



Issue 51

Newsletter

Summer 2020

Farmers Overseas Action Group's 2020 Summer Appeal

FOAG Grow More Projects promoting Conservation Agriculture to increase Food Security for Farmers and Children's Centres.

As we know, climate change is making farming more difficult all over the world. In Uganda where most of the population are subsistence farmers, the yields of the staples of maize and beans are falling as soil fertility is decreasing and so meeting the basic food requirements is a constant challenge. During our visit to Uganda last year, Sister Margaret Awar of Youfra expressed it forcefully thus: "after providing shelter and buildings the next thing we need for the children is FOOD". The Sisters in charge of the Children's Centres which we support, Butiru, Budaka, Pamba and Youfra struggle week after week to fund the food bill for their charges. As you know FOAG has been one of their regular donors helping with funding for surgery, for buildings, food, and water supplies but we know the quest for greater food security is still to be answered.

And so we came back inspired to try and find ways to support our partners in Uganda with this challenge of increasing food security in a sustainable way. Our discussions with our Ugandan Partners had concluded, as have others globally, that the answer, in part, does lie in the soil by utilising the farming techniques known as Conservation Agriculture (CA) sometimes known as Evergreen Agriculture.

What is Conservation Agriculture?

Conservation Agriculture is based on three main principles, to be adapted to reflect local conditions and needs:

1. Minimum mechanical soil disturbance (i.e. no tillage) through direct seed and/or fertilizer placement. This reduces soil erosion and preserves soil organic matter.
2. Permanent soil organic cover with crop residues and/or cover crops. Maintaining a protective layer of vegetation on the soil surface suppresses weeds, protects the soil from the impact of extreme weather patterns, helps to preserve soil moisture, and avoids compaction of the soil.
3. Species diversification through varied crop sequences and associations involving at least three different crops. A well-designed crop rotation promotes good soil structure, fosters a diverse range of soil flora and fauna that contributes to nutrient cycling and improved plant nutrition, and helps to prevent pests and diseases.

The application of these main principles can be further enhanced by planting the crop in alleyways between leguminous shrub trees; such trees "fix" nitrogen to benefit the crop, provide dappled shade to the young crop, produce mulch material for fodder or ground cover, and can limit soil erosion with extreme weather rainfall.



Maize intercropped with beans



Young maize crop in an alleyway of leguminous shrubs

These methods seek to build up and maintain soil fertility and yields so that the growing of crops is sustainable in the long term given the climate conditions so many countries are facing. It is widely practised in East Africa but has yet to be seriously adopted in Uganda because of lack of education and recognition of the benefits among our farmers.

How FOAG are seeking to improve awareness and adoption of CA in Uganda

FOAG knows just the people who would promote this work:

For farmers - Godfrey Muhwezi of EADEN (Eastern Archdiocesan Development Network). EADEN have been working on our Waste Less programme providing storage for maize to prevent the loss of 30% of the crop between field and plate. He is keen to introduce CA to many hundreds of farmers in Mbale-Iganga-Tororo area and we fixed a budget of £25,000 over the next 5 years starting in late Summer 2020. Hence this Appeal!

For the Children's Centres - we identified Patrick Walusansa, a young agriculturalist with a strong interest in CA and improving nutrition for children. He is known to FOAG and helps with the Waste Less Programmes at EADEN and Namalu. He agreed to work with the Sisters at Butiru, Budaka, Pamba and Youfra to help them grow as much of their maize and beans as possible on their land which was mostly unused and to grow it using CA practices. Furthermore he would develop their vegetable gardens and involve the children as much as possible. He also, as at EADEN, hopes to educate the farmers near the Centres in these CA practices. Their first season started in Autumn 2019 and now we are half way through the first Planting Season of 2020. So far so good. We know making any changes is hard work, risky and requires commitment. Hence this appeal is also to fund the second planting season of 2020 at the Centres and one more in 2021 by which time we hope each Centre's Overseers will be ready to take over. Costs of each planting season are in the region of £6000 for the four Centres and the yields will feed them over the year. How wonderful that would be.



Filling a silo at Budaka Home



Children at St Francis Home, Pamba, with tomatoes they have grown

In this appeal, we are seeking donations to support both the work we are undertaking with farmers and with the Children's Centres. If you would like to assist in bringing Conservation Agriculture to Eastern Uganda, please donate by one of the methods below.

How to donate to FOAG's Summer Appeal

Please send a payment by Bank Giro Credit (if you have an internet bank account) to CAF Bank, account name: Farmers Overseas Action Group; Sort Code: 40-52-40; Account No: 00015662; with your name as reference please. Or you can send a cheque payable to Farmers Overseas Action Group to our Administrator: Robin Dean, Rectory Cottage, Stanford Bridge, Worcester, WR6 6ST.

If you have access to the internet, it is now possible to make donations via Stewardship Give.Net. This has the advantage that their handling charges are much lower than Just Giving (which we have previously used) and they remit your donation plus Gift Aid (if you pay it) within a few days. You can set up regular payments or one off payments – in your web browser type in <https://www.give.net/20023984> – this will take you to our Giving page then you will be taken to our Donation page – this will allow you to choose the amount you wish to donate. There is a privacy option (we would like to be able to acknowledge your donation and therefore would ask that you tick the "Please share my contact details with the recipient I'm supporting, for this gift"). It will then ask for your banking details and your contact details. You are able to set up an account or donate 'one-off'.

Thank you for supporting us!

News of Last Year's Summer Appeal

Thank you all for your generous response to our Summer Appeal last year, when we asked for funds to upgrade Kigulya Primary School near Masindi in Western Uganda.

We have had some reporting back on improvements made, but not the full portfolio of photos etc. that we would like to be able to show here. Unfortunately, illness of the Head Teacher, and the recent total lockdown in Uganda have slowed down reporting.