



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

## Focus: Land Preparation

Land preparation is very important for good crop production. Most farmers will soon start preparing for the next agriculture season. Conservation farming takes advantage of the natural ecological process to conserve moisture, enhance soil fertility and improve soil structure. It also reduces soil erosion and the presence of disease and pests.

For one to succeed in conservation farming, one has to follow the four main components -- land preparation, keep the soil cover, control weeds and rotate crops. This week we draw more attention towards land preparation. Land preparation is done for two main reasons -- to control weeds and to allow for proper seeding.

Prior to planting, the soil needs to be prepared with some form of tillage or chemical "burn down" to kill the weeds that would crowd out the crop or compete with it for water and nutrients

# The Weekly

## Information Resource Bulletin

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- Bring listeners in the project area the latest information on natural resources, the environment and agriculture
- Focus on solutions, what works and what people can do
- Encourage listeners to share both their questions and solutions (African solutions for African problems)
- Raise awareness of issues that need to be discussed to affect public policy.
- Bring the latest solutions and practices that have relevance to this region from around the world
- Identify and link other NGOs working in the region share the project interests and goals
- Give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on these issues

### Problem: Poor Land Preparation

Land preparation and crop establishment go together, since land preparation influences the ability of the crop to emerge and produce a good, uniform crop.

The major concern related to soil preparation is the losing of soil and also disturbing soil structure. Soil erosion is the natural process that occurs when water or wind cause top soil to be removed and carried elsewhere. In agriculture, the loss of soil means loss of nutrients -- which are needed for crop production.

Poor soil preparation has impact on farmers by reducing crop yield, lowering cash income, lower fertility levels, more runoff and less

water infiltration into the soil. Improper soil preparation also has an effect on people other than farmers -- it can include a decrease in water quality downstream and eroded soil.

Poor land preparation can also lead to more pests in the crops and may increase the incidence of disease which may reduce yield. If the residue from the previous crop was full of weeds, there is likely to be weeds in the current crop. The weed residue can also fix nitrogen in the soil.

In conservation farming, farmers must protect the crop lands from animal grazing after harvest.

## Solutions: Activities for Journalists

Conservation farming allows a farmer to start land preparation immediately after harvesting. Find out from the listeners what they're doing to their field from the time they harvest their crops?

Why should a farmer think of starting land preparations right now?

If a farmer starts to prepare his/her land early it will allow them to plant their crops at the onset of the rain season and spread their work over a month.

Conservation farming encourages farmers to leave at least 30% residue coverage on the soil. It includes no-till, where no tillage is done at all and seeds are placed directly into the previous season crop residue.

Find out how a farmer can improve soil fertility? Find out the advantages of early planting especially if there is a drought season.

In reduced tillage, minimal soil disturbance is done to get a good plant stand.

Find out what kinds of tools farmers can use for minimal soil disturbance?

How do farmers control weeds?

Find out how they control pests.

Find out if farmers know the advantages of early preparations and planting of crops in a drought-prone area.

Conservation farming encourages digging holes to assist in water harvesting by small

scale farmers.

Find out from listeners who have practiced conservation farming how their crops performed in a drought spell.

Zambia National Farmers Union through conservation farming unity has established a lot of demonstration plots.

Have farmers in your community attended the farmer field schools of Zambia National Farmers Union.

The Ministry of Agriculture and the Food Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is promoting conservation farming in Zambia.

Ask farmers if they participate in any of these programs.

Encourage listeners to talk to their local extension agent about basic conservation farming techniques.

### Useful Links

Information about farming and the environment: Makweti Sishekanu, National Farmers Union Zambia: +260-211-252-649 or +260-965-098-360. Email: [makwetiskanu@yahoo.com](mailto:makwetiskanu@yahoo.com)

Sinya Mbale, Conservation Farming Unity Manager 0965238008

Good source of information: Vincent Ziba, FAO Zambia; Email: [vinceziba@yahoo.com](mailto:vinceziba@yahoo.com). Phone: 0966-246-924

Good source of information; Mwape Sichilongo, WWF Conservation Manager. Email: [msichilongo@wfwzam.org](mailto:msichilongo@wfwzam.org). Phone: +260 966442540