

Adaptable ideas

By Joshua Kato

Joel Cherop, 37, is now a certified crusader against hunger and poverty in Uganda. I say, certified, because for the last five years, he has won awards and certificates for practising agriculture and training hundreds of people in farming. Cherop has organised an open farm field day, on December 6, at his Kapenguria demonstration gardens. The Open Day is free of charge to farmers across the country.

Cherop first broke into limelight after emerging one of the best farmers during the inaugural National Best Farmers competition in 2014. He has since won several awards, including financial support from the Tony Elumelu Entrepreneurship Programme (TEEP). Cherop is promoting affordable irrigation techniques and productive usage of fragmented land in Kapchorwa district. His farm was also visited by President Yoweri Museveni last year.

Cherop grows onions, sim-sim, vegetables, coffee, tomatoes, rice and apples. He was among the 2014 Best Farmers competition organised by Vision Group and sponsored by DFCU Bank, the Netherlands embassy and KLM airlines. The competition is in its fourth year, with the 2017 competition coming to an end. Currently, Cherop is mentoring young farmers in onion.

How he started

With 20 bags of Irish potatoes seedlings, Cherop plunged into farming in 2010. He planted the potatoes on an acre of land in Kapenguria parish, Kapteret sub-county, Kapchorwa district. He did all the farm work because he did not have the money to pay labour.

The first yields were low though. In the second season, he went for onions. He purchased two kilogrammes of onion seeds at sh100,000. He applied the right agricultural ingredients on the farm starting with onion seeds through to the nursery bed and fertilisers. This paid off.

"This is what I want to see young people embrace, so they can go into agriculture with solutions. Some of the challenges we (farmers) face because of effects of climate change are already



2014 Best Farmer Cherop showing his onion harvest. He is hosting farmers to an open farm day on December 6, at his Kapenguria demonstration garden in irrigation and production on fragmented land

Kapchorwa Best Farmer to offer tips on Open Day

"Farmers will learn how a quarter of an acre of land can yield 6,000kg of onions." Cherop

being felt," said Cherop in an interview with the *New Vision*.

With the sh7m won from the 2014 Best Farmers competition, Cherop improved his irrigation system.

"I improved the system with more pumps and drip pipes," he says. Then a year later in 2015, with \$5,000 (sh18m) from TEEP, he improved to using an overhead irrigation system.

What farmers should expect

On the Open Day, visitors will have a tour of the farm. They will then interact with Cherop. Cherop says he will train farmers in setting up nursery beds, planting systems, setting up irrigation systems, applying fertilisers, post-harvest handling and marketing. He says farmers should come with notebooks and pens to learn.

"Come and see how using quality seeds, fertilisers, disease management and irrigation can revolutionise

FEEDBACK

WHAT OTHERS SAY



Joel Cherop's progress is testimony to how far winning in the Best Farmers competition can take one. As one of the sponsors of the competition, we are happy with his progress. He is willing to train other youth in farming, which shows that he cares about their well-being. **Josephat Byaruhanga, policy officer in charge of agriculture at the Netherlands embassy**

My farming practices have changed after attending one of Cherop's trainings. I hail from Bukwo, where I was using traditional farming methods, but have now my yields have improved since, on Cherop's advice, I started planting good-quality seeds and use fertilisers. **Alice Isaac Chelimo, farmer**

agriculture in Uganda," Cherop says. For each enterprise, Cherop farms on small pieces of land, but gets good harvests.

"Farmers will learn how A quarter of an acre of land can yield 6,000kg of onions per season," he says.

"We were once told apples cannot be grown in Uganda, save for Kabale, but when you visit Kapenguria, you will see them," he says. He adds that Uganda is blessed by nature and people should benefit from the natural gift.

"There is no reason why we should continue crying about poverty when we have these gifts of nature," he says. Cherop explains that there are many countries, that do not have even a quarter of the gift that Uganda has, but these countries produce much more food per acreage than Uganda.