

Fake herbicides cause weeds to be resistant making it costly to control them

Farmers tipped on how to spot fake agro chemicals

By Prossy Nandudu

Churchill Ojok is a rice and maize farmer in Nwoya district. He is growing the two crops on 500 acres of land. He has been farming for six years now.

He has been using different types of herbicides to control weeds. Ojok employs casual labourers to weed his garden, but this, he says, is too costly.

"By the time they are done, the spot they started with is already infested with weeds," Ojok says.

To reduce the costs of weeding, Ojok decided to look for a lasting solution. He came across Roundup, a product used by many large scale farmers to control weeds.

Ojok said he has been spraying his crops three times in a season before he got Roundup. He says each acre required one litre of herbicide, which goes for sh15,000.

This means on one acre, he spent sh45,000, which means he needed sh22.5m for the 500 acres.

However, that changed when he started using Roundup. The money Ojok spends on herbicides reduced drastically since he sprayed his garden only once in a season.

He, however, reported that the downside is that some unscrupulous individuals are counterfeiting the product and selling at the same price as the genuine one.

Ojok is not the only farmer who has experienced fake agro chemicals. According to James Wamalugu, an agro dealer in Mbale, farmers are no longer interested in buying anything called Roundup due to counterfeits.

"Even if one explains the difference between the genuine and fake Roundup, the farmers do not want to hear of it, because the bottles look the same. So we have to destroy them and consider that a loss," Wamalugu said.

It is basing on such reports that Balton Uganda, the suppliers of Roundup decided to engage selected largescale farmers across the country to show them how to differentiate the fake product from the genuine one.

The farmers came from Masindi, Nwoya and Gulu districts, where there are many large scale farmers of rice, maize and sugarcane, among others.

Agnes Mbabazi Kabwiso, the general manager of Agriculture at Balton Uganda, explained that the meeting which targeted commercial farms was aimed at introducing the latest technologies and interventions in farming.

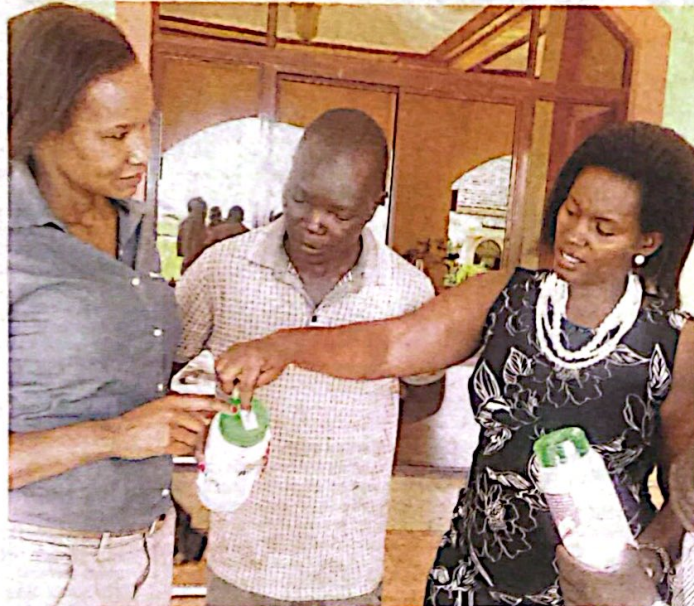
Kabwiso added: "Once the large-scale farmers can tell the difference and learn the latest technologies, they will pass on the information to the smallholder farmers whom they work with."

"We hope that smallholder farmers will learn about the latest technologies that large-scale farmers are putting in practice to maximise production," she said.

"There are many small-scale farmers who are not aware of the latest farming methods that would help them develop into commercial farming. Such methods include spotting quality and genuine agro inputs, seeds, herbicides and equipment," Kabwiso observed.

Fake herbicides on sale

A survey conducted by Balton Uganda around container village near St Balikuddembe (Owino) Market in Kampala, shows that 99% of the Roundup being sold there has been adulterated.



Kabwiso (right) shows Ojok the scratch card on a genuine bottle being held by Musyoka during the farmer's engagement with Balton. Photo by Prossy Nandudu



Ojok in his maize garden. He says genuine herbicides save money, time and energy

"Apart from being adulterated, the fake products are being sold expensively, increasing costs on the farm, especially for those practising commercial farming," Evelyn Musyoka, the commercial lead for Monsanto, a company that provides farm solutions, said.

What is being done?

To guard against counterfeits, Musyoka said Balton and Monsanto are working with the agriculture ministry and the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS), to come up with a seal that will differentiate the fake products from genuine ones.

She explained that with the repackaged product, emphasis has been put on changing labels, including a seal with an electronic verification code from UNBS called Kakasa.

"After buying the product, a farmer is supposed to scratch the seal and send the code underneath it to UNBS by SMS to check

"It takes five seconds to get feedback from UNBS on whether the product is genuine or not"

Why you must avoid counterfeits

Evelyn Musyoka, the commercial lead for Monsanto, a company that provides farm explained that the composition of counterfeit herbicides is compromised and cannot effectively control weeds, leading to resistance which will translate into higher costs of production.

"When a herbicide with less chemical concentration is sprayed on the weeds, they get used to the small amounts of the chemical. In the process, they build resistance, so that to eliminate them, a farmer has to spend a lot of money buying more chemicals for the concentration to be enough to weaken the weeds. The farmer would rather spend once on a genuine product," Musyoka explained.

Other dangers of using fake agro chemicals on the farm

If the chemicals are poorly used, they result in health complications. Some chemicals affect the skin because many farmers do not wear protective gear like overalls, nose and mouth masks and gloves needed when spraying.

Also some farmers do not know how to dispose of the used cans. The cans are later picked up by children or used for storing food stuffs and water, a report from Cabi International, that developed a guide for farmers on how to protect themselves when handling any form of chemicals, states. This leads to intake of chemicals, which are deadly.

How to identify fake products

The seal should be clear and not tampered with.

Labels should be in clear and legible words.

It should have active phone numbers for both the manufacture and agro dealer.

Farmers who cannot read ably should seek the assistance of the district agriculture officers or extension workers near them for advice.

if the product is genuine or fake.

Once the product is found to be fake, UNBS, together with the agriculture ministry's inspectors trace the agro dealer. When the supplier is got, the farmer's money is either refunded or he is given the genuine product, she explained.

It takes five seconds to get feedback from UNBS on whether the product is genuine or not, according to information from the UNBS.

Apart from that, Musyoka added that they will continue with the sensitisation campaign, through the media, co-operatives, large-scale farmers to stamp out counterfeit products.

Any punitive measures?

The products are confiscated and taken for further verification by the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) laboratories. If it is confirmed to be fake, the product is destroyed, an official from MAAIF said.

In some instances the agro dealer may be stopped from transacting.