Developing Countries Farm Radio Network

Pack 12, Item 3

Type: Script

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**Testing a new farming method**

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Information on this subject area was requested by DCFRN participants in Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, India, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Swaziland, Taiwan (Republic of China), Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Presenter: George Atkins

**Special note**

Before using the information in this item, please read the note at the end concerning related DCFRN Items.

**Suggested introduction**

We at this radio station are part of a world-wide information network that gathers farming information from developing countries all over the world. It's the Developing Countries Farm Radio Network, sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency, Massey Ferguson, and the University of Guelph.

Through this Network, we bring you information on ways to increase food supplies for your family, or to sell—ways that other farmers have used successfully.

Again today, we have more on trying out a new idea. Here's George Atkins.

**ATKINS:** What do you do when an extension agent or some other adviser suggests that you should use a new farming method you haven't tried before?

Perhaps you first think to yourself, "What if this new method doesn't turn out to be good for me? If it fails, I will be the one who loses out." Perhaps you will think, "It's no risk for the adviser; I am the one who will take the risk and I can't afford to take a chance."

Well, let me tell you a true story about Komlan Latá‚ávi, a farmer in Togo who had this very same problem.

Komlan had always planted his maize in hills, but the extension agent in his village wanted him to try planting it a different way. He suggested that Komlan should make long ridges in his field and plant the seeds in rows—one row on each ridge. The extension agent said he would get a higher yield if he'd plant maize this way.

Well, Komlan thought about it for quite a while and finally decided to try out the idea—but just in a small way to see if it would be good for him. This way, he would not be taking a big risk that he couldn't afford to take; and if the new method should turn out to be a failure, he wouldn't lose too much.

Here's what he did.

He cut some nice tall stakes in the bush, and then he went into his field and marked out two plots, exactly the same size. Both of them were 20 metres (65 feet) square. This was a convenient size on his farm, although they could have been smaller. He was carefulto pick out a place for his plots where they would both have the same kind of soil.

Just think of that for a moment now—two plots in Komlan's field, each marked out with a stake in each corner, and all four sides of each plot are 20 metres (65 feet) long.

One of these plots he called his "control" plot. That's where he would plant maize in hills in the usual way; the other plot was his "test" plot, where he would test the new method. On the test plot, he would plant maize in rows, one on top of each ridge. Komlan told a neighbour about his plan and got him to help form the ridges in the test plot, and the hills in the control plot. Komlan and his wife then planted their regular variety of maize on both plots on the same day. On the control plot they planted it in hills, and on the test plot they planted the seeds in a line on the ridges as the extension agent advised, leaving about 30 centimetres (1 foot) between seeds in the rows.

The maize began to grow in both plots, and later when Komlan and his wife weeded the crop, he marked in his record book how much time it took to weed the test plot and how much time for the control plot.

And do you know, he found that it took him twice as long to weed the control plot, planted in hills, as it took to weed the test plot! When he thought about it, Komlan decided that weeding the test plot was faster because the maize in it was growing in even rows.

Part way through the season, as Komlan and his wife looked at how the maize was growing, they could see that the test plot looked better than the control plot. But they thought they should wait until harvest time before deciding whether or not this new method was worthwhile. You see, it took extra time, early in the season, to form the ridges and carefully plant the seeds in even rows.

When harvest did come, Komlan and his wife counted very carefully the number of basins of maize they were able to pick from each plot. After shelling the maize and putting it in sacks, they found they had two sacks of grain from the test plot and one sack from the control plot.

Imagine that—they had found that planting maize in rows on ridges produced twice as much maize as they could get from planting it in hills the way they had done before.

It had taken a little extra time, but Komlan and his wife decided that the new method was a good idea for them. They also thought about what they would have done if the new method had not been a success—if the yield on their test plot had been lower. They decided that they would not have lost much because they tried out the new method on only part of their land. So they were happy that they had tried it on a small scale the first time.

And what did they do the next season? You guessed it—Komlan and his wife planted all their maize in rows in order to increase the amount they could harvest and also the amount of money they could earn from what they sold.

Serving Agriculture, the Basic Industry, this is George Atkins.

**Notes**

1. This is the second item in this Package that encourages farmers to try out new ideas, and to try them first on a small scale to reduce the risk. It is suggested that you use the informationin this item in association with the other one, Item 2, but that you use Item 2 first.

2. All farmers should be encouraged to keep farm records, but before any farmer will adopt this practice, he/she must see the value in doing it. This item is one of several that isintended to help your farmers realize the value of keeping good farm records, as records are mentioned briefly in it. You are urged to use the information in this item in association withinformation from:

Good Farm Records: A Key to Higher Profits, Part 1, Getting Started - DCFRN Package 11, Item 1

Good Farm Records: A Key to Higher Profits, Part 2, A Diary - DCFRN Package 11, Item 2

Good Farm Records: A Key to Higher Profits, Part 3, Records Help in Cropping Decisions - DCFRN Package 12, Item 1

3. DCFRN Information Polls show that in many regions, a large percentage of farmers who receive our information may not be able to read or write. It is possible that in some cases their children may be able to help them with their record keeping. If applicable, you might wish to suggest this to your farmers.