Hybrid seeds prove good performance in Singida

By SUNDAY NEWS Reporter

MORE than 150,000 sunflower farmers in the country are posed to raise their revenues and increasing employment opportunities from benefits brought about by sunflower hybrid seeds, which have proved to give high yield within short period of time.

Tanzania is one country among others in the world producing sunflower oilseeds for raw materials in processing cholesterol-free edible cooking oil with a by-product used as livestock feeds. Currently, sunflower oil makes about 13 per cent of the world edible oil production.

Visiting one of the sunflower project co-supported by the government of Ireland in Sekouture village, Singida region, the Irish ambassador to Tanzania Paul Sherlock accompanied with some Members of the parliament also from Ireland have urged farmers to increase adoption of the new seeds so that they could improve their lives.

"We are glad to see good performance of the trial sunflower fields and that I think you pose to raise your income. In Ireland our economy based much on agriculture and rural life. And as the visiting MPs say, we have learnt so much from you, which is a big takeaway back home," said Paul Sherlock, Irish ambassador to Tanzania

Speaking on behalf of the Singida Regional Commissioner at the farmers field day to hosting the Ireland delegates, the Singida Rural District commissioner, Elias Tarimo said it was high time that the sunflower farmers grab the potential opportunities brought by hybrid seeds in increasing production of the cooking oil crop.

"We have heard that, our development partners -AMDT have done extensive market diagnosis to understand the bottleneck of this sector, and use of local seeds variety was found to be one of the big constraints in order to develop the sunflower sub-sector.

"You have seen for yourself from your demonstration plots, use of hybrid seeds can increase your yields more than two times of what you used to get in one season," he said.

Mr Tarimo urged farmers to start shifting from persistent farming to farming as business and that they should start saving money to purchase more hybrid seeds for the upcoming planting season as they seek to expand their farms after they have tested performance of the hybrid seeds in their trial farms.

Testing of performance of the hybrid seeds in Singida was part of the series of seed trial support facilitated by the Agricultural Market Development Trust-AMDT through its co-facilitators across the country, where more than 15 metric tonnes -trial hybrid seeds were distributed last season to farmers to appreciate the new seeds performance.

Faida Mali, a local non-profit organisation is one of the co-facilitators implementing the AMDT Sunflower Projects in Singida region within four districts of Mkalama, Iramba, Ikungi and Singida rural.

In this season alone, about 127 mother demo-plots were established reaching farmers who adopted from the demo plots and planted in their own farms are 647 (261 women and 97 youth).

The first phase of the project was implemented in 2017 where 7,467 (women 4,312) small and medium scale farmers (women, youth and men) were reached.

Elaborating further about the sunflower intervention, the Faida Mali chief executive officer, Mr Tom Sillayo said from January 2018 to January 2021, the project is geared to reach 32,000 small and medium scale farmers (women, youth and men), supporting variety of "bundled-services" to farmers.

"With hybrid seeds such as Hyssun 33, farmers can get up to 20 bags per acre (70kg each). If each farmer cultivates only two acres, they can produce up to 76,000 tonnes per season. And with the average price is 900/- per kg, so farmers are expected to earn a total of 68, 400,000,000/-," he said.

Bytrade agronomist David Yamagaji explains a point to the Irish ambassador to Tanzania, Paul Sherlock and Members of the parliament from Ireland who visited sunflower project implemented in Singida region by the Agricultural Markets Development Trust (AMDT) this week. Looking on in the middle is the Singida Rural District Commissioner, Elias Tarimo.

With local seeds - data in the 2016/2017 season the cultivated land for sunflower were 392,747 acres yielding 245,458 tonnes. The average production is 4 – 6 bags per acre.

However, with the application of the improved seed Hyssun 33 there could be a huge deference in which the same 392,747 acres with production of 17 bags per acre they could produce 467,368 tonnes which is almost doubled.

AMDT employs market system development (MSD) approaches, where engaging private sector/Service Providers to work with on the ground for optimum service provision to ensure sustainability of the programme. Such service providers include soil testing, profitable market linkage, crop-insurance, ICT and information extension, financial services in close collaboration with the respective Local Government Authorities (LGAs).

Rehema Joel, a member of the KUNI famers group said they were very impressed to use the new seed, which has shown potential to give more yields as opposed to what they used to get. "we used to get a maximum of four bags per acre with our local variety, but we have seen that we could harvest up to 15 bags by adopting this hybrid seeds as demonstrated on our trial field supported by this project. This will be our life changer, we pose to get more revenue from this crop," she said.

"We have now learnt that, we have been wasting our precious time, energy and resources to cultivate the local varieties which give us low returns, but with this new variety, as farmers, we could benefit even more because the seeds tend to have more oil content upon processing," added Joshua Ramadhan, another farmer in Sekouture village.

The Trust is supported by the Government of Denmark, Government of Ireland, Government of Sweden and it has been established as a long-term facility to address challenges experienced in past markets development initiatives in Tanzania by facilitating interventions that identify and address diagnosed constraints to selected agriculture value chains.

Currently, the trust implements eight sunflower projects in 12 regions, with aim to reach 150,000 small-holder farmers by 2021.

Tanzania imports 60 per cent of total edible oil requirement despite having vast and promising production potential in the sunflower sub-sector, Bank of Tanzania (BoT) research shows.

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The production potential is missed as the national average yield is 0.6 tonnes compared to potential yield of 2.0 to 3 tonnes per acre.

The BoT Research paper 'Potentiality of Sunflower Sub-sector in Tanzania of March 2017' shows that local production of both factory and home extracted sunflower seed oil contributes about 40 per cent of edible oil requirement of 330,000 tonnes.

The 60 per cent gap is filled by imports. "This sub-sector is largely untapped...measures to boost sunflower production would definitely impact significantly on economic wellbeing... "the report says. However, despite the promising potentials in the sub-sector, sunflower production still is relatively low and benefits from its value chain have not been adequately realised.

Tanzania developed Sunflower Sector Development Strategy in March 2016 which outlines comprehensive approaches on how to promote sunflower sector in the country and identifies the role of each stakeholder in the development of the sector.

The BoT figures on sunflower seed output seem to correspond with that of United Nations Industrial Development Organisation UNIDO which put annual output of around 350,000 tonnes of sunflower oilseeds, corresponding to about 90,000 tonnes of oil, making Tanzania is one of the top ten sunflower oilseed producers in the world.

Sunflowers are grown all over the country, mostly by small-scale farmers. Therefore, the development of the sunflower oil sector has a great potential for improving livelihoods and the welfare of relatively poorer households.

According to 2015 FAO data, South Africa is the largest sunflower seeds producer accounting for 46 per cent of total continent's production, followed by Tanzania with 35 per cent.

SHORTSTORY

When a python captures your enemy!

By SOSTHENES MWITA
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I WILL never forget the day I mowed down five highly versatile enemy commandoes who cornered me in a dense jungle that July morning. And when a large jungle python captured the last commando, much to my delight, I knelt down and thanked the Almighty.

My battalion commander, a brigadier we all treated with veneration, had sent me on a solo mission to track enemy troops in that jungle.

Brigadier Wambura armed me heavily before departure. He laid in my hands a high-velocity machine pistol, a sharp 38-inch-blade combat knife, two powerful hand grenades, a long-range pair of binoculars, two Berretta pistols and, of course, the requisite array of bullets.

I also had other field paraphernalia. I was dressed in combat fatigues complete with a bullet-proof vest and a hard helmet. The brigadier also gave me two fast-poison capsules with which to kill myself in case enemy troops captured me.

"Look Paulo," he barked. "You must swallow both capsules with one clean sweep and drop dead. This will save you from excruciating enemy torture and pitiful death," he said. "And, whatever the case, never betray my trust," he ordered wagging an admonishing finger at me.

So, I wandered deep into the jungle to look for enemy positions. I dug my way labouriously, slashing thick creepers with the knife to clear the way for my boots. A rabbit flashed from the undergrowth under my feet startling me. It plunged into a cluster of thickets as a dove alighted from a nest.

I was trying to disentangle my boots that were snared in a mass of creepers when I saw a cigarette butt. I stooped low to examine it. Someone must have been here, I thought.

As I picked up the smouldering butt I spotted a fresh army bootprint in the damp soil. I turned around to appraise my surroundings rather nervously. Wham! I saw him. A member of the enemy forces!

A commando! My heart took a somersault. I scowled at him. Our eyes locked. Then I saw four more men. In fact I was surrounded and skillfully trapped by five enemy commandoes. I glared at the soldiers with sagging courage. However, I remembered an old piece of advice from my departed father.

My old man had taught me to face dangerous situations like this one with a cool head. "Never panic when you are confronted by life-threatening danger," he told me as we sat around a bonfire one bitterly cold evening. "You need an excellent presence of mind when in grave danger."

"Always be brave in the face of danger and fight back aggressively, hitting your enemy where it hurts most. Always make it out to your enemy that you have superior firepower. Enemies come in many forms. Sometimes they come in the form of animals, insects such as bees or fellow humans.

"People who panic in the face of danger often fail to use their heads and get killed. Bravery is a good survival tactic," he said. That was the advice from my old man. Now, if you think I swallowed those stupid fast-poison capsules and dropped dead, you have another shocker coming.

I hit the ground at lightning speed and rolled over for cover. I hid behind a thick dead tree and primed my mind and my weapons for a vicious fight. This smart combat tack must have dazed my adversaries, for they remained on their feet transfixed. But they all had their guns pointed in my direction.

I brought down the guy on my left with a burst of machine pistol fire. The man, grunted, leapt into the air and fell down groaning. His gun flew out of his hands. It dawned on the other men that the fight was real. They ducked behind tree trunks but I could see the knee of one man projecting.

I sunk a slug into that knee with pinpoint accuracy. The soldier flinched offering his chest to me on a silver platter. I now took a sniper shot without bothering to aim. I hit him with clinical precision. Two things happened simultaneously -- the man dropped dead and the other soldiers shot at me.

Most of their bullets whizzed past me and whistled into the wilderness. One bullet singed my left shoulder. At least ten bullets nicked my helmet. Those were killer shots, I thought. The men held their fire to study the situation. Well, I was making headway, anyway. It was two men down now.

But I still had three more combatants to tackle. The men were hiding conveniently behind tree trunks awaiting the opportune moment to strike. Intuition told me to attack again. So, I lobbed a hand grenade behind one of the trees where a well-fed man-mountain was lurking.

The explosion brought the man flying towards me. Again, my machine pistol barked. The man fell down and lay still in a heap. I counted him dead. The fourth man should not have come to this killing field. The foray was exceedingly dangerous for him. He was a coward and a naïve sissy.

The guy lost his nerve, threw down his rifle and fled like a maniac. He unwittingly sprinted through the vegetation. I brought him down with a single brain shot. That left me with only one enemy soldier -- the most ferocious one, perhaps. I now wasn't sure where the man was lurking.

I lobbed a hand grenade behind a suspicious-looking tree but, as fate would have it, the grenade overshot its target and rolled into a pond. It didn't explode. So, I hit the tree trunk with a flurry of bullets sending a cloud of dust swirling into the canopy of the tree.

Much to my bewilderment, the guy didn't respond. An eerie silence ensued. Sensing danger, I crawled on my stomach to a different position to scour the undergrowth for the soldier. Here, I lay still for a moment and then raised my head stealthily to scout for danger.

I was shocked by what I saw. It was, indeed, a bewildering scenario. In fact I had been wasting my ammunition fighting that last man. When I saw him, the slob was busy dying -- much to my delight. He was gasping for air desperately. Nature had already fought my battle and won it.

A large jungle python had captured the man and was mercilessly tightening its body coils to suffocate him! The reptile must have been very hungry. It was licking him at the same time!

After wetting him thoroughly and making sure he was dead, the giant serpent would swallow him. I knew very well that the man would not survive. So, I didn't shoot him. Instead, I knelt down and said a few prayers. I had to thank Almighty God for the spectacle.

The dying soldier had military boots, bulky combat fatigues and a hard helmet on. I could also guess that the man had hand grenades, pistols, and other implements of war in his shirt pockets.

I wondered how the snake would get round to swallowing him. I took away the captive's metre-long knife to help the snake. The knife was razor sharp. It could not have given the python any chance.

But nature has its own ways of solving problems. I remembered seeing a similar python swallowing an antelope that had sharp horns. In nature, I thought, one creature always dies to nourish another. It was this soldier's turn to nourish the snake.

Of course, the other dead soldiers would nourish hyenas and other carrion eaters that would come foraging at nightfall. I picked up the dying soldier's AK 47, which was lying unattended near the tree trunk and the other soldiers' weapons and stashed them in a military rucksack.

I walked off, allowing nature to take its course. I arrived at the camp panting with fatigue and reported my findings to Brigadier Wambura promptly.

The brigadier virtually took a walk on the clouds in delight. He called for an immediate assembly and announced my findings with plenty of pride. He displayed the arms I had captured before the brigade.

He patted me on the back, praised me profusely and called me an accomplished soldier. I became a decorated colonel after the war. A lavish party was lined up for me. Paulo, the decorated colonel.

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WEEKLY HOROSCOPE

Aries (March 21-April 19)

The next four weeks are busy! Plan on short trips, increased reading, writing and studying, mucho conversations with everyone, busy errands and new projects! The pace of your days will accelerate. Wow!

Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Today your focus swings to money, cash flow and major expenditures. This focus will last for four weeks. Ka-ching! Value your moneymaking ideas because you are the financial wizard of the zodiac. Enjoy shopping but keep your receipts.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

The Sun is in your sign for the next four weeks boosting your energy and giving you chance to recharge your batteries for the rest of the year. This is a favourable window of time because you attract important people and fortunate circumstances to you. Enjoy!

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Because your birthday is one month away, this means your personal year is ending. The next four weeks are the perfect time to contemplate what you want your new year to be all about. How do you want it to differ from last year? Ideas?

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22)

The next four weeks are popular! Everyone wants to see your face! Enjoy time with friends, clubs, groups and organizations. This is also an excellent time to bounce your goals for the future off someone to get their feedback.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

In the next four weeks, the Sun is at the top of your chart. This happens only once a year and when it does, it makes you look fabulous to bosses, parents and VIPs. Use this flattering light to your advantage! Go after what you want. Make your pitch.

Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)

You want to travel and discover adventure in the next four weeks. Do what you can to satisfy your urge for a change of scenery. If you can't travel, then be a tourist in your own town. Visit ethnic restaurants. See new places and talk to new people!

Scorpio (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)

You will be more intense in the next four weeks because of the placement of the Sun. Your passions will be aroused - not only sexually but in every other way as well. Issues will be black-and-white! Expect to focus on inheritances and shared property more than usual.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

For the next four weeks, the Sun is opposite your sign. (The only time all year this occurs.) Because of this, you will need more sleep. You will also have a stronger than average focus on your partner, spouse or close friend. Actually, you can learn about your style of relating.

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

You will bust your buns in the next four weeks because you want to get better organized. You want to get on top of your game. Not only that, you want to feel that you are healthy - the best you can be! Therefore, in this window of time - reach for the stars! Do what you can to improve your life.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

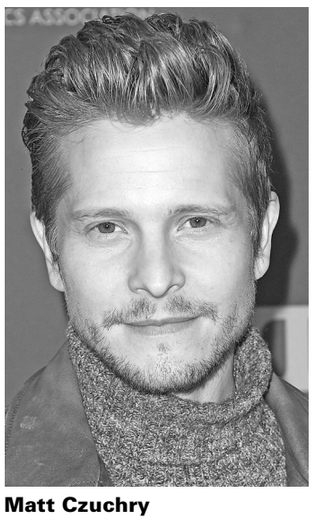
It's play city for Aquarians for the next four weeks. Romance, love affairs, vacations, social soirees, the arts, entertaining get-togethers plus sports events and playful activities with children are on the agenda for you. Grab some sexy duds and go out in full dazzle!

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20)

Your focus turns to home, family and your private life for the next four weeks. You will love to cocoon at home. Your interactions with a parent will be significant. Your focus will be on your private life, although Venus promises parties, romance plus fun and games!

If Your Birthday Is Today

Actor Matt Czuchry (1977) shares your birthday today. You love to travel and explore new ideas. You are warm, compassionate and charming. This is a time of completions and taking inventory. Review past triumphs and failures as you finish this nine-year cycle. You might let go of people, jobs and places to move on to something new. You are moving away from heavy burdens to something new and lighter!



Matt Czuchry