

# Pack 114

Interview

May 2020

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**Adding value to farm produce: Soybeans**

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**Notes to broadcaster**

Many small-scale farmers and agro-entrepreneurs in various parts of southern Africa often lose out both economically and nutritionally because they ignore or do not know how to add value to their farm produce before consumption or sale.

Most often, such farmers hurriedly offload their produce to exploitative briefcase buyers who in turn sell to manufacturers and food processors at a high price. At the end of the value chain, small-scale farmers buy the final product made from their very own produce from the shops as flour, peanut butter, baby porridge, or other products that they use for their needs.

Sometimes, the quality of the final product is not very pure or safe due to food preservatives, additives, or over-storage. Consequently, small-scale farmers should be encouraged to adopt simple techniques for adding value so they can produce and use or sell their own products.

This script tells the story of an enterprising young mother of four who sells various products from her village in Chipata, eastern Zambia. Starting with one item, Mercy is now running a fast-growing business of value-added products within her home area. The practices described in this script can also be used by small-scale farmers to get more value from their crops.

You might choose to present 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.

You could also use this script as a foundation for creating your own program on adding value in your area. You will need to interview small-scale farmers, nutritionists, and market experts to establish how farmers can use simple tools to add value at the village level, and how village entrepreneurs can legally register their enterprise and expand to other areas. You could ask them:

* How small-scale farmers can add value to their farm produce
* Which kinds of produce are recommended for value addition.
* How they can access a sufficient volume of crops to ensure constant supply.
* How they can use the products in their family or sell at the market and other outlets.

Estimated running time for the script: 15 minutes, with intro and outro music

## FILIUS: Welcome to yet another exciting episode of *Farming is a business*, the program that educates small-scale farmers on how to practice simple farming methods and still benefit from their farming. My name is Filius Chalo Jere and today I have an exciting topic: how our small-scale farmers can add value to their crops before sale.

## For this topic, I travelled to Mpeta village in the rural areas of Chipata, eastern Zambia, to meet a young woman who is doing wonderfully in this enterprise. With me, I have Mrs. Nancy Kaenga, a seasoned nutritionist from the Food and Nutrition Department of the Ministry of Agriculture.

## We find Mercy at her home with two half-full bags of soybean grains by her side. She is busy scooping soybean from one bag into a winnowing basket, and winnowing the soybean adeptly while singing a village song and pouring the clean soybean into the other bag.

SOUNDS OF WINNOWING AND SINGING COMING TO A HALT UPON ARRIVAL OF VEHICLE

## MERCY: Welcome to my home, eh, Madam Kaenga. I notice that you have come with a different vehicle today, and a different driver, too!

## KAENGA: Thank you, Mercy. Yes, I have come with a different vehicle, but my companion is not a driver by profession. This is Mr. Filius Chalo Jere, the man behind the voice that you hear on Breeze FM talking about farming being a business. I mentioned that I would be coming over with him in my message to you.

## MERCY: Oh, I am so privileged today. Welcome to our village, Mr. Jere. You call yourself the farmers’ friend on radio.

**FILIUS:** Yes, I want to believe I really am the friend to every farmer. I want every farmer to look up to me as their link to experts like Mrs. Kaenga here to help you with solutions. We have found you winnowing soybean grains. What are they for?

## MERCY: I am in the business of producing food crops to sell to my fellow villagers in this area. However, I find it more profitable to add value to the produce before sale.

**FILIUS:** You must be cultivating a lot of food crops to sustain your business.

**MERCY:** Not exactly. There are so many people around here and very little land to go round. Because there’s little land and many people, I have only one hectare to produce my crops. This will only last for a few months. However, I also buy food crops from my fellow farmers in order to sustain my business throughout the year.

**FILIUS:** Your fellow farmers must appreciate you for giving them a ready market right in the village.

**MERCY:** Yes, they do appreciate me because many briefcase buyers who come from town often try to cheat us and buy our crops at very low prices. Sometimes they use suspicious scales to weigh our crops. I would never cheat my friends here.

## FILIUS: Of course not. Please tell me, why do you involve yourself in adding value to farm produce? Isn’t it easier to just buy from the farmer and sell to the consumer?

## MERCY: It may be easier, but it is not very profitable to sell farm produce in raw form. You know, in business, one must always think of ways of maximizing profit. Adding value to farm produce before sale is one sure way of making more profit.

## FILIUS: What is involved in adding value to soybean? Is it just winnowing the grains?

## MERCY: (LAUGH) No, there is much more than just winnowing. Generally, when you want to add value to the product, you must first consider whether that is necessary. Here in the village, I consider it quite necessary to process soya into flour to avoid being undercut by the middleman and the retailer of the finished product.

## FILIUS: Why so? Luckily, we have Mrs. Nancy Kaenga here. I believe she can answer this question from her professional point of view.

## NANCY: Yes, I will do that. It is unfortunate that some rural mothers believe that a baby must be weaned using baby formula or baby foods from the shops only. I always teach them that this is wrong. The best baby-weaning foods can be made very easily using crops produced in the village.

## FILIUS Can you give examples of such crops?

## NANCY: The soybean that Mercy is processing is one such crop. Then there are groundnuts, cowpeas, and many other leguminous crops that small-scale farmers produce. Unfortunately, soybean is often perceived as a cash crop grown solely for sale. The Food and Nutrition Department of the Ministry of Agriculture has tried its best to promote the use of soybean in the diet.

## FILIUS: Why?

## NANCY: Because it is the one crop that has a lot of nutrients including proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins, and rare trace elements that are necessary for growth and good health. Unfortunately, its adoption as a food for the family among many rural households and even urban dwellers for that matter, has been negligible.

## FILIUS Why do you think people shun soybean as a food?

## NANCY One obvious reason is that, if it is not handled properly, soybean produces a bad taste. This taste is produced when broken pieces of soybean come into contact with cold water. To avoid this bad taste, the soybean must be prepared by winnowing—or even removing the broken soybean by hand. The clean soybean must then be dropped quickly into a pot of boiling water.

## FILIUS: Is that what you do, Mercy?

## MERCY Yes, that is what I will do as soon as I finish winnowing the soybeans. Look, I have already put that big pot on the fire. I will have to wait because the water must not merely be warm, or even just hot, but boiling.

## Then, as Mrs. Kaenga advised, I must drop the soya beans into the water bit by bit so that the water continues boiling, do not cover the pot to allow steam to escape. This removes the bad smell from the soya beans. It normally takes thirty to forty-five minutes for the soya beans to be cooked fully.

## FILIUS: Then what will you do?

## MERCY: Do you see that rack over there?

## FILIUS: Yes, if you mean that structure made of small wood poles with a reed mat on top. In fact, there are two structures, one higher than the other. The higher one has more room on top than the lower one. I thought the structures were some sort of primitive table where you serve the soybeans when eating.

## MERCY: (LAUGH) Primitive tables they may be, but more correctly they are merely raised racks or platforms. As soon as the soybean is cooked, I will pour it on the higher and wider platform and spread it out evenly to dry. The rack allows the water to drain quickly from the grain, and aeration is good for drying. Complete drying can take two to three days, but I prefer to leave the soybeans on the rack for about a week to be completely sure.

## After that, I take the soybeans to the grinding mill where I always insist that the miller uses sieve number 1 because the mesh is small and produces very fine soybean flour. With no additives except a measure of iodized salt to taste, the flour is usually light and golden in colour. With this, my work is done and all that is left is for me to put it out for sale.

## FILIUS: How and where do you sell your soybean flour, Mercy?

## MERCY: Currently, I put my soybean flour in a bag or bin and place it out on that lower platform. As soon as people see this, my customers mob me because they love my product, so it does not last long. For measuring, I use a plastic cup that is commonly used in the market for measuring out grain and flour products.

## FILIUS: I am sure that your soybean flour did not suddenly become more attractive than the baby foods in the supermarkets in town. It must have been gradual. How did your soybean flour compete with the popular baby food brands on the market?

## NANCY: SMALL COUGH TO ATTRACT ATTENTION. May I correct one thing here? Soybean products should never be regarded just as a sort of medicine to cure malnutrition in babies or sick people. It is for everyone.

## So, the soybean flour that Mercy produces here should never be compared or relegated to home-made baby food. Instead, it should be seen as a source of nutritious food for all age groups. So I am sure that Mercy’s customers are not confined to mothers who are weaning their babies off breastmilk, right, Mercy?

## MERCY: At first, only weaning mothers and mothers with malnourished children came to buy my soybean flour. However, with your help, madam, this is no longer so. Now many people buy my soybean flour to feed even their school-going children.

**FILIUS:** How is it prepared?

**MERCY:** It is very easy to prepare my soybean flour. Remember, it is already cooked. So if you want to prepare porridge for your baby, you just boil the required amount of water and add the soybean flour and stir—that’s all.

For the bigger children, you may add a few spoonfuls to porridge made from maize flour or to *nsima* while it is still cooking. On the other hand, you can use it like bread flour and make fritters. Mrs. Kaenga has been so busy teaching us the various ways of preparing food from soybean flour that you would be surprised how well my soybean flour is selling these days.

My conclusion is that it is selling so well because my soybean flour is a local product. I grow the soybeans myself in my own field or buy it from farmers round here. I am sure this inspires customer confidence.

## Secondly, my customers are well-acquainted with me because some of them are my relatives and neighbours in my own or neighbouring villages. They also see the stringent hygienic measures that I take to ensure my product is safe for consumption.

## Thirdly, one cup of my soybean flour contains far more flour than what is contained in a packet of baby food from the shops. I believe my soybean flour is also nutritionally much better. But above all this, I have the support of nutrition experts from the government, like Mrs. Kaenga here.

## KAENGA: Indeed, we in the Food and Nutrition Department of the Ministry of Agriculture always support such initiatives. Apart from providing a local market for small-scale farmers, it ensures that a good quantity of the crop is retained close to where it’s produced and is consumed within rural communities. In the end, we hope to see a big improvement in the health of rural people.

## FILIUS: Are you inferring that the Ministry would confine entrepreneurs like Mercy to rural areas?

## NANCY: No, no, no! Mercy is free to expand her business to town. There are many families here who cannot afford imported baby foods or even a modest breakfast. Mercy’s soybean flour is a cheaper and maybe much more nutritious alternative.

## My advice to you, Mercy, is that for the time being, continue your business from the village where you can easily grow your own soybeans and even buy more from your friends. And talking about friends, I encourage you to bring them together to form a co-operative. That way, you will receive more meaningful support from the Ministry and be able to access good capital to acquire processing equipment of your own.

## In addition, you can diversify into other products like peanut butter from groundnuts. Normally, this results in by-products like cooking oil which you can sell separately. You can then sell residues like soybean cake to producers of livestock feed or even go into the production of poultry and pigs yourselves. There are many opportunities.

## FILIUS: Indeed, there are several opportunities for your business to grow, Mercy. Are you going to let them pass you by?

## MERCY: No, no, no. If I had resources, I would surely expand into town and try to sell to supermarket outlets. However, to do that, I am told that my soybean flour must meet certain standards. I must have proper packaging instead of selling in open cups. It must then be tested and given what is called an ISO number. Obviously, this is too complicated for semi-literates like me. That is why we will always depend on experts like Mrs. Kaenga to help us.

**FILIUS:** You are quite an enterprising woman and I don’t think you will be content with soybean flour alone. What are your future plans for adding value to farm produce before sale?

**MERCY:** You are quite right, I am not stopping with soybean flour. For that reason, I also grow a small portion of groundnuts which I process in a similar manner to groundnut flour. I also make peanut butter. Both products are good for porridge and as condiments in vegetable relishes.

**FILIUS:** Are you not trying to bite more than you can chew?

**MERCY:** Maybe. However, this is merely testing the depth of the water. I am taking Madam Kaenga’s advice that we start a co-operative seriously. It is always possible to succeed when you are many.

## FILIUS: There you are, listener. Adding value to food crops like soybeans, groundnuts, and the like has many advantages. The most important are that you can earn much more from your produce than if you sold it raw. You also create a market outlet for rural small-scale farmers and can contribute tremendously to the good nutrition of rural communities.

## So, please consider this enterprise seriously and consult your local co-operatives and nutrition officers for advice on how you can go about doing this. If necessary, please contact me on \_\_\_ so that I can link you directly to these responsible officers. My name is Filius Chalo Jere, your friend in farming, and my number once more is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

## Please talk to me about your farming.

With this, we have come to the end of our program today. Make a date with me on the same day and same time next week for another illuminating topic on *Farming is a Business*.

Thank you.

## Acknowledgements

Contributed by: Filius Chalo Jere, farmer radio producer, Breeze FM, Chipata, Zambia

Reviewed by: Nancy Kaenga, nutritionist, Ministry of Agriculture, Chipata, Zambia.

**Sources of information**

Interviews:

* Mercy Musonda, small-scale farmer, Chipata, Zambia, November 2019.
* Mwila Mulundu, Agricultural Research Scientist (Legumes) Msekera Agricultural Research Station, Chipata, Zambia, November 2019.
* Nancy Kaenga, Nutritionist, Ministry of Agriculture Chipata, Zambia.