

Teaching skills key to selection of a successful model farmer

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Farmer trainers should be selected based on their interest and ability to teach others rather than on their successes in implementing farming techniques, shows a new study led by Steve Franzel, a scientist at the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF).

In the study by Franzel, Charles Wambugu and Tutui Nanok, 126 adopters of fodder shrubs, fast-growing leguminous shrubs for feeding [dairy cows](#), in Kenya took part in the study that found that 40% of expert farmers were not effective disseminators.

About 225,000 smallholder farmers in [East Africa](#) are growing fodder shrubs to increase their milk production. The overall impact of the shrubs in terms of additional [net income](#) from milk is high, at US\$19.7 million to \$29.6 million in Kenya alone over the past 15 years.

In most extension projects the model farmer is selected based on their expertise and how successfully they have been in attaining and in some cases superseding the desired results.

"This finding has great implications on how extension is practiced," said Franzel, "It means that choosing a farmer to demonstrate and teach other farmers will only be as effective as their skills in passing on the information."

The results of the study suggest that extension programs that choose farmer trainers on the basis of their farming expertise will not promote

[dissemination](#) as effectively as those that choose trainers on the basis of their dissemination skills.

"I have helped my fellow farmers in improving their farming methods because I have been able to show them how much more milk I am producing thanks to the fodder [shrubs](#). I have also been able to teach them how to increase milk production on their farms because I have had training on how to teach other farmers," said Rose Wanjiku, one of the farmers who was part the study.

"Changing how we choose farmer trainers in this way would see more extension projects reap the full benefits of their work, " said Franzel who was speaking at the ongoing, Innovations in Extension and Advisory Services: Linking Knowledge to Policy and Action Conference in Nairobi, which was attended by various high-level officials including Dr. Romano Kiome, the Permanent Secretary at the Kenya Ministry of Agriculture.

This major international conference seeks to bolster faltering support for government agencies, private operators, and individuals who collectively provide a critical link in the field between agriculture knowledge holders and policy makers and millions of struggling smallholder farmers, in developing countries and more particularly in Africa.

Provided by World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF)

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