example, if they are a farmer, include pictures of them working on their farm. If they belong to a savings group, capture images of them interacting with other members in savings activities.



In this picture we see emotion, and we learn about the lead farmer's family.



The woman in this picture appears sad, but determined.

EMOTIONS!

Try to capture emotions. Talk with people as you take photos. They will often open up during conversation, and that is when you may capture a photo that portrays their true feelings. In the pictures to the right, what emotions do you see?



This woman, in contrast, exudes joy!

DURING THE PHOTO SESSION

- **Take time to make participants feel comfortable.** Introduce yourself and explain why you are taking pictures. If you feel uncomfortable, your subject will pick up on that. If you're relaxed and enjoying the interaction, it's more likely your subjects will be relaxed, too.
- **Take pictures in varied settings and illustrating various activities.** This helps provide a fuller picture of the participant's story.
- **Ensure that the picture treats the subject with dignity,** doesn't reinforcing harmful stereotypes, and doesn't exploit people in precarious situations.
- **When taking photos of children, include their parents or guardians** in the photo for family context. Foodgrains Bank limits the use of photographs of children without a parent/guardian.
- **Gather names, ages and relationships of people in all photos.** Record who took the photo, the project name and the organization supporting the work.



Horizontal pictures are often used for posters and Powerpoint presentations.

USE BOTH HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL SHOTS.

Different orientations are used for various materials. Turn your camera to ensure you are getting both orientation types.



Vertical pictures are commonly used in print publications.



In this picture, the subject was facing the light, making her face much more visible.

LET THE LIGHT GUIDE THE DIRECTION OF YOUR SHOT.

Stand with the light source to your back to reduce shadows and ensure that your subject is well lit. If the light source (e.g. the sun) is behind your subject, they will appear dark and difficult to see. If you must shoot with light behind your subject, try to find a way to reflect or shine another light source on their face.



The light behind the people in this picture makes it difficult to see their faces.

WHEN SHARING PHOTOS

- Before sharing your photographs, ask yourself the following questions.
 1. Would the people photographed want to be portrayed like this and have it published?
 2. Is the image sensitive from their cultural perspective? Remember that what is considered respectful varies from culture to culture.
 3. How will this image be perceived by a foreign audience?
- Don't just send a photo in a Word document. Microsoft Word reduces the quality of the photos which means they cannot be used for any other communication purposes.
- Send the photos separately as attachments. If the photos are too large to attach, use Dropbox, Onedrive, Google Drive, or a service like WeTransfer. Foodgrains Bank staff can help you if you're not sure how to do this.
- Include captions as part of your story, or as a separate a document. Photo captions should be used to provide context and information that might not be in the story. This can add value and provide culturally-sensitive interpretation of the images for the audience.



The straight-on angle of this picture lacks a sense of movement.

USE VARIOUS ANGLES.

By taking pictures from different angles, you can capture more of the context, mood or personality of the subject. If you are shooting with a cluttered or ugly background, change the direction of your shot or climb up and look down from a higher point of view offer a different aspect of a scene.



Because of its angle, this picture conveys movement, making it more interesting.

CA Farmer Profile

Alemo Ayere learned how to use Conservation Agriculture as a participant in the food security project of Terapeza Development Association (TDA) in Ethiopia. He has been using CA now for over 5 years, and clearly understands the benefits of improved soil health and increased yields.

Despite understanding these benefits, he only uses CA on a relatively small portion of his 4 hectare farm. The main constraint holding him back is the labor demand of field preparation and planting by hand. In May, 2023, Ato Alemo hosted a training session for service providers from

throughout Ethiopia who wanted to learn how to make and use an ox-drawn (minimum tillage) direct seeder.

After hosting the training, Alemo is convinced that he needs to buy a planter for his own farm, and as a business to earn income from planting for other farmers . [Watch this short video](#) to hear his plans for expanding CA on his farm.



Alemo Ayere in his CA maize-pigeon pea-cowpea field

Partner Profile: Office de Développement des Eglises Evangéliques

Jean Twilingiyumukiza, Agriculture and Livelihoods Technical Advisor for Central & West Africa

Office de Développement des Eglises Evangéliques (ODE) celebrated 50 years of service to Burkina Faso last year. ODE is a non-profit development association created by the Federation of Evangelical Churches and Missions of Burkina Faso (FEME) to promote sustainable development, improve human dignity and build a more peaceful and just society. ODE works in



Women harvesting CA maize in Koti



Half-moon structures are used to harvest and retain water for cereal production.

the sectors of agriculture, water resources (dams, wells, and irrigation), non-formal education and literacy, and community health.

Burkina Faso, the "land of honest men," is landlocked in West Africa, and 86% of the population relies on subsistence agriculture. The country has suffered from recurring droughts and insecurity over the past 11 years. By late 2021, insecurity in Burkina Faso displaced 1.4 million people and caused significant food insecurity and other humanitarian needs.

ODE is Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Burkina Faso's longest-standing partner, and since 2013 it has been partnering with Canadian Foodgrains Bank through MCC to improve food security through promotion of Conservation Agriculture (CA), improved seed production, vegetable production, nutrition education, and training of community leaders in sustainable rural land management.

Their current five-year agriculture and livelihood project "PARSEO" plans to reach 1,130 households (6,780 people) in 14 villages in the commune of Oronkua. Households in this area depend on farming and often struggle to sustainably produce enough food year-round and to generate sufficient income to cover basic needs. Access to drinking water and sanitation is also limited. PARSEO will work with communities to address these needs by promoting field-based agriculture and irrigated market gardening, establishing community savings groups, and facilitating access to drinking water, hygiene and sanitation systems.

As in previous projects (PROSAN-Yé and Koti), the current project promotes CA plus other agronomic practices, including building on traditional minimum tillage basins known as "zai" and "half-moons." Green manure cover crops complement the traditional zai and provide soil cover and animal feed. CA significantly increased cereal and vegetable production and has improved nutrition for more than 5,000 project participants in Yé and Koti townships. Project participants also increased off-season agricultural production with small-scale irrigation. PROSAN Koti promoted gender equity, including facilitating access to finance by 100 women from 11 villages through promotion of rural saving groups.

ALTA TRAVEL SCHEDULES

Lilian Zheke

10-15 July, 2023
Zaka, Zimbabwe
PAOZ training

14-24 August, 2023
Northern Malawi
TSA & SOLDEV Support and Training

11-15 September 2023
Mwandi, Zambia
UCZ Training and Support

25-29 September 2023
Gutu & Zvishavane Zimbabwe
ZCC Training and Exchange Visit

Jean Twilingiyumukiza:

9-15 July, 2023
Niamey, Niger
SPN Project Visit and Team building

24-28 July, 2023
Rubavu, Rwanda
Refresher Training for Master Trainers

5-11 August, 2023
Bujumbura, Burundi
CA Master Training-Session One

24-28 August, 2023
Goma, DR Congo
Country-level Workshop

10-15 September, 2023
Bujumbura, Burundi
CA Master Training-Session Two

John Kimathi Mbae

6th July, 2023
Nairobi, Kenya
Master Trainer Graduation

10-15 July, 2023
Embu, Kenya
ACC&S Training

24-28 July, 2023
Kitui, Makueni, Machakos, Kenya
Fadhili Exchange Visit to KALRO & Aggregation Centre

1-4 August, 2023
Tharaka Nithi, Kenya
Partner Exchange (Fadhili & NCCK)

7-11 August, 2023
Lodwar, Kenya
ADRA Visit

21-25 August, 2023
Marsabit, Kenya
CITAM Training

11-15 September, 2023
Tharaka, Kenya
NCCK Training

25-29 September, 2023
Makueni, Kenya
UDO Training

Neil Rowe Miller

17-19th July, 2023
Tarime, Tanzania
Service Provider Training

24-27th July, 2023
Bunda, Tanzania
TZ Country Workshop

August, 2023
Dodoma, Tanzania
Service Provider Training

August, 2023
Kasulu, Tanzania
CWS Project Visit