



AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY PROGRAMME FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA (APPSA)

BLACKSMITH RETURNS TO FARMING

Fleming Chookole, 49, of Mwiinga village in Chinkankata district in Zambia has returned to farming after abandoning it for blacksmithing for several years. Today, he is a lead farmer and inspirational Conservation Farming Unit (CFU) farmer among villagers—thanks to the Agricultural Productivity Programme for Southern Africa (APPSA) which introduced the crop and soil improvement programme to Fleming and his community.

Fleming's frustrations with farming emanated from the perennial low yields he obtained as a result of mono-cropping; declining soil fertility, lack of knowledge on best farming practices and poor marketing practices. Today, Fleming has been trained in conservation farming, which relies on three principles: crop rotation, minimum soil disturbance and early land preparation. He was also introduced to new crops like soyabeans and the use of certified seed, herbicides and pesticides and trained in safe use of agro-chemicals. The trainings involved hands-on demonstrations. As a result Fleming has realized improved yields and APPSA has linked him to agro-dealers and marketing companies for ease of selling his produce.

Fleming is participating in the APPSA programme for the third year now. From depending on selling home-made buckets as a blacksmith Fleming has become a fulltime farmer. Today the fertility of his soils has been restored through implementing a rigorous legume-cereal crop rotation (soyabeans followed by maize and other crops). In this current cropping season, he has planted two hectares of soyabeans, four hectares of maize and a lima (0.25 ha) of cowpeas, sugar beans and a hectare of groundnuts, all under conservation agriculture.

The returns from farming have been so good for him that for the past two seasons, Fleming has sent his children to school without financial difficulties. He has abandoned his blacksmithing to solely depend on farming as a source of livelihood. Farming has enabled him to buy four heads of cattle and build a slightly bigger house; and he plans to build an even bigger one in the future. These achievements were unattainable during his times as a blacksmith, a trade which he said always kept him busy and away from his family trying to sell his wares at the market. Farming has provided Fleming with an

opportunity to spend more time working with his family and profits have been more attractive.

The predictable income from soybeans enables Fleming to forecast his income. This year, he expects to get about 30x50kg bags of soybeans, which is being sold at 2 Zambia Kwacha per kg (About 0.22USD). He wants to expand the area under soybean production because growing the crop under conservation agriculture is not labour-intensive, and the crop has a ready market; his community has introduced bulk marketing of crops through aggregating.

For Fleming, the major lesson learnt is that good soil practices rekindle soil fertility and crop diversification broadens incomes and enhances food security.

For more about the success story please contact Mr Ndashe Kapulu the Principal Investigator for the project at the Zambia Agriculture Research Institute (ndacho81@gmail.com)