

Small-holder coffee farmers in Kirinyaga and Nyeri Counties benefit from the dissemination of improved maize varieties

Project update: July 2014

In Kirinyaga and Nyeri Counties, maize is the preferred food crop amongst most small-holder coffee-growing farmers. However, they do not produce enough maize for their families to last the whole year. The major constraint to improved crop productivity is the use of late-maturing, low-yielding varieties and inappropriate soil/crop management practices (image 1).

New crop varieties and improved soil management practices have been developed, but farmers are unaware of the new varieties. FIPS-Africa has formed networks of 15 *Village-based Advisors (VBA)* in each of Kirinyaga and Nyeri Counties who raise awareness of the improved varieties. They do this by disseminating samples of seeds of new maize crop varieties in small packs, donated by co-operating private sector seed Companies, to enable farmers to experiment with them in a low risk way.

Farmers, having succeeded with the small seed packs request their VBAs to sell them seed in larger pack sizes.



Image: Inappropriate variety together with poor management results in low yields (Nyeri County).

In the first 2014 rainy season commencing in March, FIPS-Africa's VBAs disseminated a total of 11,300 small packs of seed of the following crop varieties: PHB30G19 from Pioneer Hybrid International, PAN15 from Pannar Seed (Kenya), and Drought Tego from Dryland Seed Co. Ltd. A few of the approximately 6000 beneficiary farmers are shown in images 2-6.



Images: Improved KH50031A maize variety (left), and PHB30G19 variety (right).



Image: farmer (left) showing the results of her small pack of an improved maize variety; Kirinyaga County



Images: PAN 15 variety (left), and Drought Tego variety (right).

Small pack promotions are resulting in an increased demand for seed of the improved maize varieties amongst farmers, and VBAs are selling seeds to farmers in their Villages. In the 1st rainy season of 2014, VBAs in Nyeri and Kirinyaga Counties sold 3,120 kg and 1,760 kg of maize seed, respectively. Farmers are happy with their crops, and are expecting large yield increases (see images 7-13).



Image: Rose, the Nyeri Network Co-ordinator, (right) sells seed to VBA Jane (left) to sell to farmer (centre). KH500-31A variety from Leldet Ltd.



Image: Farmer who purchased the Olerai 22A variety from Jane, her local VBA in Nyeri County



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Image: VBA in Nyeri County with the conventionally-used late-maturing H614 variety.



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Image: VBA in Nyeri County who purchased the KH500-34A Maize variety



Image: Farmer in Nyeri County who purchased the KH500-31A variety



Image: Farmer in Kirinyaga County who purchased the PHB30G19 variety from her VBA.



Image: VBA in Kirinyaga County with her crop grown with the the PHB30G19 maize variety.



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Image: Farmer in Nyeri County proudly holds a cob from the KH500-31A variety, which she harvested from her farm.

Demand for the improved varieties is expected to increase as farmers gain confidence, and non-adopters learn from those who have adopted. In the second 2014 rainy season commencing in October, VBAs in each of Nyeri and Kirinyaga Counties are planning to sell 6000 kg of seed of improved maize varieties to farmers. Assuming 3,000 farmers each buy 4 kg seed to plant on half an acre, and each farmer increases yields by 600 kg, then it is anticipated that these farmers will have produced enough maize to meet their families' food needs for the year.