

There were at least 10 tractor suppliers exhibiting at the show. The finance minister, Matia Kasaija, promised farmers that the Government will empower them to acquire and use tractors. Tractors improve productivity and reduce labour costs

Lessons from the Source of the Nile show

agricultural and trade

By Joshua Kato

As the curtain fell on the 25th Source of the Nile farmers show in Jinja town, both the visitors and exhibitors who graced it took home vital lessons they hope to adopt on their farms and research. The 2017 show started on Monday last week and ended on Sunday. The theme of the show was: *Managing the challenges of climate change for sustainable agriculture.*

According to the Uganda National Farmers Federation (UNFFE) secretary general, Sunday Emmanuel, over 230 exhibitors attended the show. They include institutions linked to the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, district farmers' federations and companies engaged in the proliferation of agri-inputs. There were also groups from Kenya, Tanzania, plus a visit from a delegation of leaders from India.

For the second year running, President Yoweri Museveni made an appearance at the show.

Until 2016, the President had taken 10 years without coming to the grounds, normally delegating this role to either the Vice-President or the Minister of Agriculture.

"The fact that the President graced the show again points to the importance he is putting on agriculture at the moment," Emmanuel said.

The President's message was a mixture of tips for farmers, for example, when he asked them to plan their farm enterprises depending on the sizes of land they own and lamentations, especially about Parliament's failure to pass the Biotechnology Act. Biotechnology is a process were genetics of one living thing are combined with another living thing of the same or different species to get something better. For example, elements from a pawpaw, which has vitamin C can be combined with a potato to introduce vitamin C, to the crop.

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He simplified biotechnology even further by explaining, "I have personally been using this knowledge for the last 60 years since I began farming. If I want long-horned cattle, I can breed, even peasants can easily select seeds with this simple science," he said.

It remains to be seen if Parliament, that has had the Biotechnology Bill for the last six years will act.

Presidential Highlight



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More quiet

Compared to previous shows, this year's edition was more quiet, thanks to a move by UNFFE to reduce the number of 'noisy' exhibitors.

"At least now one can effectively communicate to a visitor at one's stall because there is not much noise compared to the previous shows," Moniesa Kunu, who was exhibiting fruit juices and wines, said. The merrymakers were only allowed to come in the evenings after the official show time of 9:00am to 5:00pm.

There were also improvements in the layout, compared to previous shows, where various enterprises were mixed up. This year, farming and agriculture activities were given specific spots, where they could be easily accessed. For example, all companies that exhibited farm machinery were allocated space near the main entrance. District farmers' federations exhibited to the left of the second entrance, while financial institutions were allocated space behind the main pavilion.

Additionally, the organisers held discussions pertaining to agriculture on each of the week days. Held at the main pavilion, the talks included financing, youth in agriculture, value addition and land management, among others.

"We did not want people to come here and leave with nothing," said Charles Ogang, the president of UNFFE.

Tractors increase

At the show, dealers in heavy-duty farm machinery are always part of the highlights and indeed they were, even in this year's edition. The level of agriculture mechanisation is improving, gauging by what happened at the show. There were at least 10 big tractor suppliers at the show.

"Mechanisation is the way to go if agriculture is to change lives in this country. We must make sure farmers are helped to acquire tractors," Matia Kasaija, the finance minister, said while launching a 55hp, small tractor exhibited by Engsol.

According to Meddie Mwiri, an official from Engsol, farmers must know that a tractor is an added advantage to the farm. It is a labour and income multiplier. If a farmer does not use it all the time, he can hire it out. Although Ugandans have just started adopting mechanised farming at the lowest levels of the value chain, the trend is promising.

Nicholas Matsiko, the 2015 Vision Group best farmer, uses farm machinery, including tractors on his farm. Matsiko explains that until Ugandan farmers adopt machines, yields will remain low.

"For example, I use threshers to cut grass for my cows, which has eased my work and reduced labour costs," he says. Matsiko exhibited some of the machinery he uses on the farm.

Value addition

Adding value to agriculture produce has been and still is one of the major songs of policy makers. Uganda has two rainy seasons, hence the two planting seasons every year. However, worldwide, agriculture has transited from depending on rain to being all year round. While there are companies that add value to produce, such as milk and fruits, this practice accounts for less than 10% of fresh produce in Uganda. This means the rest of the produce is sold raw.

At the farmers' show, value addition was one of the highlights. Other than juice, wines and honey, there were new products, for example, from high value crops, such as lemongrass, from which a scented oil is extracted, shea butter and the newly introduced chia seeds. There was also equipment for adding value on display. This included juice processors, solar-operated driers and milk coolers.

Florence Kayaayo, one of Vision Group's 2016 best farmers from Kabarole, exhibited wine.

"This wine is produced from grapes grown on my farm in Kabarole. What I am doing can be done by other farmers and if many of us engage in it, the country will earn more from our efforts," Kayaayo said.

Livestock

Better livestock management systems was exhibited. This ranged from hybrid cattle and kuroiler chicken, cattle and goats. Prisons department perhaps had the largest pigs at the 2017 show, one of which – a Landrace weighed over 270kg.

Bulamu Mixed Farm, from Magigye, after Gayaza in Wakiso district, who exhibited for the first time, had a Hampshire pig that weighed over 250kg at just one-year-old. "We have been telling our visitors that with good feeding, it is possible to grow good quality pigs and earn well from the sales," Henry Maseruka, an animal nutrition consultant with Bulamu Mixed Farm, said.

Additionally, there were several livestock support equipment, including, modern milking machines, dehorners, spray race facilities and milking parlours.

Seed varieties

"The seeds are there. One can grow 20kg of beans or maize and reap 4,000kg," President Museveni said.

Seeds are the mothers of all food. No show is complete without having new seed varieties. Most of the seed companies were in Jinja.

While previously NARO produced seeds, but gave them to private companies to multiply them commercially, NARO this time round also exhibited their own commercial varieties. These included vegetables and pulses.



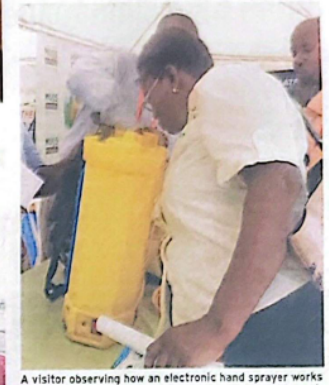
A farmer from Bulamu Mixed Farm explaining how to rear a 250kg pig in one year. It was the first time to showcase such a big pig



The 2017 Vision Group best farmer, Florence Kayaayo, exhibiting grapes from which she makes wine



Vision Group Harvest Money staff Jackie Nambogga explaining to visitors how to join the Best Farmers competition. Vision Group sold Harvest Money DVDs, books and agricultural magazines



A visitor observing how an electronic hand sprayer works

