

Today's Marketing Services of the Kakamega FFS Network

by Habbakuk Khaamala¹

Our Marketing Challenges

We have virtually no access to markets other than local village markets within 5 km. Farmers are selling individually with no group cooperation. There is a lack of information about crops the field school groups as a whole are growing. The farmers are exposed to exploitation by brokers and poor information on market prices. There is poor communication between group members due to distances and infrastructure and no focal point for market information or general coordination.



Kakamega FFS network officers

Developing Marketing Services

The Network has been helping the farmers to work together to access markets using the existing FFS organisation of the Executive Committee, Zone Officers, and Field School Representatives. We have collected crop information through a Crop Inventory sheet into a Crop Database. A Marketing Office has been opened to support members with marketing and organizational information. Kenya Agricultural Commercial Exchange (KACE) is used for daily prices and automatic bids.

¹ Story based on presentation by Habbakuk Khaamala FFS, Kenya and edited by Anne Dennig in April 2007

Providing market price information helps to “inoculate” farmers against bad price information from petty traders. The Network helps farmers to make offers to sell through KACE whilst developing other buyers. We are involved in DrumNet, a company which links buyers, sellers, stockists, and financial intermediaries. We are promoting the Orange Fleshed Sweet Potato as the first Network-sponsored cash crop.

Already our leadership has been trained on business and marketing. Farmer members have been trained on quality needs, recognition and practice. Value-adding equipment (chippers) have been purchased and the members trained in their use. Over time we will build the business and marketing capacity of the general membership.



Demonstrating the Sweet Potato Chipper

Initial Setbacks

Attempts at large-scale sales of the orange fleshed Sweet Potato have been unsuccessful. We have found that KACE market prices do not reflect prices given to farmers from brokers. The Cartel-like behaviour of brokers makes it difficult to access large scale markets profitably and the network has had continued difficulty in accessing information and linkage to profitable markets.

Lessons Learned

- Proper market research is critical.
- Production driven marketing does not work; demand should drive production.
- You cannot rely on second hand information.
- Start small and ensure that the market is as promised on a smaller scale.
- Commercial farming should be contract farming; it is important to negotiate a contract guaranteeing that if farmers grow to a certain quantity and quality then a buyer will pay.
- Make sure that you diversify your crops as markets come and go and prices fluctuate.
- Promote and educate on more than just one type of cash crop.



Members visiting the office

Services Offered by the Network Today

Today we are engaged in the promotion and education of members for crop diversification in the following ‘buyer demanded’ cash crops:

- Sunflower Seeds (Bidco),
- Chili Peppers (MACE foods),
- Artemisia (East Africa Botanicals),
- Sweet Potato Chips (Unga Millers).

We are also trying some sample plots for Moringa, Jatropha and Roselle/Hibiscus. Currently we are occupied with the facilitation of buyer/producer contracts for growing, harvesting, and delivery of farm produce.



We are helping with access to credit, information, and market support for FFS groups. We are also stockist of various farm inputs, including maize seed and fertilizer.

We are now a registered company limited by shares. This allows us to provide a legal voice for farmers in contractual agreements and enables large scale for-profit income generating activities. Our profits are divided among shareholder farmers. We are now drafting a business plan to determine profitable and sustainable means of income generation.

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