



# Spinning Maize into Gold: *ACDI/VOCA Strengthens the Maize Value Chain in Kenya*

By Martha James

“One definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting the same results.” So began ACDI/VOCA volunteer Martha Denney’s training to Kenyan farmer association leaders. Though she was referring to gender issues (see sidebar), the definition applies to all aspects of maize farming in Kenya. This year especially, when more than 125 Kenyans died from aflatoxin poisoning due to poor storage practices, training in maize production, processing and storage is crucial. ACDI/VOCA’s Kenya Maize Development Program (KMDP) is stepping in to transform the way maize is produced in the maize-deficit country so that it is a safer, more abundant and more lucrative crop for farmers. KMDP’s innovative approach addresses the entire maize value chain and utilizes a business development services model. By focusing on every player in Kenyan maize production, from the smallholder farmer to large-scale commercial millers, KMDP seeks efficiencies that save time and money but also ascertains where critical business services may be needed.

## Training

A major focus of KMDP is training. To ensure that as many smallholder farmers as possible in the targeted regions of Trans Nzoia, Uasin-Gishu, Lugari, Bungoma, Nakuru and Kakamega benefit from

the program, KMDP trainers travel extensively throughout the country demonstrating effective maize production and processing. They hold various seminars on such farming practices as planting, fertilizer and pesticide use, business services and marketing, and on social issues such as HIV/AIDS and gender. Because one of the best education techniques is learning by doing, field demonstrations have proven a useful way to illustrate the effectiveness of the improved production methods KMDP trainers are touting. New techniques can seem counterintuitive to farmers who have been growing maize all

their lives. Demonstration plots allow farmers to see firsthand how the new methods work without having to invest in inputs themselves. Julius Thuku opted to use his farm as a demonstration plot, which has been very successful to date. He acknowledged that the failure of similar donor programs has left his neighbors wary of new ideas. “They are not risk takers,” he said, “but I try hard at what I’m doing and the results will prove I am doing it from my own strength.”



ACDI/VOCA’s Stanley Guantai demonstrates safe pesticide use.

## Higher Yields

One of KMDP’s main objectives is increasing maize yields. Farmers who produced less than 2 tons of maize per hectare are now realizing yields of over 4.5 tons. Mr. Samoei, a KMDP participant, reached a record yield of 11.25 tons per hectare during the 2003 season and was named best overall farmer in the country by the National Farm Competition Committee of the Agricultural Society of Kenya. While Mr. Samoei’s success is extraordinary, other farmers have routinely doubled production in just one season, despite poor rains.

## Introducing Warehouse Receipts

Another key aspect of working to better the maize market chain in Kenya is to establish a grain warehouse receipts program. To date, it has been challenging to introduce the receipts concept to farmers, millers and traders, who are used to dealing in maize as it is harvested rather than storing it and selling it later. As part of this effort, in August KMDP facilitated the first of two annual maize industry business fairs in Nakuru at Lesiolo Grain Handlers Ltd. Focused on the theme of “Strengthening Partnership in the Maize Business,” the fair featured 39 exhibitors. Among the 2,500 attendees was the guest of honor, the Honorable Zaddock Syongoh, Member of Parliament and Assistant Minister of Trade, who commended KMDP for bringing together various stakeholders from both the private and public sectors for the event. A second fair, featuring 40 exhibitors and four financial institutions, was held at Moi’s Bridge Grain silos and was attended by over 7,000 farmers and maize traders. The Honorable Kipruto Arap Kirwa, the Kenyan Minister of Agriculture, attended and challenged other organizations to invest in agriculture to revitalize the Kenyan economy.



To create linkages along the Kenyan maize value chain, ACDI/VOCA has sponsored two business fairs.

The strategy of ACDI/VOCA’s Kenya Maize Development Program is essentially to keep Kenya’s maize farmers from repeating the mistakes of the past. Through extensive work along the maize value chain, the maize sector in Kenya can become more robust, efficient and profitable.

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## Incorporating Social Issues into an Enterprise Development Program

While fertilizers, planting techniques and pesticides are important factors in any maize production enterprise, social topics can also be significant. Acknowledging

this, the Kenya Maize Development Program has incorporated training on gender, HIV/AIDS and other pressing social issues into the curriculum. Consultants like Martha Denney (above on left) and Phoebe Owuor highlight the importance of equality in the



enterprise and the need to practice HIV/AIDS prevention. In addition, KMDP sponsors activities like dramas and puppet shows demonstrating HIV/AIDS prevention and care techniques.



## KMDP Goes Live

Up-to-date market information is crucial to planning agricultural enterprises and marketing agricultural commodities. As of July, Kenyan farmers have twice-a-day access to current market information disseminated through the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation. The radio program reaches 3 million people, even those in the most rural areas, making it an ideal outlet for market information. The information is updated by Kenya Agricultural Commodity Exchange (KACE), ACDI/VOCA's partner in the Kenya Maize Development Program.

