



Improved fallows provide benefits for farmers

Notes to broadcaster

Improved fallows - growing a mix of trees and shrubs on fallow land - can help farmers restore fertility to their land more quickly in situations where it is no longer possible to leave the land fallow for a long period of time. Farmers who use improved fallows can benefit from increased food security and access to useful products such as fuelwood and timber. Many farmers who use improved fallows report that their income increases because they spend less on fertilizer.

Start of program

SOUND OF RUNNING FOOTSTEPS.

Farmer 1: (upset) Sam, Sam are you there? Come quickly... someone is occupying my field!

Farmer 2: Hello neighbour! What's the problem? You say someone is occupying your field?

Farmer 1: I was just coming home from town - passing my fields - when I noticed something peculiar. The field that I left fallow with grasses - someone is invading it! I came straight here to ask if you knew anything about it.

Farmer 2: Somebody is invading your land?

Farmer 1: Well - somebody is using it. They are making ridges and cultivating their own crops. I wasn't growing crops on that land because the soil was poor. I left the land to rest so the soil could regenerate. That's why nothing was growing there.

Farmer 2: I bet it is those two brothers - Bobo and Ben. Suko's children. I heard they were grabbing land around here...

Farmer 1: Well, if it is them, they are going to hear from me!

Farmer 2: Well, whoever it is, I don't think your problem is going to go away. There is not enough land for everybody and people are getting desperate and planting crops wherever they want.

Farmer 1: But I can't allow this. I won't have someone else taking my land. There must be some solution!

Farmer 2: You know, you might be interested in a new method I use called 'improved fallow'. Instead of leaving the land vacant, I plant trees and shrubs on fallow land. Why don't you come on inside and I'll tell you more.



SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS.

FADE IN MUSIC AND HOLD UNDER NARRATOR.

Narrator: It's true that this farmer finds himself in a tricky situation. On one hand, his land is no longer fertile - it is almost useless for growing crops! And yet, when he lets it lie fallow - to re-build fertility - other people might start using his land for THEIR own crops.

Let's find out what his neighbour has to say about improved fallows.

FADE OUT MUSIC. FADE IN SOUND OF CONVERSATION.

Farmer 2: My friend, you are saying that your soil is no longer good for growing crops. I understand you because a few years ago, MY land was also no longer productive. The soil was so poor - it was almost impossible to grow maize. I needed to let the land rest. But instead of letting my land rest with grasses, I planted trees and shrubs.

Farmer 1: You planted trees on your fallow land? I've never heard of that.

Farmer 2: Some people call it 'improved fallow'. It means that you leave the land to lie fallow - but you plant trees and shrubs on it. It's a different, better way of resting the land.

Farmer 2: But what about the soil? How does this help to make your soil fertile again?

Farmer 1: The trees help a lot to return the nutrients to the soil more quickly! I leave my field for only two seasons and then I start working the land again. Much faster than a regular fallow. And I need very little fertilizer to get a very good harvest.

Farmer 2: And while the trees are growing on it...others can't use it to plant their crops.

Farmer 1: Exactly. That's why you could benefit from this method. And it's really quite simple. I plant trees and shrubs after maize. After I harvest the maize I leave the trees to grow for another one or two seasons. Then I cut the trees and mix the leaves and branches into the soil. Of course I use the other parts of the tree for fuelwood.

Farmer 2: Maybe this could be part of the solution to my problem...

Farmer 1: Why don't you come over and see my fields tomorrow? We can talk more about it.

FADE OUT SOUNDS OF CONVERSATION.

FADE IN MUSIC AND HOLD UNDER NARRATOR.



Narrator: Planting shrubs and trees on fallow land can be a way for farmers to make their land productive again. Farmers who plant trees report that their soils improve, they spend less money on fertilizer and they have fuelwood and timber from the trees that they cut.

MUSIC TO END PROGRAM.

Acknowledgements

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Information sources

Improved fallows for western Kenya: An extension guideline, Benjamin Amadalo et al., World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), Nairobi, Kenya. Available on line at <http://www.knowledgebank.irri.org/cglrc/icraf/Improvedfallow.pdf>

