

How to safely store grain

A farmer often finds it necessary to keep harvested grain for some time, perhaps waiting for prices to improve or merely storing it as stock to turn to in the days ahead when there is food shortage.

For some poor households storing grain is like saving money in a bank. The idea is to have some food saved up for the future in case there is scarcity or when visitors come.

To store grain safely it is important to consider the factors that cause damage to it, like insects which feed on it, rodents and birds, temperature, and some microscopic organisms that can cause grain deterioration.

It is by guarding against such factors that a farmer can be guaranteed of the safety of his or her stored grain.

Agriculturists recommend that grain is well dried before it is stored.

The presence of moisture or water in the grain facilitates the growth of microorganisms like fungi which cause moulds and rapid spoilage of grain.

Not all farmers can afford a moisture metre but a group of farmers can pool savings and buy a metre to be used in turns.

Grain should be stored at the moisture content of about 13 per cent or less, if possible. The store itself should be dry and water proof since damp conditions can cause grain to germinate or to rot.

The farmer must further guard against insects like weevils and beetles. Some people keep grain in airtight plastic drums or bags to deny oxygen to the insects.

Traditionally some produce like beans may be mixed with ashes to discourage weevil attack. It is also safe to apply insecticidal chemicals sold in farmers' shops.

However extreme care must be taken to apply the right amounts according to manufacturers' instructions since pesticides are actually poisonous and can be injurious to the grain consumers if wrongly used.

Stored grain must be secured against rats. Some people keep cats which frighten them away.

Rat poison can be used to fight them. Another preventive measure is to clear any bush and rubbish near the store since they act as breeding ground for rats.

E-mail: ssalimichaelj@gmail.com