

# Pack 114

Interview

May 2020

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**Marketing farm produce**

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**Notes to broadcaster**

Marketing is a key stage in the farming value chain, and plays a crucial role in sustaining farmers’ livelihoods. This is especially true in rural areas where the majority of people depend on farming to meet their daily needs. Without access to reliable, high-value markets, farmers can’t translate their hard work into improving their livelihoods. Instead, they continue to languish at the bottom of the value chain.

This script shares the experience of different players in the vegetable value chain from Bungoma County in Western Kenya. It explores some of the factors that affect farmers’ access to markets, the role traders play, and the strategies employed by farmers to deal with their challenges. It also discusses consumer demand and how farmers can take this into account when they plan and manage their farms.

This script is based on actual interviews. You could use it 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.

You could also use the script as guidance and seek out interviewees representing the different players in the value chain.

If you create your own programs on marketing farm produce, talk to farmers, traders, wholesalers, extension workers, and other relevant stakeholders in your area. You might ask them:

* What are the major challenges for farmers who want to make a good profit from their produce? Have some local farmers found solutions to these challenges?
* What services are available to help farmers succeed with marketing?
* What are some of the challenges that traders face? And how have some traders solved these challenges?
* What do you think the future holds for growing and marketing produce in this area? What are the trends?

The estimated running time for this item, with signature tune, intro, and extro, is 20 minutes

**SFX:** Signature tune for 15 seconds

**PRESENTER:** Good afternoon and welcome to your weekly, informative farming program. My name is \_\_\_\_.

Today, we talk about marketing farm produce. Often, farmers complain about the lack of markets for their produce and about unfavourable prices that prevent them from making good returns on their investments. We visit Bungoma town farm produce market to get a feel for what customers expect. Later, we will talk to farmers to understand how they work towards getting their produce to the market and to their customers.

**SFX:** Sounds OF farm produce market for five seconds. fade under presenter.

**PRESENTER:** This is Bungoma market, a bustling market in Western Kenya. Farmers, brokers, and traders of various kinds haggle over prices and commodities on display. Some are just arriving while others have been here since early morning.

Meet Mrs. Agnes Wandera, a vegetable dealer at the market. She buys produce from farmers and brokers and sells to consumers at her stand. She sells both retail and wholesale, depending on what her customers want. Together with her two assistants, she is busy attending to one customer after another. She says that the morning hours from 6 to 10 a.m. are the most hectic as many retail vendors pick their goods for the day.

**SFX:** Fade up market sounds for three seconds, then down under presenter

**PRESENTER:** I see you have a very busy morning. What kind of produce do you deal with?

**MRS. WANDERA:** I sell fresh produce from the farms. As you can see, I have specific products: potatoes, tomatoes, onions, kales, and cabbages. Rarely do I sell anything else, unless I get a very good deal. These are fast-moving goods. Every household uses them every day, so I have a wider customer base and sell more volume.

**PRESENTER:** Who are your customers?

**MRS. WANDERA:** Bungoma is a growing town. Virtually all the people who live here are my customers. I am not the only trader here or in other parts of town, but people have come to know and frequent my stand.

**PRESENTER:** What do you do to attract and retain customers?

**MRS. WANDERA:** First, I sell fresh produce, direct from the farm. Second, I source quality produce, harvested on time and when fully mature. If you move around the market, you will find onions that were harvested before maturity. They look small and watery. Some traders buy such produce because it comes cheap—maybe the farmer had an emergency and had to dispose of the produce. Third, my price is fair, and there is room for negotiation for those buying in bulk. Fourth, and very important, I am consistent. The stand is open every day. My customers do not miss the goods they want. Some even call in advance, book, and pay, then pick later or send a boda-boda to pick for them *(Editor’s note: local name for motorcycle operators).* Lastly, the goods are sorted into different grades, so there is something for everybody.

**PRESENTER:** There are times when certain produce, say onions, is out of season. How do you deal with such shortages?

**MRS. WANDERA:** It is usually a struggle to find goods during the dry season because the majority of farmers in this region depend on rain. But, after working here for many years, I have identified farmers who have farms near rivers and who irrigate their crops. They supply me throughout the year or at least when other farmers are not able to, though prices tend to rise and customers complain a lot. But there is nothing much traders can do about that. Customers appreciate that our stand is stocked throughout the year.

**PRESENTER:** Earlier, you said that you source your produce either directly from farmers or from brokers. Briefly, share your experience with the two groups.

**MRS. WANDERA:** In my opinion, each group has its place. Farmers have different levels of experience. I have farmers who can predict the amount of produce they will harvest. This makes it easier to negotiate and plan ahead, knowing when to expect the delivery. Such farmers are few but they often deliver quality goods. Others lack the knowledge and experience to manage their crops. They end up with very poor harvests, affected by pests and diseases. It is difficult to deal with such farmers. I leave them to the brokers.

There are times when I cannot reach the farmer due to distance or the low quantities the farmer has for sale. It would be very costly for me to go to the farmer. In that case, the broker can combine the farmer’s produce with that of other farmers and deliver the quantities I want so long as the quality is acceptable. In this situation, I don’t engage the farmer on price. It is up to the broker. There are also times when I need the goods urgently, and brokers and middlemen come in handy.

**PRESENTER:** Thank you for your time. It is clear that interaction between traders and farmers is crucial to understanding the marketplace and its dynamics. I leave Mrs. Agnes Wandera to attend to her customers as I head to the farms.

**SFX:** music for eight seconds, then insert sounds of river water flowing and trickLing between rocks for four seconds, then fade under presenter.

**PRESENTER:** I am at the banks of River Luuya, about 10 kilometres east of Bungoma town. I am here to see Mr. Tobias Simiyu, a farmer who specializes in commercial vegetable farming.

**SFX:** Sounds of farmer tilling land with hoe/jembe for five seconds, then fade under presenter

**PRESENTER:** Tobias plants kale and indigenous vegetables such as black nightshade, known in the local language as *sucha*, and crotalaria, known locally as *mitoo*.

**PRESENTER:** Hallo Tobias, your land looks muddy.

**MR. TOBIAS:** Yes, the short rains have been heavier than usual. It is almost two weeks since we had full sunshine like this. I must finish preparing the holes for transplanting those kale seedlings in the nursery. They were ready last week but the rains kept me away from the farm.

**PRESENTER:** For how long have you been farming vegetables?

**MR. TOBIAS:** This is my fourth year. I shifted from sugar cane when Nzoia Sugar Factory collapsed and sugar cane became a burden. We still plant maize, beans, groundnuts, and sweet potatoes for food. We consume some and sell a little to get money to buy things like sugar and cooking oil from the shops. Otherwise, the main source of income is vegetables.

**PRESENTER:** I see quite a large area of kales on the upper part of the farm. How much land do you plant to vegetables?

**MR. TOBIAS:** My land is only two and a half acres.I have kales on one acre, *sucha* on half an acre and *mitoo* on half an acre. I have also leased another four acres within the village and along the river. Two acres for kale and one acre each for *sucha* and *mitoo*.

**PRESENTER:** You definitely have a preference for kales!

**MR. TOBIAS:** Yes, I plant what I can sell. People dismiss kale as being too common, but they don’t know that it makes money. I supply secondary schools and some boarding primary schools. Schools are a regular, predictable, and dependable market that I can easily plan for. Since I irrigate my crops, I am a dependable supplier.

When schools close, I compete for the market in town, but I time my peak production for the dry season. That is why I must transplant this kale before the end of this month, October, for it to be ready when the high season begins in December. December to March is usually the dry season, and since most farmers depend on rain for their farming, the supply of fresh vegetables dips and the price goes up. During the long rainy season, I plant maize and beans like every other farmer. But I keep my eyes on the long dry season. That is the time I make money.

**PRESENTER:** How do prices compare between the seasons?

**MR. TOBIAS:** Prices for kale range from 200-2500 Kenyan shillings per sack ($2-25 US). For me to make money, I time my peak production to the peak market price. I also look at consumer preferences. The town population prefers kale because it needs less firewood to cook. The local countryside population prefers indigenous vegetables. Of all the kinds of vegetables available in Western Kenya, indigenous vegetables are the most popular. Black nightshade and crotalaria have a ready market.

**PRESENTER:** For Tobias, understanding the market dynamics of supply and demand and using irrigation enable him to produce in both the on- and off-seasons and fetch the best prices for his produce.

**SFX:** music up for five seconds, then crossfade to sound of motorbike, then down under presenter.

**PRESENTER:** I cross over to the neighbouring county of Trans Nzoia, the traditional breadbasket of Kenya. Here, farmers engage in large-scale cereal farming, specifically maize and wheat. Mr. George Wafula leads a group of farmers going again the grain train. He grows tomatoes and onions—high-value crops that fetch him a tidy sum.

Why this choice in an area known for its maize fields?

**MR. WAFULA:** Maize growing does not make economic sense for people like us who have only five acres of land. The production cost is high and the returns are terribly low. The National Cereals and Produce Board is not consistent in its pricing because of cheap imports from neighbouring countries. So farmers are left at the mercy of brokers and middlemen. Last year, my neighbours and I decided to invest in onion farming and greenhouse tomato farming.

**PRESENTER:** Wasn’t that a risky gamble?

**MR. WAFULA:** Not really. I studied the trends in potential markets, mostly the major towns of Western and Nyanza regions. We found out that traders in Bungoma and other Western Kenya towns source produce from as far as Central Kenya *(Editor’s comment: Central Kenya is about 450 kilometres from towns in Western Kenya).* This presented an opportunity.

The risky part is the distance to these market towns, which meant I couldn’t do this alone. I needed to coordinate with other farmers to pool our produce together to cut transport costs. Also, our earth roads are impassable during the rainy season. Luckily, the county government came to our aid with its recent roadworks across the county. Now, we can easily reach the main tarmac road. We have made connections with buyers and some come to the farms to pick the produce, which is very convenient for us.

**PRESENTER:** How do you stay relevant and meet the demands of the market?

**MR. WAFULA:** It begins with understanding the market: where it is and when it needs your produce. You cannot take something to the market that is not needed. Nobody will buy it. In our case, we need to know when onions and tomatoes are needed and when they fetch the highest prices. Then we think of what varieties are preferred and for what reasons. Some of the reasons include taste and shelf life. It is important that, as we think of the market and the consumer, we also think of ourselves as farmers so that we do not benefit the consumer at our own expense. It is a trade-off.

**PRESENTER:** As a farmer, what do you consider to take care of your own interests?

**MR. WAFULA:** I choose varieties that are high yielding and hardy—that is, they are tolerant of pests and diseases, which reduces the cost of inputs, and they are tolerant of water stress because we rely on rain to farm onions. We also select varieties that can withstand stresses related to harvesting and post-harvest handling, and transportation to the market.

**PRESENTER:** Two seasons is not a long time to grow new crops. Definitely, you have quickly learnt on the job. What factors have helped you grow your farming?

**MR. WAFULA:** When we started, things were difficult, but we relied on information, training, and the experience of extension officers who were willing to assist us. We also attended agricultural shows in Kitale, Eldoret, and Bungoma, asked questions, and tried out the technologies and practices that were demonstrated at the shows. Where things didn’t work, we changed. We are still doing that and we are getting better and better.

**SFX:** music FOR five seconds, then down under presenter

**PRESENTER:** Mr. Alfred Amusibwa is an extension officer in Kimilili, Bungoma County. He explains the challenges farmers face in marketing their produce.

**MR. AMUSIBWA:** Thebiggest obstacle to smallholder farmers accessing markets is their limited knowledge of and ability to use market information. Extension officers do not explain market information in a way that allows farmers to use it to plan what and when to plant. Farmers and extension officers need to work together to identify market opportunities and supply those markets. As you have seen, there are farmers who are already moving in the right direction. We need to highlight them so that other farmers can learn from them.

**PRESENTER:** Mr. Amusibwa says that safety and health are important

issues that are hardly considered when people talk about marketing produce.

**MR. AMUSIBWA:** It is recommended that a farmer wait for the recommended number of days after applying pesticides on kales before harvesting. But some farmers do not wait. They simply harvest when the leaves are big enough for the market. This happens mostly during the dry season when vegetable production is low and demand is very high in town, and in schools and colleges. It is not a good practice as it exposes consumers to the potentially harmful effects of pesticide residues in the vegetables.

**PRESENTER:** How do you prevent this from happening?

**MR. AMUSIBWA:** Consumers don’t know where the fresh vegetables they buy in the market are grown. They also don’t know the amount of pesticides used by farmers, which is increasing because of the rising number of pests and diseases. Therefore,farmers themselves mustreduce the use of toxic substances on the farm. We work with farmers to ensure that they deliver healthy and safe produce to the market. Otherwise, we are failing in our duty to feed the nation. In my coverage area, for instance, I offer trainings to farmers on pesticide and other chemical applications through farmers’ groups or to individuals during farm visits.

**PRESENTER:** What is the main message in these farmer trainings?

**MR. AMUSIBWA:** As they say, prevention is better than cure. We tell our farmers to use the right amount, to use the right equipment for application, and to harvest after the recommended number of days. In this way, we protect the farmer and the consumer. We also have to think of the environment, something that is often ignored. Some of these chemicals stay in the environment for a long time. During heavy rains, they can find their way into rivers and wells. So we really have to be mindful of this. Otherwise, using these chemicals harms humans and the environment.

**SFX:** music FOR five seconds, then down under presenter

**PRESENTER:** Here are some of the precautions that farmers are advised to observe to ensure safe use of pesticides. Be careful not to splash pesticides on your body or clothing. Don’t spray pesticides on a windy day to avoid inhalation of pesticide spray and spray drift that can harm other vegetation, animals, or people. Do not eat, chew, smoke, or drink while applying pesticides.

Read and follow the directions on the label. These directions for use are very important. If you ignore the rates specified in the label and use lower rates, insects may develop resistance to the chemical and you may need to use a higher dosage to manage pests. Never use higher rates either. To protect the people who work or live in the farm, control entry to fields where pesticides have been applied; where possible, post signs to indicate treated fields.

Another important practice is to keep pesticides away from children, foods, livestock, and any other things that could be contaminated by pesticides. Keep pesticides in a locked store to reduce the likelihood of poisoning. When possible, return containers to the place where you bought them so that they can dispose the container. Do not reuse containers for any purpose. If you are not unsure, consult the agricultural officer in your area on current procedures for disposal of pesticide containers.

**SFX:** Market SOUNDS FOR FIVE seconds, then down under presenter

**PRESENTER:** I am back to the Bungoma agriculture produce market to see Mrs. Agnes Wandera, and to ask her my lingering question about safety.

Does it concern you that farmers bring recently sprayed vegetables to the market?

**MS. WANDERA:** It is difficult to tell if a farmer has harvested vegetables with high pesticide residues because some of them wash the leaves to remove soil, especially during the rainy season. Or they deliberately wash away the chemicals that stick to the leaves to make the vegetables clean and presentable.

But since we source our produce from farmers we know, we are confident that they follow the correct procedures. Once in a while, I go to the farms to supervise harvesting. In this way, I am sure that we are bringing clean and healthy food to our customers.(Laughing)That is why you see my customers happy. They know I care about them. If we don’t do that, our customers will notice and rebuke us or move to other vendors.

**PRESENTER:** Why?

**MS. WANDERA:** There is growing awareness on the part of some customers, which can be attributed to the rising cases of lifestyle diseases like cancer and heart disease. Thus, customers are careful about the food they buy and consume. Still, the most important concerns are quantity and quality.

**PRESENTER:** It is no easy task being selling fresh vegetable. Customers demand value for money, stretching every penny to get the maximum benefit. In short, marketing produce is more than just selling. It includes aspects of production, transporting produce to the market, what price to sell, and understanding which consumers you want to sell to. Farmers and marketers must be responsive to consumer needs. Consumers want more quantity, better quality, food that is safe and healthy, and a reasonably affordable price.

As we’ve heard, the farmer must watch the seasons and play the game of supply and demand in order to get maximum returns from the marketplace.

That marks the end of our program today. See you next week for another enriching episode. My name is \_\_\_\_. Thank you for listening.

**SFX:** FADE UP sounds of marketplace, fade out, and then SIGNATURE TUNE.

## Acknowledgements

Contributed by: John Cheburet, freelance radio producer, Kenya

Reviewed by: Wilson W. Aore, Senior Research Officer, Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization. Kibos, Kenya.

**Sources of information**

Interviews:

Agnes Wandera, fresh vegetable trader, Bungoma town, Kenya

Tobias Simiyu, farmer, Makotelo village, Bungoma County, Kenya

George Wafula, farmer, Trans Nzoia County, Kenya

Alfred Amusibwa, extension officer, Kimilili, Bungoma County

Interviews conducted in September and October 2019.