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# Package 90, Script 10

April 2010

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**Composting, a better practice to improve soil fertility: The case of Dien**

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### **Notes to broadcaster**

The profitability of our farms has been decreasing day by day for the past few years. This is mostly related to climate-related uncertainties and to the fact that farmers are not aware of new farming techniques. This affects the quality of the soil.

This radio script was produced in the entrance room of a village chief. It provides information on a topic that is one solution for decreased soil quality, and encourages farmers to try composting in order to improve their yields and fertilize their soils.

This script is based on actual interviews. You could use this script as inspiration to research and write a script on a similar topic in your area. Or you might choose to produce this script on your station, using voice actors to represent the speakers. If so, please make sure to tell your audience at the beginning of the program that the voices are those of actors, not the original people involved in the interviews.

**Characters**

Amadou Neguetan Fomba: farmer in Dien

Tafara Fomba: farmer in Dien

Bah N’Golo Fomba: Chief of Dien village

Seydou Doumbia: agricultural extension worker in Dien

Malamine Simpara: technician, agricultural extension worker

*Musical break*

**Lamine Togola:** This is Radio Fanaka, the voice of farmers, fishermen and cattle-breeders. We went to the village of Dien, which is located six kilometres from Fana. Farming is the main source of revenue in Dien.

In this program, we will talk about composting. To speak on composting, we have with us a famous farmer, Amadou Neguetan Fomba.

*Hens cackling, birds shrieking*

**Lamine Togola:** With Amadou Fomba, a farmer from Dien, we will talk about what it takes to do improved composting. We will also discuss the impact of composting on his crop’s yields, and the potential benefits of composting compared to overusing chemical fertilizers.

**Amadou Neguetan Fomba:** To make compost, I dig a hole one metre deep, two metres wide and two metres long in our pasture. Then we throw in organic waste such as kitchen scraps, since we make those compost holes close to houses. We also throw in corn stalks and some soil. We add water from time to time. We know that it will decompose before May because we dig our pits in February. And in May, when it is ready, we start to put some in the fields. This is how I do my composting.

**Lamine Togola:** Does compost make your soil fertile?

**Amadou Neguetan Fomba:** You can reduce the use or the amount of chemical fertilizer you use by applying very good quality compost. It also helps the soil to stay moist.

**Lamine Togola:** How have your yields been affected by compost?

**Amadou Neguetan Fomba:** Thanks to composting, my yields are excellent. All sorts of crops grow very well in soil that receives compost.

**Lamine Togola:** What differences are there between using compost and using chemical fertilizer?

**Amadou Neguetan Fomba:** The difference between chemical fertilizer and compost is that fertilizer makes plants grow faster, but if there is not enough rain, it can “burn” the plants. Then the leaves turn brown and fold up.

Also, compost has a longer lasting effect than chemical fertilizers.

*Musical break*

**Lamine Togola:** After speaking with Amadou Neguetan Fomba, we will talk with Tafara Fomba, who is a farmer in Dien. Tafara does not use compost. (*Speaking to Tafara*) Why don’t you do composting?

**Tafara Fomba:** I grow cotton and corn. I do not compost because I do not have the materials. It is difficult for me to do compost without a cart and oxen. I also need water. Water is a rare thing in Dien. These are the reasons that keep me from composting. I use chemical fertilizers every year. It is fine, but it also has inconveniences, the first one being that the price of fertilizer increases every year. Using it also tends to degrade the soil.

**Lamine Togola:** Between compost and fertilizer, what will you choose to use next year?

**Tafara Fomba:** I am thinking about it, but I would prefer composting over chemical fertilizer, in spite of its difficulties. A field that receives enough compost has a similar yield as a field on which you put chemical fertilizer.

**Lamine Togola:** NowSeydou Doumbia, an agricultural extension worker in Dien, will tell us about the importance of compost for the soil.

**Seydou Doumbia:** Compost is very important. First, if a farmer uses compost, he will have a better yield compared to chemical fertilizer. Plus, compost rejuvenates the soil. It is like the difference between two cloths, one made of cotton and one made from nylon. When you soak them in water, which of them will dry faster? The nylon cloth will dry faster. Using compost makes your soil like the cotton cloth: it retains water longer than a nylon cloth. The practice of composting makes the soil fertile and fights against climate change by helping to keep moisture in the soil.

**Lamine Togola:** Malamine Simpara, technician, agricultural extension worker and coordinator of the Regional Centre for Potable Water and Purification at Low Cost, explains composting to us.

**Malamine Simpara:** A farmer makes and uses compost for three reasons: first, to clean up and keep garbage away from the house. Second, compost can be sold for income. And third, for the farmers’ personal use – to increase yields and improve soil quality. There are several ways to make compost. Here’s one way: dig a one metre-deep, three metre-long hole, and, if possible, concrete the walls and the bottom. After filling up the hole with kitchen waste, soil and crop residues and animal manure that can decompose, water it from time to time. You will need to dig two similar holes because, after two to three months, you need to transfer the contents of the compost hole to another hole. This transfer process must be done two to three times to ensure better ventilation and minimize nutrient losses.

The compost hole must be maintained for four to six months to be well-decomposed, and must be covered by banco (*Editor’s note: banco is soil mixed with water*).

Some make compost above ground between four walls of stone, banco or cement. In this case, the construction should be two metres deep and five metres long.

Around March or April, you can apply compost in your field at intervals of one metre. Between 20 and 30 kilograms of compost should be deposited in the field. That is, each pile of compost that is added to the field should weigh 20 to 30 kilograms. In my opinion, one must add five to twenty tons of compost per hectare of land.

You can estimate how much compost you’ve used by weighing the basket in which you carry compost to the field.

**Lamine Togola:** Mr. Simpara, what advice do you give to farmers on the practice of composting?

**Malamine Simpara:** My advice about composting is as follows: the farmer should not think that the working year lasts only four months, but rather that it spreads over the 12 months of the year. Only hard work will pay off. And do not limit yourself to digging one single hole for composting. Dig several compost holes for a better yield. This is my first piece of advice. My second piece of advice is that you should know all the places where you add compost in your field: you should add compost where the soil is very poor.

It is true that it is difficult to wean oneself from the use of fertilizers. But composting remains a good way to improve the health of our soil.

**Lamine Togola:** Bah N’Golo Fomba, chief of the village of Dien, has been a farmer for a long time. Every year, he uses 40 tons of compost in his field. After a short musical break, he will have some advice for us.

*Musical break*

**Bah N’Golo Fomba:** Making compost is an obligation for every crop farmer. Because chemical fertilizer is good for today, but very bad for tomorrow. Compost improves the health of the soil. We notice that every year we need to increase the dose of chemical fertilizer per hectare.

And this is why we do composting.

**Lamine Togola:** What message would you like to pass along?

**Bah N’Golo Fomba:** I have been passing along this message for a long time. I started by saying to people: “I will gladly take the garbage that you ignore. And if the fact that I pick up your garbage to do my compost hurts you, you will do the same thing.” I was so interested in compost that I picked up all the garbage of the village to do my compost.

**Lamine Togola:** This was a program from Radio Fanaka. Working on this program were Lamine Togola Lamzo, Mariam Dao, Old Karamoko Traoré, Bakary Bagayoko and Youssouf Keita, all from Radio Fanaka.

We send special greetings to the chief of the village as well as all the whole village of Dien.

Before we part, here is a question to consider: What makes compost a good thing?

Prepare your answers and send them to Radio Fanaka Banankabougou, facing the *Banque Nationale pour le Développement Agricole*, in Fana, telephone: 21 25 33 48, Email: [lamzeau@yahoo.fr](mailto:lamzeau@yahoo.fr).

Good bye and be well.

**Acknowledgements**

Contributed by: Lamine Togola, Radio Fanaka, Mali, a Farm Radio International broadcasting partner.

Reviewed by: John FitzSimons, Associate Professor, School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, University of Guelph, Canada.

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* the chief of the village of Dien
* the agricultural extension worker of Dien Kalifabougou
* the population of Dien
* Radio Fanaka

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**Sources of information**

* CREPA-Mali
* Chamber of Agriculture of Fana
* *La CMDT* de Fana
* AFRRI Mali

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