

# Pack 95, Item 7

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**Top dozen fixes from ‘Seventy-five ways to fix your farmer radio program’**

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### Notes to broadcaster

Radio, more than any other medium, speaks the language of farmers. Farmers count on radio to provide the information they need, when they need it. And farmers want radio to include them in discussions of how best to grow the crops that feed their families, and how to make some money at the market.

Too often, radio lets farmers down. Farmers tune out when the most important information isn't there or when lectures by professors, politicians and promoters drown out farmers’ voices.

It doesn't have to be this way. Broadcasters in Africa *can* produce better programs for farmers. They can meet farmers’ needs, involve farmers, and make the broadcasts more interesting. What is needed is to shine a light on good practice and share it widely across Africa.

In 2010, Farm Radio International gathered information about farmer radio programs from radio stations in Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi. We visited twenty stations and two production houses and listened to their farmer programs. We posed hundreds of questions to the people making the programs and to the people listening to them. Based on our findings, we are publishing a list of tips for broadcasters who want to improve their farmer programs starting right now!

Positive change rarely happens overnight – but it does start with one forward step. We have grouped these tips into three categories: *quick fixes*, *middle-sized improvements*, and *the big stuff*. We encourage you to consider implementing the “quick fixes.” If they work out, move on to more complex improvements. Before long, you will have a transformed radio program – more effective and more fun – with more job satisfaction too!

For this resource pack, we have chosen our "Top dozen" fixes, including a few from each category of the original document. For the complete document, go to <http://www.farmradio.org/broadcaster-resources/special-resources/>.

A note about the title: we will be happy when "*Seventy-five ways to fix your farmer program*" becomes "*Ninety-nine ways to fix your farmer program*"! But that depends on ***you***. Contact us and tell us about your ideas to improve farmer programs, and things to avoid. We will name everyone who provides suggestions that we use in the next edition. Contact us by e-mail at info@farmradio.org and put "**Seventy-five**" in the e-mail message subject line.

And good luck to all of you!

1. **Quick fixes:** *These are things you can do right now, next week, and over the next months, with no new resources and probably without asking anyone for permission.*

Note: Numbers in brackets refer to the original document

1. **Write an intro that compels listeners to stick around** You need to win your listeners' loyalty with each program episode. Listeners will give you a few minutes off the top to convince them that they should keep listening. Because of that, your intro should be one of the best thought-out things you prepare. And don't just provide a shopping list of items. Appeal to the listener's curiosity and self-interest. *Give the listener an emotional reason to listen*. For example, don't just say "we will talk to an expert on x disease," Rather, say "Betty Mumo's goats are dying of x disease. We talk to a vet who will tell you how to keep that from happening to your herd."
2. **Refer to women guests with the same dignity as men** (7) Why is it that a broadcaster says "I am talking with Dr. Stanley Lubo of the agricultural college," but, when he goes out to the field he just says "hello mother"? Why doesn't he say "I am talking to farmer Maria Smith in Luganda village"? And why does he say, "I am talking to a very pretty lady at Zomba market," when he would never think of saying "I am talking to a very handsome man at Zomba market"?
3. **Paint word pictures** (26) When you go to a village to talk about a maize disease, first of all, you should be the eyes of the listener. Describe the "big picture" as you enter the village – kids playing, elders sitting outside, and anything that distinguishes this particular village – a building, a river, a shop, a temple. Then "zoom in" and paint a word picture of the specific field and the farmer and the infected maize. This brings your listeners along beside you, and stimulates their interest.
4. **Story, Story, Story** (29) Everyone loves a story, and radio is at its best when it tells them. A story usually involves an *interesting person* who *confronts a problem* and *overcomes it*. Learn how to use stories to grab and hold your listeners. Stories can be "factual," as in a reporter's piece, or they can be "representative" as in a mini-drama. Both work well.
5. **Work with other media** (44) Radio can do a *lot*, but it can't do *everything*! If a farming issue can only be communicated through pictures, find a way to get pictures to the farmers. These can be used as reference material for farmers all the time, unlike a radio program which only gets aired once or twice. Perhaps the Extension Department can provide pictures for the school to hand out to students to take home. Perhaps pictures can be put up in the market, and your program can steer people to them. Perhaps your station has a library that farmers can visit to see pictures of a farming practice you talked about on air.

**B) Middle-sized improvements:** *These changes might require some new resources and some involvement by station management. Consider implementing them over the next few months.*

1. **Get out to the farmers in their villages** (46)Too many farmer programs are studio-bound and they suffer from that. Cell phones can bridge the farmer-broadcaster gap, but that is not enough. Transportation is costly, but you must get to the farmers' fields and homes. Farmers will respect you more if they know you have watched the wind scatter the dry soils, waited hours for the ferry, got stuck in the mud on the road to the market, and heard the cries of the sick goat. You might not be able to travel every week, but perhaps some other broadcaster can – a news reporter, for example. And the extension worker for sure. When we evaluated the twenty-two programs in the ARRPA study, we found that the programs that visited the fields were of much higher quality than those that didn't. Find the resources to get out there. And in the meantime, go to the markets close to you and interview farmers there.
2. **Plan, plan, plan** (49) A farmer program should *sound* spontaneous and relaxed. But behind that comfortable, informal sound, there should be a *serious plan*. Will this *episode* serve the overall purpose of your *farmer program*? Will it move forward the discussion and resolution of a deep-rooted issue? Does it feature farmers discussing important farming matters? Does our market report reliably cover the markets that farmers use? These are the questions the host-producer needs to ask herself each week, and then she must do the work required to deliver the content – *and* make it all sound effortless on air!

**C) The big stuff:***These changes will take time, but they are well worth it! They will require planning and the involvement of station management – and probably some special one-time resources or even additional ongoing resources. Aim to implement the ones that are important to you over the next three to twelve months.*

1. **Create a purpose statement** (58) When a station decides to do a farmer program, too often it simply assigns a producer-host and it’s up to him or her to decide what to do. That is not fair to the producer – or to the listeners! Work out a clear and useful purpose statement with your manager. Here is a good sample:

*"Farmers First" helps equip Tembe region farmers to grow the most appropriate food for their families and the market, and to build a vibrant rural community. "Farmers First" is an entertaining, weekly program that provides farmers with the information they need, from reliable sources, and when they need it. It also provides farmers with an opportunity to discuss matters of importance to them.*

1. **Partner with extension services** (59)Radio mainly serves farmers from a central location. Extension agents regularly travel to the villages. Both can improve their service to farmers if they work together. (This will probably require a formal contract or MOU that outlines who does what.)
2. **Get farmers discussing important issues on air** (63) There will be no effective economic and social development in your area *unless farmers are part of that development discussion.* Your program can provide a comfortable "space" where those discussions can *start*, and where they can *deepen*, and where they can *include more and more farmers of both sexes*.

***Finally, a few things to avoid!***

Through the course of the ARRPA research (and other program monitoring), we have come upon some radio practices that we think have no place in a farmer program. Here they are. To be forewarned is to be fore-armed!

1. **Never "talk down" to farmers** (69) We have heard programs where the host treated farmers like irresponsible children. We have heard extension workers blame farmers for not taking up some new practices they promote. We have heard hosts whose exaggerated praise for farmers sounds hollow and fake. Sometimes broadcasters feel that they have risen "above" farmers, and so they consciously or unconsciously "talk down" to them. The best farm broadcasters know that farmers work long and hard to improve the health of their families. These farm broadcasters understand that they have a huge responsibility to use radio to serve farmers, and to do so with respect.
2. **Don't pile it on!** (75) Some broadcasters must think their program is like a wheelbarrow: the more they can shovel in, the better. Not true! The program is an audio relationship between the host and the listener. Listeners are not motivated by a load of information dumped on them. They are motivated when they are engaged and guided through material at a pace and volume they can comprehend. If you pile on the information too thick, many farmers will consider themselves incompetent, (through no fault of their own), and they will be gone.

Continue the discussion on Ways to fix your farmer program on Barza – [www.barzaradio.com](http://www.barzaradio.com) – the Farm Radio International social networking site for African farm broadcasters.

Access the discussion forum at: <http://bit.ly/barzadiscussion>

## Acknowledgements

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**About the authors**

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