



Farmers listen to an apian farmer talking about honey and bee keeping during the Lwengo Farmers' Day. PHOTO/ MICHAEL SSALI

Lwengo Farmers' Day opens new opportunities

Attendees saw demonstrations and displays of high quality production technologies and value addition.

MICHAEL J SSALI

Hundreds of farmers from Lwengo District and beyond gathered at Kaboyo Primary School playground in Kinoni Town Council last week to mark the district's Farmers' Day. It was an opportunity for all the participants to meet fellow farmers, to see what they do, and to exchange ideas.

It was also an opportunity for farmers to get into direct touch with financial institutions and to learn how they can partner with them to enhance farm productivity.

The attendees were able to physically meet with representatives of seed companies and other farm input dealers seeking to get closer to the farmers in order to bridge any gaps between them. It was an occasion for accessing good quality inputs — high quality seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and tools.

The farmers had a chance to see technology demonstrations at work by observing the latest modern farming tools in action. They saw demonstrations and displays of high quality production technologies. There was networking and engagement between farmers and agricultural production value chain actors.

Many came as individual farmers and others attended as representatives of the various farmers' groups in the district. The function also attracted several secondary and primary schools in the district. The entire football pitch was filled with stalls, displaying various agricultural products, and activities.

"We are aware of the common false complaint by some farmers that our agricultural services field officers are not available on the ground," said Peter Bamwesigye, Lwengo District principal agriculture officer. "Their questions are mainly about where

TOOLS

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to find genuine agricultural inputs like herbicides and pesticides. So our new approach is to organise such functions as this one where they get to meet different farm inputs dealers, talk to them and to obtain their addresses and contacts. They then know where to go for all their farm needs instead of just depending on the agricultural services extension officers for direction. At this function they also have the chance to meet representatives of the different financial institutions willing to grant credit services on convenient terms for farmers."

The stalls

Masaka Diocesan Development Organisation (MADDO) set up a mini-demonstration garden where they displayed how to carry out agroforestry. In the mini-garden they planted Robusta coffee at the spacing of 10 by 10 feet, and banana stems between the coffee rows at 20 by 20 feet. They further planted tree seedlings all along the boundaries. They also covered the ground with grass (mulching) and put a beehive in the centre of the demonstration garden.

At the garden, Innocent Ssembatya, an employee of MADDO, told the farmers, "It is good to have some bee-

hives in the garden to boost crop pollination and fruition. Bee keeping is also a source of income from the sale of honey."

The demonstrations

John Ssuuna Mayanja, an ex-MADDO employee, said Uganda's population keeps increasing yet farming plots are getting smaller due to land fragmentation and people have to learn how to carry out gainful farming on small plots of land. He emphasized the importance of mulching as a way of weed control, soil erosion mitigation, and soil moisture preservation.

He also stressed that mulch turns into fertiliser when the grass decomposes, thus enriching the soil. (Sustainable agriculture)

"Some pests cannot multiply well under moist conditions provided by mulching," Mayanja said.

Muhigira Coffee Farm, one of the largest coffee farms in Uganda, was represented by Joan Konso, Personal Assistant, Muhigira Estate, who displayed packets of roasted beans, and coffee powder at her stall.

"We grow coffee on two square miles and we also keep cattle and do apian. We keep cattle mainly to get cow dung manure. We are into apianies mainly because bees are important for honey and pollination of the coffee crop."

Lwengo Resident District Commissioner, Emy Kateera Turiababuni, who was the chief guest, said he was impressed by the interest that the farmers had taken in coffee growing. He said he will arrange to visit some good performing farmers in the district.