



zambia

Faro Munjanja
Lusaka, Zambia

Building a future on the farm

Several buildings stand under construction as Faro tours a group of visitors through his 10-hectare vegetable and grain farm in Lusaka, Zambia. Profits earned from Munjanja's farm are helping him to expand – a grading shed for tomatoes, a storage facility for fertilizers and chemicals, and a new office building for the farm. The farm appears relatively advanced with a tractor, several automobiles, and a tractor-mounted boom sprayer in sight.

“I think there is nothing better that I can do than farming.”

Munjanja knows that for his farm to prosper he must invest; something he has always done. A recent investment in new irrigation technology for the tomato crop

has already paid off. While it was expensive, the drip irrigation system optimised the farm's water use, improved labour efficiency and reduced operating costs.

The drip system is operated by one person rather than the numerous workers that were previously needed to redirect water provided from flood irrigation. It's also made fertilizing the crop easier. “You just have to measure your fertilizer, put it in the tanks and you're watering and fertilizing at the same time,” he says.

Munjanja grows tomatoes, cabbage, onions and maize on his farm. Raising vegetables during the rainy season presents some specific challenges, including diseases and insects. “This crop went through the rains and we made something out of it, mostly because of better chemicals,” he says. In the past, growing tomatoes from December to February was nearly impossible, but Munjanja is now able to harvest a successful crop and market his tomatoes at a time when prices are higher.

Munjanja’s cabbage crop provides another example of how fungicides are helping him to make a profit. “These cabbages will be ready for harvest in December,” he says. “I neglected spraying them for one week and the damage from disease is severe. You can see there are a lot of deformed cabbages.” If he had sprayed just one week sooner, he knows a sizable loss could have been prevented.

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Herbicides are a relatively recent introduction to the farm but Munjanja is already waiting for better products to reach his farm. “We have a lot of weed problems in vegetables so we need improvements in herbicides for these crops,” says Munjanja. “The post-emergent herbicides for tomatoes are too selective,” he says. And for his cabbages, Munjanja would like to see more effective weed control with fewer residues.

When it comes to his corn field, Munjanja relies on insecticides to protect the cobs from corn borers. “You can see the damage, especially when the crop is near tasselling,” he says. While he’s careful to look for maize varieties that have greater resistance to corn borers, when



the insect counts reach threshold levels an insecticide helps to shore up his crop.

While Munjanja relies on crop protection products, they are only one element of his integrated pest management plan. “Crop rotation is what makes my farm tick,” he says. By rotating crops, Munjanja reduces the incidence of pests and actually cuts down on the amount of crop protection products he might use otherwise. Part of his crop rotation includes a green manure rotation, where Munjanja plants grasses that are ploughed back into the soil to increase its fertility.

Munjanja uses other sustainable production practices as well. For example, his drip irrigation system helps preserve valuable ground water reserves that feed his crop. And by staking his tomatoes, a labour-intensive job, he reduces the incidence of plant disease. Staking the tomatoes makes sure the plants remain relatively upright, providing for good airflow through the dense canopy and keeps them off the ground. This helps reduce the amount of fungicides he needs.

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Planting good seed is another element of Munjanja’s formula for success. He buys all his seed and chooses hybrid tomato seed. But for his onions, he opts for open-pollinated varieties. “Although my preference would be to grow hybrid onions, the costs have become extremely high,” he says.

Munjanja credits much of his success as a farmer to what he learned growing up on his father’s nearby farm. Since 1994, he has been operating his own farm where he and his wife are happily raising their three young children. Munjanja has embraced new farming technologies and is growing his farm as a result. While he has an eye for business he also has a passion for farm life. “It is giving me a good life,” he says. “I think there is nothing better that I can do than farming.”

improvements

