

Conservation farming to improve yields and profits in Zimbabwe

Foundations for Farming



Photo: Eleanor Bentall/Tearfund

Foundations for Farming (FFf) is an initiative aimed at bringing transformation to individuals, communities and nations through faithful and productive use of the land. Conservation farming techniques are promoted, which conserve soil and water by using surface cover (mulch) to minimise runoff and erosion and improve the conditions for plant establishment and growth. Minimum or no tillage is used when planting the crops. These methods result in higher yields and less dependency on food aid during times of low rainfall and drought.

Tearfund's partner, River of Life Westgate (RLW), is training groups of farmers throughout Zimbabwe in conservation farming techniques with a strong emphasis on the FFF principles of doing everything:

- on time (planning ahead; preparing well; starting early; never being late!)
- to a high standard (no shortcuts),
- without wasting (time, soil, water, sunlight, seed, nutrients, labour, energy, opportunity etc.)
- with joy (honouring the Lord)

Ongoing training is carried out on a monthly basis followed by visits to the agricultural plots by the trainers to reinforce the techniques and monitor

progress. Many of the farms have demonstration plots for other farmers to see their results. As yields increase, participating farmers make seed available for new farmers who want to get involved.

Impact on beneficiaries

The results have been telling among the 50,000 households that have been involved, with increased cereal yields between 50 and 200 per cent. This enables them to not only feed their own families, but to sell crop surpluses and use the income to boost other aspects of their lives, such as children's education.

In Mutoko maize was grown the traditional way next to the FFF plots to see how effective the method really is. In one area the yield from the FFF plot was 300kg compared to 60kg from a neighbouring plot of the same size. The area had experienced a very dry period lasting several weeks but their FFF crops still did well.

"I attended a farming meeting in which we learnt about and saw a film on farming Jesus' way. The name Jesus was enough to draw my interest and I immediately decided to try my luck. After all we were not asked to give up our traditional methods altogether. There was no harm in trying. What was important was to follow instructions. Fortunately our instructor is, and always has been, a man who is always ready to listen to enquiries to the extent of showing his own plot for demonstration.

Naturally, any effort produces results. My harvest was double my usual harvest in previous seasons, mainly because the harvest of the experimental plot had very good crops which were very large. At first, the spacing seemed large and wasteful but as the crops grew, I noticed the two plants per hole were compensatory and it ended just right. Crops spread out very well with enough aeration producing huge fully seeded cobs. This is a proven method worth recommending."

Mr. G. Sidubi, Headman, Kensington, Bulawayo