

# Pack 107, Item 5

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**Rehabilitating cocoa plantations**

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**Notes to broadcaster**

After the Ivory Coast, Ghana is the second largest cocoa exporter in the world. Cocoa is Ghana’s main cash crop and one of the main contributors to economic growth in the country.

Cocoa producers in Ghana are mainly small-scale farmers with an average farm plantation of three hectares or less. Larger farmers have plantations ranging from three to 50 acres of land, but no farmers dominate the sector. Most small-scale cocoa farmers and their families rely solely on farm produce for their livelihoods.

Recently, small-scale farmers have been facing the risk of losing their source of income due to the rise of diseases and viruses on many cocoa farms in Ghana. Apart from disease problems, many farms have very old cocoa trees, 30 years old or more. Older trees are more susceptible to disease and have low yields, which has drastically reduced the productivity of farmers.

Therefore, Cocobod—the body that governs cocoa production, processing, marketing, and distribution in Ghana—has introduced a cocoa rehabilitation program. This program helps farmers remove their old trees and replace them with hybrid varieties which produce more pods and increase farmers’ income.

This script introduces the problems associated with keeping old and diseased cocoa trees, and shows how this problem can be solved by cutting down low-yielding and unhealthy cocoa trees and replacing them with new hybrid seedlings.

The script presents the benefits of cocoa rehabilitation and deals with the issues surrounding this initiative. It may also allay many farmers’ fears concerning the process of cutting down old and diseased cocoa trees and replacing them by new hybrid, high-yielding and disease-tolerant trees.

This script is based on actual interviews. You could use this script as inspiration to research and write a script on cocoa or other cash crops in your area. You might chose to produce this script as part of your regular farmer program, 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.

**HOST:** Hello, listeners. It’s another exciting week of farm broadcast, and today we will discuss a very important cash crop in Ghana—cocoa!

If you broadcast to a cocoa-growing area, you might want to adapt this program for your audience and then invite listeners to call or text their comments and questions. Here are some possibilities for discussion:

* Are there opportunities for cocoa farmers to profit from adding value to cocoa in your listening area?
* Can local cocoa farmers benefit from practicing this cocoa rehabilitation program? How?
* What are the barriers to profiting from cocoa farming in your area?
* What can cocoa farmers do to sustain themselves and their families during the three-year waiting period after they cut their old trees?
* How can cocoa farmers benefit from planting shade trees? What are the best shade trees available to the farmers in your area?

The estimated running time for this script is 20 minutes, with intro and outro music.

My name is Nadia and I have here, Mr. Theophilus Osei Owusu, the deputy director at the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, or MoFA. He will tell us all that he knows about the topic on our table: Rehabilitating cocoa plantations. In other words, he will tell us all about planting new trees to replace old ones in cocoa farming.

Good morning, Mr. Osei Owusu, how are you?

**MR. THEOPHILUS:** I’m fine, thank you, Nadia, how are you?

**HOST:** I’m well, too. As you can see, I’m enjoying the cold breeze in the rainy season.

**MR. THEOPHILUS:** (LAUGHTER) Then you have to enjoy it while it lasts!

**HOST:** Of course, Mr. Osei Owusu will be answering questions on cocoa farming.

Since you are a deputy director at MOFA in Accra, how close are you to farmers living in rural areas?

**MR. THEOPHILLUS:** I make a lot of field visits to farming communities and interact with as many farmers as possible. Also, we have representatives or MoFA officials in farming communities who serve as a link between us working here in Accra and farmers in the rural areas. This is how we get the information to meet the needs of our farmers.

**HOST:** Mr. Theophilus, I have a simple question for you. Are you ready?

**MR. THEOPHILUS:** Yes, go ahead.

**HOST:** Are you a farmer? If yes, what do you farm? If no, why? And have you ever considered becoming a farmer?

**MR. THEOPHILUS:** Thank you, Nadia. My answer is yes, I am a farmer, and I have a mango plantation around the Dodowa Road.

**HOST:** Good, he farms! That is an interesting revelation. You deserve to be applauded.

Now let’s get back to the basics: what do you make of cocoa rehabilitation and cocoa farming?

**MR. THEOPHILUS:** I must say that cocoa farming and cocoa rehabilitation go hand in hand. Trees are a cocoa farmer’s most important asset. This is because cocoa trees need shade trees to grow.

**HOST:** What are shade trees?

**MR. THEOPHILUS:** There are temporary and permanent shade trees. Temporary shade trees are used to nurture the young seedlings, while permanent shade trees are used for older trees.

Every cocoa plantation needs permanent shade trees to help the cocoa trees survive for a long period of time. Some farmers neglect this important aspect of cocoa farming, and this is why they end up with very low yields.

**HOST:** Wow, this is new information for me. How do farmers get access to these shade trees?

**MR. THEOPHILUS:** Some shade trees grow naturally, but there are others that are deliberately planted to support cocoa farms. Cocoa farmers have to work with the Forestry Division and the Cocoa Health and Extension Division to find trees that provide the right kind of shade for the cocoa tree.

Shade trees are beneficial to farmers because, when a farmer cuts his old cocoa tree and plants his new seedling, he will need shade trees to protect the growing cocoa seedling. These shade trees will create the right kind of humidity the cocoa tree needs to grow.

**HOST:** Thank you, Mr. Theophilus, for your expert advice. But before we continue with this conversation, I will pause briefly to interview Mr. Danso Jones Godfred, who is the MoFA director in the Western Region, Bia District.

Bia produces the second most cocoa of all Ghana’s districts.

**SFX:** MUSIC FOR TWO SECONDS, THEN SOUND OF PHONE BEEPING

**HOST:** Hello, Mr. Danso, you are welcome to the farm broadcast. My name is Nadia and we have been discussing cocoa rehabilitation in cocoa farming. Once again, you are welcome!

**MR. DANSO:** Thank you, Nadia.

**HOST:** Mr. Danso, why is it important for Ghanaian cocoa farmers to practice cocoa rehabilitation?

**MR. DANSO:** It is important for farmers to practice cocoa rehabilitation because, when the cocoa tree grows older, it begins to lose its strength and produces less cocoa pods than usual. It also becomes more vulnerable to diseases and pests. When a farmer cuts the old trees and plant new ones, his farm will have renewed strength to grow well and produce better cocoa pods.

**HOST:** And do you think that a fair number of cocoa farmers in Ghana practice cocoa rehabilitation?

**MR. DANSO:** Many farmers were not happy about cutting their trees at first. But after some farmers in the district took the risk and saw the benefit, it has encouraged about 50% of the farmers in this district to at least start the practice.

**HOST:** How does a farmer know that it is time to cut his tree and replace it with a new one?

**MR DANSO:** Very good question. There are different classes of cocoa trees. We have diseased plants, old plants, and young diseased plants. There are also the new hybrid trees we are encouraging our farmers to grow.

**HOST:** Kindly explain these classes for our listeners.

**MR. DANSO:** Diseased plants are trees that have been affected by diseases like swollen shoot, which is very common in Bia. Usually these trees have water coming out of them and they have discoloured leaves—either yellow coloration along the veins of the leaves or leaves with no colour at all.

The second class of trees—old trees—are usually more than 30 years old and have faded leaves or have lost most of their leaves, and are unproductive.

The third class of trees—young diseased trees—are young trees that are growing very close to old trees and, as a result, are infected with a disease from the old trees.

**HOST:** Thank you, Mr. Danso, for being a part of this program. We will take a short break, and after the break we will continue our conversation with Mr. Theophilus. Stay tuned.

**SFX:** MUSIC FOR 15 SECONDS

**HOST:** Mr. Theophilus, what are your concerns on today’s topic?

**MR. THEOPHILUS:** Most of the time, farmers do not want to get rid of very old trees, which is a major problem in cocoa farming communities.

**HOST:** Why?

**MR. THEOPHILUS:** There are different reasons that farmers may be reluctant to replace old trees with new ones. Some of the very old trees may be growing for 30 years, and farmers get attached to the trees, making it difficult for them to cut them.

Another problem is the land tenure system. Tenant farmers are afraid that when they cut cocoa trees, the owner may take over the land.

Another factor is that it takes three years for a new cocoa tree to bear cocoa fruit. It is difficult for farmers to think about three years with no yields.

**HOST:** Is that not a valid point?

**MR. THEOPHILUS:** To an extent, yes. But old trees grow tall and produce a very small amount of fruit. The size of the tree also creates challenges with harvesting. Some cocoa farmers have suffered severe injuries from falling off tall cocoa trees during harvesting.

**HOST:** How is the government helping farmers to solve these problems?

**MR. THEOPHILUS:** Cocobod is the body that governs cocoa production, processing, marketing, and distribution in Ghana. Cocobod is conducting a cocoa rehabilitation program which helps farmers cut their old trees and replace them with hybrid varieties which are disease-tolerant and produce more pods. With the hybrid trees, cocoa farmers can increase the value of their trees and increase the farmers’ income. These are the new hybrid trees Mr. Danso rightly mentioned.

**HOST:** Do you encourage farmers to plant these hybrids?

**MR. THEOPHILUS:** It is important for our extension agents to let the farmers know that hybrids produce higher yields even though they are shorter than the old trees, which reduces the risk of injuries from falling. The hybrids are also tolerant to cocoa swollen shoot virus disease.

Farmers need to know that they can replace their old trees with hybrids only if the old trees are not diseased. If the old trees are affected by cocoa swollen shoot virus, they must cut them down to avoid the virus spreading to other farms.

**HOST:** Ok.

**MR. THEOPHILUS:** Farmers must also be confident that, if they make the bold decision to replace their old trees with new trees, the forestry commission will register the tree in the name of the farmer, with his picture and ID number. Because of that, nobody can cut the tree under false pretences.

Farmers are also encouraged to plant seedlings of economic trees like *emire,* mahogany, and *ofram*—also known as the Ivory Coast almond—within the cocoa trees. These trees will be registered by the forestry commission so that nobody can come and cut them for timber. They provide timber to the farmer and act as permanent shade trees until they are ready for cutting and sale.

**HOST:** What do you mean by “economic” trees?

**MR. THEOPHILUS:** “Economic trees” are fast-growing trees which farmers plant to receive additional income.

**HOST:** Do people who don’t farm the land still have the right to cut economic trees for timber?

**MR. THEOPHILUS:** Some time ago, some people visited communities to cut down trees in cocoa farms for timber. They presented letters that said that the trees belonged to the government and that they were permitted to cut them to use as timber.

But the government stopped these timber concessions, and once you register your new trees, nobody can cut them for any reason at all. The government protects your cocoa plantation.

**HOST:** My final question to you is: how will farmers who have agreed to replace their old trees with new trees survive three years of no yields? I believe that this is the main reason behind their reluctance to cut the old trees.

**MR. THEOPHILUS:** My advice to these farmers is simple. The new seedlings are free, so once you plant them, you can intercrop your cocoa with crops such as plantain, cocoyam, maize, and others. This will provide you with a good source of living as you wait for the cocoa trees to mature.

We also encourage farmers to do other things like rearing rabbits, grasscutters, sheep and goats; beekeeping, rearing snail, and growing mushrooms while they wait the three years to harvest their cocoa. These give them additional income during this period.

**HOST:** Splendid, wow … so you heard it all! It is important to grow new trees to replace diseased or old cocoa trees. The benefits from cocoa rehabilitation exceed any disadvantages it carries.

Dear farmers, according to the experts at MoFA, there are clear benefits to growing the new hybrid trees for better yields. Mr. Theophilus, how do these hybrids react to disease?

**MR. THEOPHILUS:** The hybrid trees have resistance to common diseases that can attack cocoa trees.

**HOST:** What are your final words for our listeners and fellow farmers?

**MR. THEOPHILUS:** My last plea to my fellow farmers is that they must see beyond the three-year lapse in production from replacing old trees, and consider the greater good this practice will bring them.

They should consider the three-year waiting period not as a fallow period, but as a time when they can grow other crops and do other businesses to sustain themselves and their families. This will make the wait less painful, and they will position themselves well for the increase in yields on their cocoa farm! Rehabilitation is surely one way to enhance cocoa productivity!

## Acknowledgements

Contributed by: Abena Dansoa Danso, Media Liaison Officer and Script writer, Farm Radio International, Ghana.

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**Sources of information**

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