

Evergreen and Strengthening Rural Institutions represented at the East African Farmer Innovation Fair

By Danyell Odhiambo and May Muthuri

Agricultural innovation is a key pillar when developing strategies that would alleviate the food security crisis that has persistently burdened emerging economies. Farmers still grapple with a myriad of challenges as they struggle to solve two puzzles; How to promote food security and how to raise additional income in their different agricultural activities.

In a bid to ensure that the two questions are tackled with minimal investment, some farmers engage in innovative ventures that guarantee increased output. This has seen major global dilemmas ultimately get local solutions.

Scores of farmers, researchers, students and government officials drawn from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Ethiopia converged at the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI), National Agricultural Research Laboratories at Kabete in Nairobi for the two-day East Africa Farmer Innovation Fair (EAFIF) that opened on 28th May, 2013.



Evergreen Agriculture staff interview Jack Rware who advocates for avocado grafting to improve yield. ICRAF was represented by Staff from the Evergreen Agriculture and the Strengthening Rural Institutions (SRI) projects. The team utilized the opportunity to

interact with relevant farmer innovators and institutions while learning contemporary applications of Agroforestry.

Dr. Bell Okello, an agricultural and rural development specialist from Prolinnova Kenya says that “Until recently, there has been a belief that technological innovations can only be generated in research institutes by scientists. The reality, however, is that farmers are everyday trying out new innovations or improving on innovations already in place by making them practical and adaptable to their needs and circumstances”.

Simon Musila, a cereal farmer from Kalama division in Kenya’s Machakos County has shifted to a new way of cultivating finger millet. Musila raises the millet in nurseries before transplanting them to his farm during the onset of the rain season. He takes advantage of nitrogen flush which promotes crop growth and eventually increases harvest.

Musila has extended his love for conservation agriculture to train three women groups namely; Ngomeni, Ikonge and Kyavyalu Self Help Group which are part of the farmer groups that are actively engaging in Evergreen Agriculture, supported by ICRAF and the Kenya Network for Dissemination of Agricultural Technologies (KENDAT). Adopting the innovation has helped him promote food security through the use millet flour to make nutritious products for his customers.

Gerald Kibugi, a software developer participated in the fair to demonstrate the missing link between information technology and agriculture, two sectors that are often considered to be the ‘backbones’ of modern economies. He has created an information sharing application dubbed ‘Green House Do it yourself (DIY)’ software which, he says, can guide farmers interested in green house farming to monitor the progress of their crops without the need for consulting with extension officers.

Kenya is the largest producer of Avocado fruits in Africa and one farmer is not taking this for granted. Jack Rware, an organic farmer from Embu County in Kenya has adopted grafting as a way of improving the locally available avocado species. This initiative has led to the development a unique variety which he proudly nicknamed the ‘Jack II’
The Fair attracted a host of local and international organizations dealing in agricultural research and innovations which included; Practical Action, Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security, World Neighbors, USAID-Kenya and AgriProFocus, among others.