

VOICES

SHARING IDEAS, GROWING SOLUTIONS.



The newsletter
for partners of
Developing
Countries Farm
Radio Network

March 2007, NO. 80

FINDING A NICHE FOR SPECIALIZED CROPS AND LIVESTOCK

What are Niche Agricultural Products?

Niche agricultural products are specialized crops or livestock for which there is a very particular but limited market. For example, mushrooms, potatoes and other vegetables are considered niche crops in many parts of Africa, as are flowers, spices, fruits and medicinal herbs. Snails and rabbits are examples of animals that are considered niche products in parts of Africa. Maize, rice, pigeon pea, goats and chickens are not niche products; rather, they are staples because they are widely produced and consumed throughout Africa. If a farmer chooses niche products wisely, they can provide both needed income and, in some cases, food for farm families. They can also provide “insurance” for times that staple crops fail.

The market for niche agricultural products is relatively small and unstable. This is what makes the production of niche products attractive to the smallholder – the markets are too small for the big companies to bother with. On the other hand, this also makes it a risky strategy for smallholders. The market could dry up suddenly or, if it grows, it could become attractive to large producers that can easily undercut the smallholder’s prices. Converting whole farms to the production of niche agricultural products is therefore a risky strategy. Careful planning together with the support of a farmer’s organization can help ensure that niche agricultural products improve the livelihood of farming families without endangering basic food security by taking too many resources away from the production of staples.

Successful niche agricultural products vary greatly from region to region, depending on many factors, including climate and the state of the market. For advice on what niche products might be a good choice in your area, you might want to talk to national or international agricultural research organizations, or to farmers’ unions, farmers’ groups, or agricultural extensionists.

It is sometimes said that a really good niche agricultural product is one that faces some kind of a barrier or challenge to entry to the market. For example, a niche crop might require unusual

climate conditions, or the crop may need many years to mature. If you live in that very specialized ecological zone, or if your family owns an orchard of trees that took many years to mature, you may have an advantage entering the market. Cooperating with other farmers can be critical as well. Two of the scripts in this package show how farmers’ groups can successfully produce for niche markets that would be difficult for individual farmers to enter. However, it is not a good idea to enter a niche market in which a larger and better-financed group is well established and successful, because the new group will likely be undersold and driven out of business.

Niche Agricultural Products for Export and Regional Markets

Some niche agricultural products are grown mainly for export. For example, Kenyan farmers grow a lot of flowers for export, mostly to Europe. However, these kinds of export markets can be dominated by larger growers or by large cooperatives, and there are often very specific and stringent quality requirements. If you are interested in growing for these markets, it is very important to have connections to larger international organizations. Regional markets in Africa are often not well-developed, but, where they exist, they may offer opportunities for producing niche agricultural products on a smaller scale and with less capital expense than overseas export markets.

Niche crops are not limited to fruits, vegetables and spices. Organic crops as well as fair trade crops occupy specialized niches in the marketplace, niches that are expanding every year.

In this package, we profile six niche agricultural products: bamboo, cashews, jatropha, potatoes, snails and rabbits. None of these are considered staples in Africa. In the scripts about cashews and potatoes, the existence of farmers’ groups is the key to success. Working with other organizations, including processors, retailers, and national or international research organizations can greatly help farmers groups successfully enter niche markets.

Continued on page 2

WELCOME NEW PARTNERS!



PHOTO: Rodric, one of RMA's newly-trained presenters, sitting in the studio during one of the first test broadcasts at the end of 2006.

- **Palisah News Agency** – a news agency in Lusaka, Zambia, that reports on agricultural and education-related initiatives
- **Radio Meva Ankarana (RMA)** – a community radio station in the village of Antsaravibe, Madagascar
- **Radio NAANE OUASSA FM** – a community radio station in Atacora, Benin
- **Réseau des Radios communautaires AADAR** – a community organization with a radio project consisting of 5 community radio stations in the north of Mali
- **ROYALS FM** – a community radio station located in Wenchi, in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana
- **Woman to Woman FM** – a radio station run by and targeting women in Yaoundé, Cameroon

Finding a Niche for Specialized Crops & Livestock *Continued from front page*

If you would like to see additional DCFRN scripts on niche agricultural products, please visit the script archive at www.farmradio.org/english/radio-scripts/ to find the following scripts:

- 71.1 Farmers in eastern Nigeria grow the fluted pumpkin
- 68.4 Mushrooms for sale
- 55.4 The supermarket garden
- 55.3 Grow vegetable crops with coconuts
- 49.8 Marie and Jean Thomas grow tropical flowers in coconut husks
- 48.1 A simple way to feed baby rabbits
- 44.8 The many uses of the prickly pear cactus
- 33.2 Rabbits are a good source of low fat protein – Breeding rabbits and taking care of them
- 33.1 Rabbits are a good source of low fat protein – Part 1: Building a rabbit hutch
- 26.2 Profit from raising rabbits in the city

For more information about niche agricultural products included in this script package please consult the following resources:

Cashew

www.worldagroforestry.org/Sites/TreeDBS/aft/docs/Anacardium_occidentale.doc

Jatropha

www.jatropha.de/

Snail Production

www.fao.org/sd/erp/toolkit/Books/BFAnimals/33%20farming%20snails%201_files/INDEX.HTM

www.fao.org/SD/ERP/toolkit/Books/BFAnimals/34%20farming%20snails%202_files/INDEX.HTM

Bamboo

www.inbar.int/

Rabbits

www.fao.org/docrep/x5082e/x5082e00.htm

Potatoes

International Potato Center — sub-Saharan Africa
c/o ILRI Campus, Naivasha Road
P.O. Box 25171,
Nairobi 00603, Kenya
Phone: (254-20) 422-3000
Ext 3601; 3602
E-mail: cip-nbo@cgiar.org
Contact: Jan Low, SSA Regional Representative

PRAPACE (Regional Potato and Sweet Potato Improvement Program for East and Central Africa)
Plot 7, Bandali Rise, Bugolobi
P.O. Box 22274,
Kampala, Uganda
Phone: (256-41) 286-209
E-mail: prapace@infocom.co.ug
Contact: Berga Lemaga, PRAPACE Coordinator

References

Berkelaar, D. (2001). Marketing Niche Crops: Marlin Huffman, Plantation Botanicals. *ECHO Development Notes*, Number 71, April 2001, page 5. <http://www.echotech.org/technical/English/edn71.pdf>

AND THE **WINNER**
 OF THE 2006 GEORGE ATKINS
 COMMUNICATIONS AWARD IS...
DATA PHIDO,
 AFRICAN RADIO DRAMA ASSOCIATION (ARDA)!!

DATA PHIDO, the Program Director of the African Radio Drama Association (ARDA), Nigeria, has been involved in several DCFRN activities since her organization joined the Network in 2003. She has contributed to DCFRN script packages, most notably coordinating a talented scriptwriting team to produce the 13-episode drama entitled “The Long Dry Season: A Tale of Greed and Resourcefulness” on the issue of desertification for DCFRN’s March 2006 package. The result was an edge-of-your-seat entertaining drama with heroes and villains, multiple plots, fascinating characters, and lots of action and humour. Woven throughout the tale are important messages about the dangers of desertification and about positive steps farmers can take to prevent it. Data has also participated in DCFRN’s electronic broadcaster discussion group. She has overseen program design and management at ARDA for the last 10 years.

ARDA is a production and training centre for interactive and participatory programs. The group produces and syndicates entertainment and educational radio programs on radio stations throughout Nigeria. Program topics cover democracy and good governance, maternal health, sexual responsibility, women’s rights and child survival. ARDA works with several community radio listeners’ clubs, and has also trained and supported women’s groups and farming associations to produce and broadcast their own programs under the award winning Development through Radio (DTR) project called “Village Meeting.”



Data receiving her George Atkins Communications Award from DCFRN’s President, Doug Ward, in Ottawa, Canada, in November 2006.

This is the 3rd time the prize has been awarded to a Nigerian partner. In 2004, Sachia Ngutsav of Radio Benue received the award, and in 1994 Peter Afekoro from the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources was the recipient.

RADIO STATIONS COMMITTED TO PRODUCING PROGRAMS FOR RURAL AUDIENCES IN GHANA, TOGO AND NIGERIA

By Blythe McKay

Radio stations and organizations across Ghana, Togo and Nigeria continue to view programming for smallholder farmers and rural communities as central to the work they carry out because the majority of their audiences are rural dwellers.

From January 19 until March 3rd I had the opportunity to visit many Farm Radio Network partners in Ghana, Togo and Nigeria as well as meet with stations interested in joining the Network.

The purpose of the trip was to reinvigorate our partnerships by meeting with partners face to face, strengthen DCFRN, learn which topics partners can contribute scripts or articles on, and to discuss upcoming Farm Radio Network activities.

During my visit, broadcasters shared first hand the different ways they produced programs for their rural audiences. Several examples stand out. A producer at Radio Ada in Ghana visits a different village each week and meets with farmers to hear what crops they are growing, how they maintain the soil and new innovations they have introduced. This approach enables farmers to contribute to Radio Ada's farmers' programme, and to learn from each other. Classic FM in Ghana collaborates with the Ministry of Agriculture to develop agricultural programs. Farmers are invited to the studio to share their ideas and experiences alongside resource experts. There is a 20-minute phone-in component of the program where farmers can call and ask questions. Radio Citadelle Vogon and Radio La Voix de Vo in Vogon,



Togo depend on their relationship with local NGOs such as REAILD and Vets Without Borders to visit communities and record programs in the field. The Women Farmers Advancement Network (WOFAN) in Kano, Nigeria collaborates with Radio Kano to produce a programme developed by local communities. WOFAN has trained community groups to use tape recorders and cassettes to record their views on health, agriculture and the environment. Radio Kano edits the community recording before sending it out on the airwaves.

Throughout my trip, stations and organizations were happy to suggest priority topics to be covered in upcoming DCFRN script packages. Of particular interest were scripts about pest management, soil fertility, preventing bushfires, fuelwood alternatives, microcredit, sharing farmer innovations, market prices, climate change, water management, and how to fundraise for radio.

A huge thank you to everyone I met! And keep up the good work!!



The radio stations and organizations Blythe McKay met with during her trip:

GHANA

- Radio Central, Cape Coast
- Garden City Radio, Kumasi
- OTEC FM, Kumasi
- Classic FM, Techiman
- ROYALS FM, Wenchi
- Radio Ada, Ada
- GBC, Accra
- Simli Radio, Dalun
- Radio Savannah, Tamale
- Radio FREED, Nandom
- Radio Peace, Winneba
- Radio Daetsrifa, Accra

TOGO

- Radio Citadelle Vogan (RCV), Vogan
- Radio La Voix de Vo (RVV), Vogan
- Radio Planète Plus, Kpalimé
- Radio Peace FM, Kpalimé
- Radio Kara, Kara
- Radio MECAP Togo, Dapaong

NIGERIA

- African Radio Drama Association (ARDA), Lagos
- Women Farmers Advancement Network (WOFAN), Kano

- Radio Kano, Kano
- Crown Women Cooperative Organization, Ogidi
- Women Information Network (WINET), Enugu
- Radio Benue, Makurdi
- Gombe Media Corporation, Gombe
- Radio Nigeria Kaduna, Kaduna
- Radio Katsina, Katsina
- Voice of Nigeria, Lagos

PHOTOS

Left: A small-scale farmer in southern Ghana discusses the problems he's had with his cashew plantation for Radio Peace's Farmer Program.

Above Left: A farm in the dry season, in the broadcast range of Radio MECAP Togo, in northern Togo.

Above: A woman from a village near Kano performs in a role play about water and sanitation – the Women Farmers Advancement Network (WOFAN) is actively engaged in grassroots initiatives to support sustainable development in rural communities in northern Nigeria.



DCFRN PARTNERS IN NIGERIA **CREATE VISION** FOR IN-COUNTRY COLLABORATION AND NETWORK

On February 15, 2007 in Abuja, several of DCFRN's Nigerian partners met with Blythe McKay, DCFRN's Development Communication Coordinator, to identify opportunities for collaboration. The discussion covered a range of important issues, including upcoming activities at DCFRN, ways in which DCFRN partners in Nigeria can collaborate with each other, and topics of relevance to Nigerian smallholder farmers.

All participants emphasized their commitment to develop radio programmes or projects for smallholder farmers, particularly since smallholder farmers make up the majority of the population in the areas where the stations and NGOs are based. They believe that smallholder farmers can, with support from broadcasters, use radio as a medium to discuss issues such as access to loans for purchase of agricultural inputs, and as a means of receiving information on topics such as fuelwood alternatives, preventing bushfires, and how to form a farmers' association.

It didn't take long for the participants to decide that what they wanted was an active Nigeria Network of DCFRN partners, which would be driven by Nigerian partners themselves, and would enable them to support each other on topics of relevance to Nigerian smallholder farmers. By the end of the day, after a fruitful discussion, the participants agreed on the following goal and objective to guide them forward:

Goal: Collaborate in order to support and advocate on issues that promote sustainable agriculture among smallholder farmers in rural Nigeria.

Objective: To build capacity among forum partners by sharing experiences and skills in order to create more effective programming for farmers.

The participants agreed to create an electronic forum to communicate with each other by email as a starting point to achieve the goal and objective. They also emphasized the importance of future face-to-face meetings in order to attain their vision.

In Ottawa, DCFRN's Executive Director Kevin Perkins expressed his appreciation for the efforts of Nigerian members to come together to share perspectives and experiences and to identify new opportunities for collaboration. "I'm very pleased that Nigerian members of DCFRN have decided to form a national network. Working together, our Nigerian partners will create more effective programs for farmers and strengthen their role as advocates for sustainable agriculture. Special thanks to Data Phido of ARDA for organizing this Forum."

PHOTO — Forum participants from left to right:
Ijeoma Ogbonna, Women Information Network (WINET)
Sadisu Imam, Radio Katsina
Lawal Ali Garba, Radio Nigeria Kaduna
Lawal Musa Kankia, Farmers Association of Katsina
Abbas Ibrahim, Radio Kano
Sachia Ngutsav, Radio Benue
Umar Baba Kumo, Gombe Media Corporation
Blythe McKay, DCFRN
Lauryn Mezue, Crown Women Cooperative Organization
Salamatu Garba, Women Farmers Advancement Network (WOFAN)
Data Phido, African Radio Drama Association (ARDA)

Community Radio in Niger

By Sanoussi Mayana Issoufou

IN 2002, as part of Niger's development strategy, Nigerien authorities decided to create several community radio stations across the country. With assistance from development partners (UNDP, UNICEF, FAO, the NGO 'Karkara') and in certain cases community members themselves (in the case of Agoudoufoga in the Tillabery region), community radio stations were built.

The aim of this initiative was to enable communities to use the community radio stations and new information and communication technologies (ICTs) powered by solar power to help promote community self-sufficiency related to basic human needs.

There are now close to one hundred community radio stations in Niger's eight regions. There are 17 stations in Agadez, 14 in Diffa, 18 in Zinder, 5 in Maradi, 15 in Tillabery, 8 in Dosso, 5 in Tahoua and 3 in Niamey. There are also a dozen or so private radio stations in Niamey.

The community radio stations are broadcasting local interest programs in local languages and on development themes. The radio stations are meant to be apolitical and non-religious and as a result all partisan broadcasts are banned.

As a whole, the radio stations struggle to find the necessary means to produce their own programs and have pre-recorded programs on local topics. However, the broadcasts they do manage to produce, including debates, stories and radio dramas centred on social, economic and cultural aspects of development, are inspiring to their audiences.

Sanoussi Mayana Issoufou and his NGO RDD-le micro vert are helping DCFRN grow in Niger by connecting with 10 community radio stations in five of the country's regions. The stations are receiving Farm Radio Network's script packages, are providing feedback on the information received and also identifying topics they would like to see or contribute on in the future.

The stations involved in this initiative are:

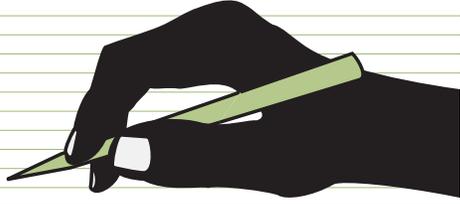
NIAMEY: Radio Assemblée Nationale

ZINDER: Sassoubroum; Wacha; Mrirriah; Malawa

TILLABERY: Liboré

DOSSO: Dan Kassari

MARADI: Zinaria de Nafouta; Tessaoua; Mayahi.



THE LIFE OF A SCRIPT

AT LEAST three times a year, DCFRN publishes a radio script package on one or two specific themes of relevance to African smallholder farmers and their families. To make sure that scripts are ready in time, DCFRN staff plan ahead. For instance, the July package will have innovative practices as one of its focuses.

Once a theme has been determined, Vijay Cuddeford, DCFRN's Managing Editor, starts contacting radio partners in the Network to see if they can contribute a radio script relevant to the theme. Sometimes Vijay will provide the partner with information to be included in the script, or link the radio broadcaster with an agricultural research institution; at other times, he will ask the radio partners to write a script based on their knowledge of what farmers in their areas are doing. Often it is a combination of the two approaches.

When the radio partner has developed the script, Vijay reviews it and provides feedback to the scriptwriter on how to improve the script in terms of content and style. The script is also sent to a resource specialist who reviews the script content to ensure its accuracy. After the radio partner has addressed Vijay's comments and sent the improved script back to Vijay, and the reviewer has approved the content, the script is ready to be published and the radio partner receives an honorarium for his/her work.

If the script was written in English it is translated into French, and vice versa if the script was written in French. Then the scripts are printed and mailed by post to all radio partners, together with the latest volume of *Voices*, DCFRN's partner newsletter. Script packages are also archived on our website, and partners are notified by email about the new package.

Partner RESOURCES



RECORDED PROGRAMS FROM Radio Canada International (RCI)

RCI provides free access to quality programming offering a different perspective and an innovative content.

RCI programming can easily be blended with your own programs.

RCI brings you:

1. On CD:
 - *Canada à la carte*: a CD digest of reports and/or interviews on a variety of topics. You can incorporate these four- to 10-minute items into your own programming at your convenience. Produced monthly.
 - **English and French-Canadian pop music** or other types of music of your choice.
 - **Children's English and French-language lessons**, designed for radio, using Canadian legends and nursery rhymes.
2. All RCI programs in MP3 audio files:
 - On the **RCI AUDIO BANK**: www1.rcinet.ca to which RCI will give you access with a code name and password.
3. You can also sign up to receive **RCI's CyberJournal**. Once you sign up for this free service, you'll receive via e-mail a daily summary of the top Canadian and international news stories. Broadcasters can use the material with RCI's permission. www.rcinet.ca/rci/en/

If you are interested in signing up to receive RCI programs please contact:

Ginette Bourély
Partnerships, RCI, P.O. Box 6000
Montreal, Canada, H3C 3A8
Fax : 514 597 7248
ginette_bourelly@radio-canada.ca

WEATHER FORECAST SITE for Anywhere Around the World

www.fallingrain.com/world/

The above website forecasts temperature, cloud cover and rainfall over an 8-day period.

How to use the site to get the 8-day weather forecast for your area:

1. Click on your country
2. Click on your region
3. Click on your town or village

*Alternatively under region click 'none' and find your town or village alphabetically.



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