

SORGHUM AND GREEN GRAMS

LOCATION: Kitui County; Kenya
DURATION: November 2013 - November 2016



Sorghum Farmer, Kitui County, Kenya | Photo: Farm Africa

Farm Africa is working with 7,000 farming households in Kitui County in Kenya, to build their long-term financial resilience to the impact of increasingly frequent droughts.

The project enables farmers to improve their incomes sustainably by producing drought-tolerant commercially attractive sorghum and green gram crops. The farmers are encouraged to work collectively in producer groups, which helps them increase production volumes and profit through joint marketing. Agronomy training is provided to improve crop production and postharvest handling; business training is given to enable farmers to access commercial markets at competitive prices.



Map Of Lower Eastern, Kenya
Project Areas: Mwingi and Kitui

AN OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE CHANGE

Poverty levels in the Mwingi and Kitui Districts are among the highest in Kenya, and whilst poverty across most of the country has been reducing, it has increased in these areas which form part of Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs).

Farm Africa has been promoting the cultivation of dryland crops in the ASALs since 2009 under the Kenya Dryland Farming Project which created 42 Farmers Groups and increased productivity through the introduction of soil and water conservation techniques. The current project builds on this success and capitalises on increased local government focus on the importance of drought-tolerant field crops, improved water management, better links between lowland and highland economies and affordable finance systems. At the same time, the commercial market is showing a growing interest in the potential of dryland crops and an increasing number of companies are keen to source locally (especially sorghum) to avoid heavy transport and foreign exchange costs.



BUILDING A VALUE CHAIN



Strengthening the seed system

It is critical that farmers in areas with erratic rainfall and poor market access can access appropriate varieties of seeds. Seeds with higher yields and shorter maturation periods help farmers significantly increase production levels. Farm Africa has researched the value chain to identify the varieties of sorghum and green grams that are in commercial demand and is now working alongside agro-dealers to ensure that there is a consistent supply of quality sorghum and green gram seeds.

Networked production

The project supports networked production on two levels:

For improved productivity: Farmers are organized into 250 producer groups totaling over 5000 farmers so far. Each group is then trained on improved crop agronomy techniques at a centrally located farmer field school (FFS) and then the technologies are practiced at all the group's members' farms. This multiplier effect then means that we will ultimately reach over 20,000 farming households by 2016. Farm Africa helps the groups establish Village Saving and Loans Associations (VSLA's) to provide small loans so that farmers can access capital for expansion.

For improved profitability: The project brings together the 45 Farmer Groups from the previous project and 205 groups from the current project into networks that can deliver viable quantities to traders through aggregation. 11 aggregation stores with a total capacity of 500MT will be built to provide accessible, safe storage facilities at centralized locations. Farmers will be supported with cash down-payments for the quantities they deposit, which will reduce the need to sell at low prices for immediate funds at the farm gate.

Access to markets

The farmer producer groups and wider networks provide a strong basis for access to markets and negotiation with commercial buyers. Agents have been made aware of this project because they provide a vital link in the value chain between farmers and buyers. It is vital that the agents understand not only the national demand for sorghum and green grams but also the potential for a more reliable, higher quality supply achieved by networked production.

Outcomes

The combination of increased production and improved marketing of sorghum and green grams will increase household incomes by at least 20%. The provision of structured agronomy and business training will ensure that the project is sustainable into the future.

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