

# The Organic Farmer

The newspaper for sustainable agriculture in Kenya Nr. 1 April 2005

## Welcome, Kenyan farmers!

We are pleased to introduce you to *The Organic Farmer*, a newspaper for the organic farming community in the country. There is a growing awareness of the importance of organic agriculture. This can be seen not only in the founding of the Kenya Organic Agriculture Network (KOAN), which introduces itself on page 8; the growing number of organic farmer groups is as well enough evidence of a desire by farmers to move away from the use of expensive chemical farm inputs to produce food.

Organic farming is a departure from the conventional methods of food production. At the same time it means a change in the use of farm inputs. BIOP, a small Nairobi-based company has developed many products arising from ICIPE research on the well known Neem tree (Muarubaini), for instance the Neem fertilizer which will be of great benefit for the farmers (see page 3).

The bulk of information on organic agriculture does not reach the small-scale farmers. *The Organic Farmer* seeks to fill this gap. We will inform you about what is going on in the agricultural sector. We intend to provide advice and farming tips in an easy, understandable version, as we have carried the story on maize storage (page 5) or mulching (page 7). Stories of this nature not only provide farmers with new ideas, but they also add to their traditional experience. The paper will come up with similar articles in its future issues to ensure farmers acquire adequate skills that will increase crop yields, raise their earnings and living standards.

The production of this newspaper is the result of a joint effort and coop-



*Good tilling and proper land preparation is very crucial in organic farming. (Photo P. Lütthi/BioVision)*

eration between the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) in Nairobi and BioVision. This Swiss-based foundation for the promotion of a sustainable development is sponsoring *The Organic Farmer*. That is the reason why it is being distributed to you free of charge.

Dear farmers, we also need your help and cooperation. If you get this newspaper, share it with your colleagues.

Let us know your opinion, your ideas and wishes. And if you have advice or tips for fellow farmers, please write to us and tell us about them. Together let us make *The Organic Farmer* a strong voice for Kenyan Farmers.

The Editors

## Bridging the communication gap

*Farmers around the world have progressed by their own research, through trial and error, and also through information exchange with neighbours close and far. Since the development of science,*

By Hans Herren

*trial and error approaches, or what will happen if I do this or that, have given way to experimental approaches, based on hypotheses. This means that if one has a problem such as a low soil fertility. The scientist would then try different levels and mixtures of fertilizers, chemical and/or organic and measures the relationship between the different application rates and fertilizer qualities. The best results are then adopted, promoted and become part of the production system, through an adaptive management system. This includes not only learning by doing but also the introduction of new technologies.*

*The crucial factor in increasing farm productivity is: How do farmers benefit from the research of scientists and of their peers? The farmers newspaper that is being launched with this first issue will bridge the gap between information creation and access. It is hoped that it will become a two way communication channel, on the one hand bringing relevant and usable information and knowledge to the farmers, and on the other carrying questions back for processing and answers to reach the farmers in subsequent issues.*

*The editorial board assures you that the information brought to the farmers is in line with sustainable, ecologically and economically accepted standards and welcomes the readers to this common venture.*

*Dr. Hans Herren is Director General of the International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) in Nairobi*

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The story of a successful small scale organic farmer *Page 4*

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Requirements for selling products to European market *Page 6*

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Get useful advice in the News Corner *Page 7*

## MY OPINION

By John W. Njoroge

It is great pleasure to learn that a magazine on organic farming has become available to the organic farmers in this region.

I want to congratulate the producer and all those who will be involved in informing and educating the organic farmers. Up till now there are many farmers who have been trained in organic farming, sustainable agriculture, bio-intensive farming and low external inputs agriculture. These farmers have so far had no local magazine, that clearly expresses the need and problems associated with these alternative farming methods.

We believe this magazine fills this void that has existed for many years. I therefore urge farmers in Kenya and elsewhere to embrace this magazine as their own, to read it, to contribute to its rich information and to share the knowledge learned with neighbours and friends.

This will give the publishers and editors of this magazine the incentive to get more information that is relevant to our unique situation as organic farmers who are dedicated to produce healthy food.

*John W. Njoroge is Director of the Kenya Institute of Organic Farming*

## The Organic Farmer

The Organic Farmer is an independent newspaper for the Kenyan organic farming community. It is published monthly and distributed for free to farmers.

The Organic Farmer is sponsored by BioVision, a Swiss-based foundation for the promotion of sustainable development.

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# The tree called the “Wonder tree”

*The Neem tree is a multipurpose tree which yields income from al-most all its parts. It has medicinal and agricultural uses.*

By Ilona Eveleens

In Kenya, especially along the Coast, the Neem tree is very well known, in Kiswahili as “Muarubaini”. The tree, which grows up to 30 meters and reaches an age between 100 and 200 years, provides shade and timber. The seeds, leaves and bark can be used to produce medical, cosmetic and insecticide products. Because it is an evergreen and fast growing the Neem tree is a favorite for reforestation. The wood is useful as building timber because termites will not attack it.

## A lot of medicines

The tree starts bearing fruits after 3 to 5 years and is fully productive after 10 years. Under favourable conditions a tree can produce up to 30 kg of seeds per year and 350 kg of leaves. Extracts from seeds and leaves can be turned into medicines against a number of ailments as well as insecticides for agricultural use. The oil especially, produced out of the seeds, is a much sought after ingredient for cosmetic products.

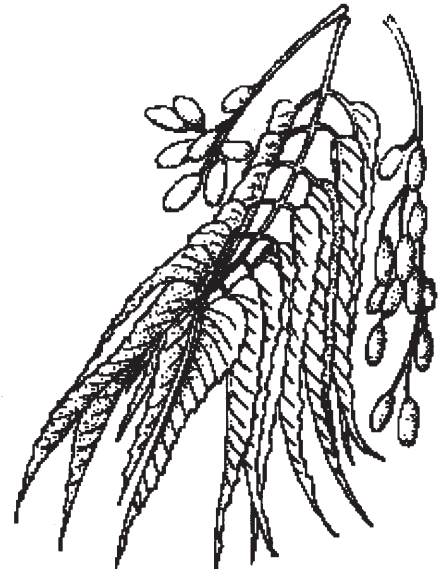
Found in Africa, Asia and South America, the Neem tree grows basically everywhere. It thrives at low as well as high altitudes on sandy, stony or loamy soil. It handles a humid climate with ease but also survives prolonged dry spells. When planted on slopes, the tree can help to combat erosion and landslides. The fallen leaves help to neutralize acidic soils.

## Pesticide use

Termites avoid the Neem tree and that knowledge led to research into the pesticides effects of the tree by the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE). Results show that extracts and smoke can be used as repellent.

Just place a few leaves on embers or on a hot plate such as a chapatti plate and the smoke will prevent insects from coming near. Insects do not die immediately after they come into contact with an extract of the Neem tree, instead they are blocked in their development process and die for sure after a few days.

The healing effect of the seeds, leaves, roots and bark seems to be almost endless. Already in ancient texts from the Asian continent the medicinal effect of the tree are mentioned. In India it has the nickname of “village pharmacy” and others call it the “wonder tree”. And up to now scientists are still doing research into the effectiveness of the Neem tree. Most medicines are made out of the oil from the seeds and the leaves. The oil is produced by pounding the dried kernels while adding a bit of water to make it into a paste. After kneading for a while the oil begins to ooze out.



The leaves are being added to water and mostly drunk as a tea which has a bitter taste (see also page 6).

## How to plant a Neem tree

The Neem tree is best propagated from its seeds which will only germinate if less than three months old. The seeds need to be sprinkled daily while laying on a newspaper which is placed on plastic in the shade. The newspaper has to be renewed every second day. After a week the seed will crack and sprout ready to be planted in compost made of half soil and half cow manure. To propagate from a cutting, a small twig has to be stripped of its leaves and stuck into moist soil.

## More crop yields with Neem-fertilizer

*The BIOP company in Nairobi produces a cheap and environmentally friendly fertilizer for farmers.*

**By Njuguna wa Kamau**

The ambition of any farmer is to get the highest yield possible and a good return for their investment, not only for food self-sufficiency but for commercial purposes. Unfortunately for Kenyan farmers (as is the case with farmers in most sub-Saharan countries in Africa) the soils are poor. They lack essential nutrients to sustain agriculture. In order to feed the increasing population and raise their incomes many farmers rely heavily on chemical fertilizers and pesticides to increase crop yields.

Despite the use of these synthetic farm inputs to boost soil productivity, many farmers are today faced with a sad scenario; as they try to apply more chemical fertilizers to increase yields, the yields are instead decreasing by the year. What many of these farmers do not know is that continued application of modern fertilizers and pesticides increases soil acidity. The chemical pesticides themselves destroy essential organisms such as earthworms that maintain soil structure and fertility. These organisms are also important in controlling harmful pests that damage crops.

### Neem fertilizer

“Our products are a way out of this dilemma”, argues Daniel Mahinda Wahome. He is agricultural expert at



BIOP, a small company in Nairobi, which is producing biological fertilizer products from the Neem tree. The products are available under the Wonder Tree brand.

The fertilizer has a high nutritive value. It is a soil conditioner and should be applied after the land preparation by

mixing thoroughly with the soil. The fertilizer can be used on crops such as cabbages, sukumawiki, tomatoes, bananas, potatoes, onions, soybeans and groundnuts. “Apart from increasing crop yield for the farmer the fertilizer does not leach or increase soil acidity as chemical fertilizers do”, Mahinda says. BIOP will sell the fertilizer through a large network of distributors and stockists throughout the country.

There are other advantages of the new Neem-fertilizer. Most Kenyan farmers are already faced with increasing prices of fertilizer and related farm inputs. Higher fuel costs have also pushed up land preparation costs. The new Neem fertilizer produced by Biop is cheaper than chemical fertilizers. For example one kilogram of organic fertilizer retails at Ksh 25 but its chemical substitute costs Ksh 32/=. Moreover the organic Neem-fertilizer needs only one application per season, while the synthetic alternative will require three applications per season.

BIOP maintains close links with the well known International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) in Nairobi, a research institution which is trying to apply its findings in assisting farmers to practise sustainable agriculture and food security. On the basis of many years of research by ICIPE, Biop has come up with a range of products that hold the future to organic farming in Kenya.

While Neem-fertilizer is already being sold, two other BIOP-products are still in the process of registration at the Kenya Pest Control Product Board to ensure they meet International Pesticide standards. These two products are Neem-Extractive and Neem Cake Powder.

### Other Neem-products

Neem extractive is a broad spectrum pesticide that controls nematodes and sucking and biting insects in vegetables, fruits and legumes. The Neem cake powder can be used as a fertilizer or pesticide. It controls pests in vegetables and fruits. The company hopes to get registration for the two products in the next few months before it releases them into the market.

For Kenyan farmers the change to organic farming is a big challenge; it needs a different way of practising agriculture. The use of organic inputs may



*The use of natural fertilizers increases crop yields for farmers*  
photo: P. Lüthi/Bio Vision

not show immediate results but their effects are long lasting, environmentally friendly and safe. Another reason why organic farming will become the standard practice in future is the fact that many countries which import agricultural products have imposed tough conditions for imports of chemically produced foods.

A lot of information dissemination is needed so that farmers can understand the benefits of using organic farm inputs. BIOP is already working with farmers in selected parts of the country to provide training on the products. An aggressive marketing campaign using seminars, workshops and government sponsored field days is on going. “This is meant to ensure that farmers are given the correct information on their application and use”, BIOP agriculturist Mahinda adds.



Mary Wakonyo shows with pride her organically grown banana crop.

(Photo: P. Kamau)

## “Now I have enough to feed my family”

*Mary Wakonyo is one of the thousands of Kenyan farmers who changed to organic farming*

By Peter Kamau, Ithuri

For many years Mary Wakonyo had used chemical fertilizers and pesticides on her small shamba in Ithuri of Juja Division in Thika District. But she could not understand why the yields kept on decreasing. The answer to her problems came three years ago when extension officers from the Kenya Institute of Organic Farming (KIOF) visited and showed her how to make farm manure and compost, and how to use crop rotation and mulching procedures to conserve soil moisture and to use organic pesticides.

“They introduced me to simple ideas of using organic material to improve soil fertility and control pests. Now I am happy I listened to them”, says the 56-year old mother of five, who does most of the work on her two-piece one acre of land with only occasional assistance from her children.

Her farm has a healthy crop of sukumawiki, bananas, spinach, paw paws, avocado, guavas and passion fruit. The farm products are not only enough to feed her family; she also sells the surplus in her roadside kiosk. “Last year the rains were poor, but I was the

only farmer in this village, who harvested some maize and beans, the rest did not harvest anything”, she says with pride.

Her neighbours may not understand the secret behind her success but it lies in the simple procedure of conserving soil moisture through mulching and careful application of compost and manure. “I realised I had to feed the soil as it was no longer able to produce enough food for me and my family”, she adds. Mary Wakonyo has come together with 15 other women from

*“Now I am able to plant twice a year whereas I could do it only once previously”*

the Ngrigama Women Group. The group continues to gain from training and refresher courses offered by KIOF.

### Natural pesticides

Since Mary Wakonyo changed to organic farming she has never used chemical fertilizer or pesticides. To control fungal diseases such as Early Blight in her tomato crop, she mixes milk with water, then adds bar soap foam to act as a sticker and applies it to the affected crop and it works. For pesticides, she applies chilies, Mexican Marigold

leaves and onions to make a mixture that controls pests. Tobacco leaf extract protects her crops effectively against aphids.

Her two milking cows provide enough manure for the farm. In return, plant residue from the farm provides fodder for the animals. “Before I did not know the use of farm manure. Now it is my main source of fertilizer”, she says. Due to her method Mary says she is now able to plant twice a year, whereas before she could plant only once in a year.

### Lack of buyers

In the past Mary had go to the market to buy produce to sell in her roadside kiosk. Now she gets all from her shamba. But her main concern is marketing of her organic produce. Although aware that organic food products could fetch higher prices than chemically grown alternatives, she has not been able to identify outlets which could buy her vegetables and fruits. “As a result I am forced to sell these items like normal food”, she says.

She would be happy if she was introduced to shops which specialise in organic foods. “If only I could find markets for my organic products, my earnings from these commodities would increase”, she adds. “But anyway, I am lucky to have gone into organic farming”.

# What can be done against storage losses?

*Every farmer is pleased to get a good yield. But pests can destroy the harvest during storage.*

**By Peter Kamau**

Nearly all Kenyan farmers know about threat caused by pests in stored cereals such as maize. Pests do a lot of damage and reduce considerably farmers' profit margin. The ability to store maize longer gives the farmer benefits from market price changes which tend to increase with time.

According to reports post-harvest losses to farmers in Africa are high. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) findings show that African farmers lose between 15 and 50 percent of their harvest every year to pests.

## Reduce contamination

Maize storage management is also important as it reduces chances of the



*The Larger Grain Borer: shown here 10 times bigger than in reality.*  
(Photo G. Goergen, IITA, Benin)



*Infested grain is a big loss to farmers.* (Photo G. Goergen, IITA, Benin)

harvest getting contaminated by poisonous moulds.

Last year a large number of people died from aflatoxin poisoning when residents from parts of Ukambani District in Kenya consumed maize suspected to have been poorly stored and distributed by traders. The incident clearly shows the dangers in poor grain storage.

The most common pests in Kenya are weevils and rats which have been easy to control with chemical pesticide dusts and rat poison.

## Biological pest control

The last few years however have witnessed the invasion of the more de-

structive Larger Grain Borer (LGB), nicknamed "Osama" for its devastating damage to farmstored maize. Introduced from Mexico and Central America into East Africa through relief food in 1990s, the borer has caused a lot of havoc.

For many years scientists in West Africa have carried out research to cope with these pests. They have identified a predator that preys on the borer. One of the scientists, who was worked for a long time with a team searching for means to control the Larger Grain Borer with an other insect, is Dr. Fritz Schulthess, who since 2003 has been at the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE). "The problem is", says Dr. Schulthess, "the predator which targets the male borer can only survive in hot, dry semi-arid areas". Unfortunately for farmers, Kenya's maize growing areas are in the cool highlands where the borer is causing great devastation to smallscale farmers. And many of them can not afford the pesticides.

Research for the moment is focusing on selection of races of the predator, which can do well in cool and semi-arid regions. Some natural enemies have been identified in Mexico and will be introduced soon into the ICIPE laboratories for further research. In the meantime some farmers will have no other choice but to use chemical pesticides if there is a need. But, argues Dr. Schulthess, there are environmentally friendly methods for controlling the pests which may help the farmers to avoid losses (*see box*).

### **Pest Control Tips**

- ◆ Storage facilities should be properly cleaned. Remove undesired grains, cobwebs and other residues which may harbour pests.
- ◆ Storage facilities should be fumigated to kill pests before storing maize.
- ◆ Maize should be harvested immediately it matures. Longer stays in the field lead to husks opening and exposing the grain to pests.
- ◆ Maize should be placed in plastic containers if possible to prevent pest infestations.
- ◆ Shelling the maize will reduce pest damages since most pests prefer maize while still on the cob; even if a farmer has to use pesticides, shelling gives better results. Maize should be sorted before storage to remove infested cobs.
- ◆ The harvest should be properly dried after shelling to prevent mould growth, which leads to aflatoxin poisoning.
- ◆ Shelled maize should be dried in the sun for 3 - 4 days to bring the moisture content to 14 percent or below which is safe for longterm storage.
- ◆ Wood ash, cypress and eucalyptus leaves help repel most pests but the effect is not long lasting. When there is no true biological control method for the Larger Grain Borer and other pests, farmers should continue using the available recommended pesticides for control.

# High standard for the export of vegetables

*Consumers in Europe are becoming more concerned about the quality, safety and reliability of the products they buy.*

## **The Organic Farmer**

Since the beginning of 2005 the European Union (EU) has set standards for import requirements under the Euro Retailer Produce Working Group Guidelines for Good Agricultural Practice (EUREPGAP) standard. The standard, drawn by supermarket chains in Europe is aimed at producing fresh fruits and vegetables that are safe, socially acceptable and of high quality.

### **Registration**

All suppliers and exporters of fresh fruits and vegetables to the European supermarkets, whether from the EU countries or outside have to comply with this standard. The producers and exporters who do not meet these requirements will not be allowed access to the European market. The EU is the single largest consumer of fresh fruits and vegetables exported from Kenya.

Among the requirements for small scale farmers to access the EU markets is that they should form legally registered groups with the Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services or the Attorney Generals



*Customers in Europe prefer organically produced fresh vegetables and fruits. (Photo P. Lüthi/BioVision)*

Chambers. Alternatively, they can form a cooperative under the Ministry of Cooperative Development. They must also maintain proper records of all group members, farm records, registration certificates, and proper sanitary and crop handling procedures.

The produce must meet traceability and residue level requirements. This allows EUREPGAP products to be traced back to the farm or group of registered farms where they were produced. The standard allows only a certain specified residue level in all food imports.

Farmers must use certified seeds. To avoid pollution, the pesticides and chemical fertilizers must be carefully handled. Operators must wear protective gear while handling pesticides. Farm chemicals must be properly stored to avoid leakage and pollution of the environment.

Storage containers must be disposed in a responsible manner by burning or burying them in deep soil. They should not come into contact with water sources.

### **Working conditions**

For proper disposal of human waste, clean toilets must be built for the workers on the farm. Their working conditions including wages, and safety must be addressed. Child labour is discouraged.

## Dear Readers!

In future we will reserve this page for the letters to the editor. We would like to hear your opinion on our newspaper *The Organic Farmer*. If you have comments or remarks, please write to us.

We are interested in getting a feedback to enable us to improve the content and meet the needs of the farming community.

If you have advice for your fellow farmers, send them to us. And if you have questions about organic farming, we will find experts who can give you the correct answer.s.

Address your letters to:

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## Some products made from Neem

*BIOP Nairobi offers a wide range of health products made from Neem.*

### **Neem Herbal Tea**

The tea is 100% pure Neem product made from dried Neem leaves. It contains no additives. It is best used as preventive-curative in treatment of sore throat, colds, fever, food poisoning, low in cholesterol, malaria, hypertension, respiratory problems, diabetes, hepatitis and kidney ailments. Taken regularly, helps to eliminate fatigue. Neem is regarded as one of the best blood purifying herbs.

### **Neem Seed Oil**

This product is a refined Neem oil from the neem seeds. It has been blended with lemon grass to create an excellent therapeutic oil and skin cleanser. Seed oil can be applied directly to the infected areas of skin and scalp. It is a fantastic natural treatment for rashes, burns, cuts, bruises, fungal infections,

acne, pimples and other skin blemishes. Neem seed oil has been found to be effective against inea pedia, the fungus that causes athletes foot. Fungal infections of this type affect eight out of ten people in Kenya at some time or another.

### **Neem Soap**

This is a herbal soap made from pure Neem oil. It has natural skin moisturising oil that makes the skin soft and supple. It assists in preventing as well as healing many skin and scalp ailments, inflammation, fungal infections, burns, cuts and bruises. Neem soap alleviates the intense itching and scarring which is the main problems associated with chickenpox. Take cool baths to reduce itching.

### **Neem Leaf Capsules**

Made from sun dried grown Neem leaves, they are used for the same purpose as Neem tea. Neem is one of the most potent immuno-stimulant available herbs.

# Mulching protects the soil

*Responsible farmers take care of the soil. They use the age old mulching method.*

Have you ever seen farmers sitting in the sun, when they are having a chat about issues affecting them? No! They are looking for the shade to protect themselves against the hot sun. Why do we not do the same with the soil?

In agriculture we have a special word for this protection of the soil: mulch-

**The soil is the most important resource for producing food, it must be protected at all times from erosion and general degradation.**

ing. It means: spreading organic matter on the soil surface and covering it. Mulching will reduce the evaporation of moisture from the soil surface. Mulching reduces excessive heating of the soil.

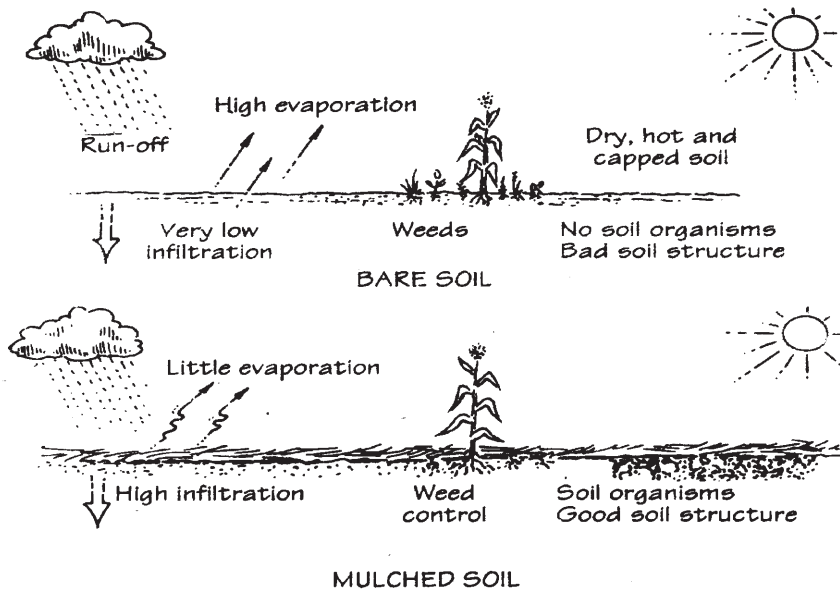
That makes better conditions for the decomposition and mineralisation

of organic matter under the layer of mulch. Mulching helps to reduce the possibility and effects of soil erosion in cases of strong and heavy rains. The cheapest and easiest method of mulching is to use crop residues and tree cuttings. Since many different kinds of materials can be used, one should identify useful materials locally.

Mulching with straw or dry grass provides a clean surface that protects the fruit of various crops such as tomatoes. Mulching with compost will improve the nutrient level of the soil as the compost is drawn into the soil by earthworms.

Mulching needs to be monitored carefully to avoid problems and achieve full benefits. Green vegetative matter, for instance, should not be used as it may encourage pests and diseases.

Many problems can be avoided by using mulch during the dry season and applying mulch two weeks after planting to allow the seedlings to develop. But one has to look carefully at mulch brought from another area, as it may contain weed seeds and pests. (TOF)



## The positive effects of mulching

- ◆ Evaporation is reduced. This, along with increased infiltration, allows maximum utilisation of rainfall.
- ◆ The impact of raindrops is cushioned, thus reducing surface sealing.
- ◆ Water run-off is reduced, thus minimising soil erosion and improving infiltration of water into the soil.
- ◆ Seedlings are shaded and protected.
- ◆ Temperature extremes are moderated, thus seedlings are protected from extreme heat or cold.
- ◆ Crusting and compaction are reduced resulting in better seed emergence.
- ◆ Weeds are better controlled by mulching.

## News-Corner

### • Beneficial Pests

Any farmer detests pests because of the damage they cause to crops. But what many farmers do not know is that some insects and other pests are in fact useful inhabitants of agricultural areas. Take the mole for example. It feeds on a wide range of insects. Its burrows aerate the soil while the tunnels help to drain excess water. To reduce their damage to crops, a farmer should place green castor oil beans in the tunnels; this encourages the moles to move away to areas where they can not cause much havoc.

### • Insect traps

Many insects are attracted to different colours. To reduce damage to crops in the field, insects such as wasps and aphids can be controlled by making a shallow yellow painted bowl filled with soapy water. Any insect drawn to the bowl will drown in it. If collected, these pests can provide food for fish or chicken. A farmer can also experiment with various colours to find which ones excite particular pests.

### • Useful birds

Duck and geese rearing may not seem an important occupation to most farmers. However these birds are cheap to feed as they live on grass and weeds. Geese are militant and can serve as guards since they become aggressive when strangers appear in their territory. Ducks eat insects such as slugs and snails in mulched gardens; they do not scratch the soil as chicken do. Their manure is rich in nitrogen and phosphorus. There must be water in their enclosure so they can dip their heads, as these are water birds.

### • Try garlic

Garlic and onions have the effect of managing a variety of pests and diseases in the garden. Their strong smell repels aphids, beetles and even rats. To make a mixture, crush one garlic bulb in one litre of water and spray on the crop; alternatively crush 3 bulbs and mix in paraffin, let it stay for three days, then add 10 litres of soapy water and spray. This will eliminate most pests and disease-causing organisms.

### • Protect your nursery

Nurseries and seedbeds need to be disease- and pest-free. Farmers should use clean, fertile soil. If plants are being produced for sale, the soil needs to be sterilized. The easiest way to do this is to pour boiling water into the layers of soil no deeper than 2 inches. The boiling water will kill off most pests and bacteria.

# Advocating for the Organic Movement

*Many stumbling blocks hinder the development of organic agriculture. KOAN seeks to promote the organic movement.*

**By Eustace Kiarri Gacanja**

The Kenya Organic Agriculture Network (KOAN) is the National Coordinating Body for organic agriculture activities in Kenya. It came into being as a result of a consultative process that culminated in a seminar and workshop dubbed, "Grow for the Future" held late March 2004.

During the seminar and workshop, participants mapped out the future of organic agriculture in Kenya and formed an all-inclusive National Coordinating Body, KOAN,



for the purposes of addressing challenges facing the organic subsector.

KOAN's mandate is to coordinate, facilitate and provide leadership and professional services to all members and stakeholders in the areas of pro-

duction, training, marketing, certification, lobbying and advocacy. It seeks to promote the organic movement in Kenya, to evolve and become a highly beneficial and integral industry with direct impacts on the environment and socio-economic status of farmers.

It is organized into five sub-committees, namely: Production, Training, Certification and Standards Setting, Marketing, Lobbying, Advocacy and Networking. KOAN has a steering committee/board of 14 members.

## Broad-based survey

This year, in 2005, KOAN will establish the detailed and true picture of the organic sector in Kenya by carrying out a baseline organic agriculture status survey.

The survey will establish who is doing what and where. It will also collect figures in terms of certified and non-certified producers, organic market outlets, products, number of people directly employed by the sector and its contribution to the GDP (Gross Domestic Product). It will also determine the various opportunities available and stumbling blocks that hinder development of the organic subsector.

For any development initiative to take place, it has to operate within a policy framework. This is currently lacking as regards organic agriculture in Kenya.

Information gathered from the survey will form the basis of developing an organic agriculture policy which KOAN will lobby for implementation.

Though thousands of smallscale farmers grow organically, they have not been certified because of the associated costs and as such they cannot sell their products as organic. KOAN will work to develop a simplified, credible and affordable certification system for smallscale farmers for the local markets. To ensure that farmers have access to markets, KOAN will act as a linkage between producers and buyers and provide timely market information to both. For the local markets, we shall work with farmers, members and other partners to establish local organic market outlets.

KOAN is a membership organisation, open to any organisation or individual willing to join. KOAN will work towards increasing membership and developing other aspects of organic agriculture. If you are interested in joining KOAN or participating in its activities, please contact:

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## Unjust dealings with farmers

*There are no fair rules in the world agricultural trade.*

The current agricultural policy of the European Union and of the USA makes not only the world's poor nations suffer, but also the majority of European farmers, who are short-changed by the system now in place. According to a report of the development-organisation Oxfam, seven big landowners in Spain received a total of over 19 million dollars (KSH 1.4 billion) in EU subsidies in 2003. This is roughly the same amount that was shared among 12,700 smaller Spanish farms that same year, and is equivalent to the combined annual income of 90,000 peasants in Mozambique.

In most of the other EU countries, the situation is similar, or even worse. In France one quarter of the country's

farmers receive no assistance at all, while 15 percent are given six out of every 10 Euros in subsidies. Every farmer in Germany receives a subsidy equivalent to more than four times the average salary of a German factory worker.

The United States does not differ greatly from the EU in this regard. While 60 percent of farmers do not benefit at all from the 20 billion dollars (KSH.1.5 trillion) in agricultural subsidies doled out by the US-government, ten percent of the biggest and often most profitable producers received 72 percent of the total paid out between 1995 and 2003.

There are currently 2.7 billion people in the world, who live on less than two dollars a day, and 1.2 billion who scrape by on less than one dollar. The vast majority are in Africa, Asia and Latin America. (TOF)

## *The Organic Farmer* in May:



- ◆ Organically produced vegetables and fruits are healthy. But how can farmers access European markets?
- ◆ Good seeds are vital. But do farmers get them?
- ◆ Manure and compost are the soil's best friends. How to make them?