

Farmers beware of the seeds

Apart from good soils, fertiliser application, and good agronomical practices, a farmer should think hard about the quality of seeds to plant in order to achieve high yields.

For a long time the practice among most of our farmers has been to save seed from the previous harvest for planting in the next rain season.

Continuous cultivation of the soil in the garden and planting of seeds saved from previous harvests often leads to a decline in crop yields.

Today's farming challenges are bigger than before due to the increased demand for food as a result of population explosion, climate change, and the emergence of new pests that have stifled crop production.

We cannot continue with the same farming practices that our forefathers used.

Fluctuations in climate patterns due to global warming have had a negative impact on crop yields resulting in commodity price hikes, food insecurity, reduced income, malnutrition, and domestic violence among other issues. Prolonged droughts lead to loss of animals, conflicts among farmers over water resources and pasture, not to mention environmental degradation.

The government annually invests a lot of money in agricultural research aimed at developing disease and pest control measures for various crops and livestock, breeding improved crop varieties and livestock, as well as devising improved agronomic and husbandry practices to cope with the different emerging agricultural challenges. Among the many achievements made by researchers is the development of maize hybrids that are suitable for moderate drought conditions and which are resistant to insect pests such as the dreadful stem borer. Other successes include the nitrogen-use-efficient and salt tolerant rice.

Scientists have also developed several other high yielding, nutritious, and pest resistant crop varieties. We now have bio-fortified beans, bio-fortified sweet potatoes, and bio-fortified bananas with enhanced nutrients especially for children and pregnant women. When a farmer chooses to plant seeds saved from his or her previous harvest it is important to consider their crop yield potential, their crop resistance to pests and diseases as well as their tolerance to drought and their nutrient value as compared to purchasing seeds bred through agricultural research.

E-mail: ssalimichaelj@gmail.com