

# Pack 105, Item 13

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**How to be an effective host of a farmer radio program**

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***What is an effective farmer program host?***

Effective hosts use their personality and broadcasting skills in a way that helps farmers improve their work, talk on-air about what is important to them, and improve the lives of their families. And all the while, the host makes the program attractive and memorable for the farmer-listeners.

By the way: If you are also the *producer* of the farmer program, (or you are the host-producer) check [***here***](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/104-post-harvest-cow-pea/effective-producer-farmer-radio-program/) for our companion guide: *“How to be an effective producer of a farmer radio program.”*

A word of caution to station managers: In some stations, management rotate different broadcasters through hosting roles. That might make sense from a *management* point of view because it gives broadcasters a range of experiences. But it rarely makes sense from a *listener’s* point of view. A listener’s primary link to a radio program is the host. If the host is effective, the listener will build a strong and positive emotional relationship with the host and the program. If the host is constantly changed, the listener’s connection with the program will be weakened, and the program and station will suffer.

***How can effective hosting help me serve my listeners better?***

- I can help farmers feel cautiously optimistic about their work.

- I can help farmers find their voice and speak out.

- I can help farmers move from talk to action.

***How can being an effective host help me produce better programs?***

* It teaches me to listen as well as to speak.
* It emphasizes the need for me to communicate clearly.
* It confirms that I must plan my interviews and panels.
* It helps me make interesting and memorable radio programs.

***Twelve key hosting tasks***

1) Respect your station’s policies.

2) Understand and respect your farmer-listeners.

3) Earn your listeners’ trust.

4) Communicate clearly.

5) Be your listeners’ guide.

6) Convey realistic optimism.

7) Help farmers speak out.

8) Plan your interviews and panels

9) Be a good listener.

10) Promote the move from talk to action.

11) Make your program interesting and memorable.

12) Improve through feedback.

**Details**

1. **Respect your station’s policies.**

Your station probably has policies that guide broadcasters on how to best use radio to serve listeners. All of your work should respect your station policies, so be sure that you know and understand the policies that relate to your work. *(See below for sample policies developed by Farm Radio International for rural radio stations. These include the VOICE program standards, the FAIR journalistic standards, and the program purpose statement.)*

If you feel that a particular policy stands in the way of providing excellent service to your farmer-listeners, discuss it with your manager. Perhaps you just need clarification. Or perhaps your station will agree to review the policy.

1. **Understand and respect your farmer-listeners.**

Small-scale farmers face many challenges. For example: In many places, the quality of the soil has been depleted, extreme weather events happen more often, and much of the harvested crop is lost before it gets to market! If you can *learn*, and then *understand* the challenges your farmer-listeners are facing, then you are already halfway to helping them be more effective farmers.

Take every opportunity to visit farmers’ fields and gardens, and ask questions of both women farmers and men farmers. For example:

- How well can you feed your family this year compared to last?

- How are crop yields now compared to earlier years?

- What do you do to improve your farm productivity?

- How fair are the prices you get at the market for your produce?

- What are the biggest challenges you face in farming?

And respect farmers on air. For example, here is one way you could introduce a panel discussion about post-harvest losses:

*“Today we have Professor John Zuma, the head of crop sciences at Abuja University. He will answer questions from three local farmers about storing maize.”*

And here is another way.

*“Today we will tackle the challenge of storing maize so that your whole harvest gets to market. Susan Chako planted two hectares of maize near Zonga village. Last year, her whole maize crop survived and was sold. Professor John Zuma is head of crop sciences at Abuja University. William Bulawo grows a hectare of maize, but his last two harvests were severely damaged by grain borers. And Mary Gecho has been looking at designs for a new granary for her maize crop in Kwamalu.”*

The difference is that, in the second example, the farmers are introduced as having as much to contribute to the panel as the university professor. That shows respect!

Finally, get names and places right. Nothing shows more disrespect than repeatedly mispronouncing the name of a local village, or a local elder. Get it right, and apologize when you are corrected.

1. **Earn your listeners’ trust.**

Since listeners build a relationship with radio hosts, you want your listeners to trust you. Trust builds slowly, and it requires many thoughtful actions on your part.

For example, when you interview an official or an expert, don’t just let them go on and on about the good work they are doing. Rather, ask them the questions that farmers want answered. *(Click* [***here***](http://www.farmradio.org/radio-resource-packs/package-100-aquaculture-the-value-chain/holding-officials-to-account/) *to see our guide: “How to hold officials to account.”)* In this way, your listeners will come to realize that you speak for them.

Earning trust also requires that you are *reliable*. Are you there for your listeners every week? Do you provide a regular weather and market report? Do you follow up on stories when you say you will? If you say you will visit a certain village next week, make sure you go!

It also means acknowledging mistakes. Of course, you always try to be factual and truthful, but sometimes a mistake gets to air. Your trustworthiness will grow when, on the next episode you say: *On last week’s program, I said that work had not yet started on improving the road between Doula and Tangere. I have since learned that work started on June 15th and the repairs are expected to be finished by September.”*

1. **Communicate clearly.**

You haven’t *communicated* with your listeners if they haven’t *understood* you. This is a particular challenge with a farmer program because farmer programs necessarily use some complex scientific and technical terms. If an interviewee starts talking about aflatoxin, immediately ask: *“That’s a new term for me. Can you explain what aflatoxin is?”* And if a discussion is loaded with technical language, give a clear summary of the most important points.

Some of the farmers you want to put on air might be hard to understand, perhaps because of their shyness or the way they speak. Help these farmers get their points across clearly—while fully respecting their dignity. Use prompts such as: *“Mr. Zomba, I didn’t hear your full message. Would you give it again, please?”* Or: *“Mr. Zomba, you mentioned storage bins, but I didn’t understand whether you think mud bins or metal bins do a better job.”*

If a panel discussion gets complicated, draw it back with an interjection like this: *“Wait a minute! You have lost me and probably some listeners. What does all this mean for a maize grower in Bamono village?”*

Also, remember that it is hard to communicate complex numbers clearly over the radio. Numbers don’t turn into pictures that a farmer can remember. For example, it is hard for a listener to remember the following: “Position your rows one point five metres apart. Then punch holes thirty centimetres apart and put two seeds in each hole.” If you must provide numbers, be as clear as possible. Give the numbers at least twice while you are doing the story, and give them again at the end of your program.

1. **Be your listeners’ guide.**

When you host a program, you are not only the main *personality.* You are also, literally, the gracious *host*. You invite the listeners into your program, you show them around, you talk with them, you nourish them, and then you send them on their way.

You do this by:

- welcoming them at the beginning,

- introducing them to the program’s contents,

- indicating where they are in the program line-up, and what is coming up,

- summarizing complex points,

- thanking them for listening, and

- promoting the next program.

*(Click* [***here***](http://www.farmradio.org/radio-resource-packs/package-98-groundnuts-the-post-harvest-value-chain/broadcaster-how-to-guide-how-to-create-ear-catching-promos-intros-and-extros/) *for our guide “How to produce ear-catching promos, intros and extros”)*

Most of your listeners probably listen alone at home, or with one or two other people. When you address your audience, keep one person in mind, a typical listener, and talk directly to that one person. For example, say, “I know that you are thinking about when to start planting, and so I have brought our extension worker in today. He has some important tips for you.” Don’t say: “This is the time when farmers think about when to start planting. Our extension agent has good ideas for farmers later in the program.”

1. **Convey realistic optimism.**

As mentioned earlier, the work of a small-scale farmer is full of challenges, and there are times when the situation must seem hopeless. In spite of that, your farmer program should convey a sense that farmers—individually and as a group—can make positive changes and improve the lives of their families and communities.

Farmer programs are not neutral. They are *pro*-small-scale farming. This does not mean that they should be uncritical. In fact, it is important that you raise and discuss the tough challenges facing farmers, like climate change, poor soils, rotting crops, or lack of credit. But you should raise these challenges within the overall context that farmers can improve their farming and their lives.

Even when things are tough, there are ways to convey realistic optimism. For example, let’s say the road to the market town is deeply rutted because of heavy rain, although the government has promised to fix it. You will want to share on air the disappointment farmers feel when they can’t get their maize to the market. However, you can also run stories about how to store maize safely until it can be transported. And you can call out to the government department every week until it gives farmers a date when the road repairs will start.

This sense of overall optimism is conveyed first and foremost by *you*, the program host. From the program intro, through interviews, to the very last word, you set the tone for the whole farmer program.

1. **Help farmers speak out.**

A good farmer program has two purposes. It gives farmers both:

- the *information* they need, when they need it, and

- the *opportunity to speak* about matters of importance to them.

And the second purpose is just as important as the first.

As mentioned above, farmers are not like teachers or lawyers or broadcasters who spend their days talking to other people, often in public. Farmers spend long hours in fields and gardens, with animals and plants. Your job is to help them be effective communicators on radio.

When possible, interview farmers where they are most comfortable and supported—in their homes, their villages, their fields, or at the market. Start by commenting positively about some aspect of their life. *(For example: “I bet that daughter of yours is a big help in the fields,”* or *“Your comment last week about the missing extension agent has received a lot of support.”)* People who feel comfortable and supported are more likely to open up when you ask further questions.

*(Click* [***here***](http://www.farmradio.org/radio-resource-packs/package-96-the-root-of-life/how-to-get-farmers-talking-about-important-things-facilitating-farmer-voice/) *for our guide* How to get farmers talking about important things (Facilitating farmer voice.”)

Women farmers may need to be prompted to speak out in a different way than men. When you visit a village, have a meeting with the women alone. (In a mixed group, they might let their husbands do all the talking.) If you have phone-in lines, dedicate one line to women callers. That way, you can try to ensure that at least half of the callers who get to air will be women. The more that women hear *other* women on air, the more they will be motivated to speak on air themselves.

*(Click* [***here***](http://www.farmradio.org/radio-resource-packs/103-2/10-how-to-serve-your-women-farmers-well/) *for our guide: “How to serve your women farmers well.)*

Finally, celebrate occasions when farmers, by discussing and acting on a problem, have created positive change. We all love praise, and it will motivate more farmers to have the confidence to speak out in the future, and the confidence to apply new and/or improved farming practices.

1. **Plan your interviews and panels.**

Much of your work as host involves interviewing women and men—farmers, elders, experts, officials, and politicians.Perhaps one of the reasons you are a broadcaster is that you enjoy having conversations with people. Good! However, enjoying a good conversation is very different from being a good interviewer. A *conversation* is a friendly chat that can move from topic to topic as each person wishes. However, the purpose of a farmer program *interview* is for the interviewer to gain important information—facts and opinions—from the interviewee about a specific topic of interest to the listeners. You, the interviewer, need to keep control of the interview, and make sure it serves your listeners well. This means that you must plan the interview in advance, and write down the questions and prompts that will help you get the best information from the interviewee. You also need to prepare follow-up questions for occasions when an experienced interviewee tries to take over and turn the interview to their own purpose. *(Click* [***here***](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/103-2/12-how-to-conduct-an-effective-interview/) *for our guide “How to conduct an effective interview” and read the section of that guide entitled “Learn about the three main kinds of interview you will do.” And click* [***here***](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/104-post-harvest-cow-pea/redaction-doug-ward-president-du-conseil-dadministration-de-radios-rurales-internationales-avec-la-contribution-de-sylvie-harrison-chef-dequipe-chargee-du-developpement-des-meti/) *for our guide “How to conduct an effective panel discussion.”)*

1. **Be a good listener.**

While it is important to plan an interview and control its direction, you must also listen closely to what the interviewee is saying. You can’t just read your list of questions and hope that the interviewee gives you appropriate answers.

Here is an example of a host who followed her scripted questions too closely and didn’t listen to the answers.

*“Mrs. Smith, I understand that your maize harvest doubled this year. Is that right?”*

*“Well, yes, but then my husband died and I have been forced off the land by his family.”*

*“Congratulations! And what do you think was the reason for the better harvest?”*

Be a good listener all the time, not just when you are doing an interview or hosting a panel discussion. Listen when you are in the field talking with farmers. Listen when you talk to farmers in the market. You will learn things that you might never have thought of.

1. **Promote the move from talk to action.**

While good information and good discussion are the key elements of a farmer program, they are not usually enough to trigger actions that lead to better farming. However, improved farming practices are needed for small-scale farmers to survive and thrive. Because you host so many interviews and panel discussions, you can help move things from talk to action. For example, at the end of a panel discussion on post-harvest storage of maize, you can ask questions like these:

*“Everyone seems to agree that planting maize in rows will lead to better harvests. Susan, you grow maize. What you are going to do differently this year?*

*“What should the producers’ co-op do to make sure that farmers have the right kind of storage bags this year? By what date does the co-op have to act?*

*“Since fixing the road does not seem to be a priority for this government, what needs to be done to make it a priority? Who will take charge of this?”*

1. **Make your program interesting and memorable**

No one stays tuned to a radio program if they don’t find it interesting. You can provide important information. You can give farmers the opportunity to voice their opinions. But if the program is not emotionally appealing, farmers won’t listen. They might continue to tune in for the weather and market reports, but then switch to another radio station that sounds more interesting. It’s especially important to remember this now that farmers have more stations they can listen to.

There is a variety of ways you can make the program interesting and memorable. Here are a few:

* Play *music* that appeals to your audience.
* Prepare item intros that give listeners an *emotional* reason to listen. For example, don’t just say, *“We are pleased to have Susan Alaro with us today to talk about poisons.”* Rather, say: *“Last week in Bulawano, two children died after mixing up a drink with poison in it. How safe are your children? Today Susan Alaro will help you make your home—and your children—safe from poisons.”*
* Use *contests* to help farmers remember important information (for example, *“Send us a rhyme that lists all the measurements and steps required for planting in rows. The winner gets our ‘Farmers First’ T-shirt!)* Or have a competition for the best recipe for cooking orange-fleshed sweet potatoes so that kids will love them.
* Have a regular light-hearted feature that shows the funny side of farming. (Interview the woman who confronted an animal stealing maize from her granary, and what she did next.)
* Have a standing joke about one of your foibles or weaknesses. For example, if you are not a good gardener, make a point about how you seem to kill everything you try to grow. Your listeners will empathize with you and will enjoy your stories.
* Vary the *pacing* within the program so that, for example, a light item follows a serious one.
* Provide signposts so that listeners know that something of interest to them is coming up soon—even if they don’t like the current item. On a bus ride, signposts are the roadside signs that tell you where you are and where you are going. Signposts in a radio program do the same thing. For example, halfway through your program you can say: “That was beekeeper Susan Quetcho telling us about her new hives. Coming up: How to keep those pesky weevils out of your grain.” Signposts provide a lot of comfort to listeners, and especially to listeners who might have tuned in late,

Above all, your program will be interesting if you set an overall tone of curiosity, optimism, mutual respect, and energy. *Click* ***here*** *for our guide “How to make your farmer program entertaining and memorable.)*

Complex issues don’t have to be boring. Don’t shy away from dealing with an important issue just because it’s complex. Just start with a human interest story that catches your listeners’ ears and draws them in, so that they will stay around when you discuss the complicated stuff. *(Click* [***here***](http://www.farmradio.org/radio-resource-packs/package-95-researching-and-producing-farmer-focused-programs/storytelling/) *for our guide “Storytelling.”)*

1. **Improve through feedback**

Radio program hosts often have a high profile in the community, and you will have admirers who will tell you what a good job you are doing. It’s a pleasure to get that kind of feedback, but you need more. You need to hear from listeners who are critical of your hosting skills, or who, for example, don’t think you cover important issues very well.

Here are some ways to get helpful feedback:

- Encourage your station to hold focus group discussions with listeners. Make sure you include questions such as: *“What do you like about ‘Farmers First’ host, William Bato? How can he improve? Does ‘Farmers First’ cover the issues that are important to you?”*

- Develop a *self-assessment* discipline. Use the list above and ask yourself on a regular basis how well you are performing these tasks, and how you can improve.

- Ask other broadcasters in your station to listen to an episode of your program, and give them your list of host tasks. Have a meeting at which they can share their observations and offer guidance for improvement. (Offer to do the same for them.)

- Participate with your supervisor in a yearly review of how well you have helped achieve the program’s objectives, based on the host tasks listed above. Identify areas for improvement over the coming year, and also identify any supports you might need (e.g., training, coaching) to achieve those improvements.

As mentioned at the beginning, being an effective program host is a huge responsibility that requires a lot of skill. But you can do it if you keep improving how you do each of the main tasks outlined above. And as you improve, you will help your farmer-listeners to improve their farming practices, and the lives of their families.

Good luck with this important and challenging work.

## Acknowledgements

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**Sources of information**

1) [V.O.I.C.E program standards](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/101-getting-and-using-audience-feedback-and-evaluating-radio-programs/use-voice-standards-to-improve-your-farmer-program/)

2) [F.A.I.R. journalism standards for farmer radio programs](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/104-post-harvest-cow-pea/f-r-journalism-standards-farmer-programs/)

3) The program purpose statement:

A *program purpose statement* has three elements. It:

* names the goal of the program,
* names the intended audience, and
* names the main activities used to meet that goal.

A program purpose statement is as brief as possible, so that everyone working on the program can remember it and abide by it*.*

Here is a program purpose statement for a farmer program based on the VOICE standards for farmer programs.

*"Active Farmers!" helps the men and women farmers of Neruda region to be successful farmers.*

*It:*

*-  provides the information farmers need when they need it,*

*- gives farmers the opportunity to discuss important farming matters, and*

*- supports farmers who introduce new practices they believe will improve their farming.*

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