

Fighting “witch weed” with radio

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Vambiè Théra, who hails from the community of Pérakuy in Mali, was one of the farmers reached by the educational programs. He had heard about striga, but didn't think of it immediately when his crops quickly withered one year. Instead he consulted traditional spiritualists who advised that his crop was cursed and that he should make animal sacrifices to return good fortune to his fields. He carried out the prescribed rituals to no avail – his harvest was half of what he expected, meaning food shortages for his family.

His luck finally changed for the better when he turned his radio dial to Farm Radio International partner Radio Moutian while it aired an educational program

about striga. He quickly learned that striga was worse than he imagined, but that it could be controlled. He took careful note of the methods to prevent striga – methods which also promote good soil health, since striga thrives in poor soil environments.

“Now every night, my family listens to the next part of the story on Radio Moutian. And I'm not the only one – just ask the radio station – (the striga program) has become their flagship show,” says Vambiè Théra. Armed with the information on how to prevent striga, he's already taken steps to prepare for the upcoming planting season and reclaiming his family's food security.

*Supporting
broadcasters in
developing countries to
strengthen
small-scale farming
and rural
communities.*

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network news

FARM RADIO INTERNATIONAL

Fighting “witch weed” with radio

Farmers learn to prevent **striga**, a weed that can devastate staple crops

Five years ago, nothing grew well in Barafo Théra's family farm, which lies in the community of Damy in Mali. Nothing, that is, except for a weed called striga. Striga is a parasitic plant that attaches itself to the roots of host plants, sapping them of nutrients. What this means for farmers like Mr. Théra is finding their staple crops such as millet and sorghum yellow, stunted, and withering. This leads to poor or non-existent harvests and, all too often, hunger.

Striga affects two-thirds of the land that African farmers devote to cereal crops, overtaking the very crops that families rely on for their staple food. The weed is so pervasive that many experts consider it the greatest obstacle to food security in Africa. It's so hated that it's earned the nickname “witch weed.”

Year after year Mr. Théra, his wife Worowé Kamaté, and their four children, faced poor harvests and food shortages due to striga. But everything changed the day he met with a local farmers union.

“Talking is good, but you will understand me better if you see my field today,” Mr. Théra says as he leads Farm Radio International writer Mariam Koné past their family compost pit. They have four acres of farmland. Here his family grows millet, sorghum, fonio, and sesame. Thanks to composting and other farming techniques that he learned from the farmers union, the fields are a healthy green and free from striga. The couple now produce plenty of food for their family, with a small surplus to sell for cash.



Malian farmers examine sorghum before the harvest. Thanks to educational radio programs, they have learned to protect their crops from striga.

The farming techniques that allowed Mr. Théra and Mrs. Kamaté to save their crops from striga are low cost and relatively simple to learn. These include practices like intercropping legumes with cereal crops and penning livestock to provide a ready supply of manure fertilizer. However, knowledge about these practices has been slow to spread. That's where Farm Radio International comes in.

Through a partnership with the same farmers union that helped Mr. Théra and his family, a local radio station, and the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, Farm Radio International is spreading the word on effective techniques to combat striga to hundreds of thousands of Malian farmers. We are also gathering resources so that we can reach farmers in Burkina Faso with similar educational radio programs that explain steps to fight striga.

Volunteer Profile: Danny Beswick

“We share the same vision of agriculture”



It might surprise you to learn that one of Farm Radio International's newest volunteers had a negative first impression of our organization. Danny Beswick is a small-scale farmer who values sustainable agriculture. So before he really knew about Farm Radio International's mission and work, he was concerned that our goal might be to export western approaches to large-scale agriculture. He was relieved – and pleased – to learn that it's quite the opposite.

“It's what it should be,” Danny says about Farm Radio International's approach, which focuses on supporting small-scale African farmers by sharing practical information. “It's understanding the needs of people in developing countries and meeting their needs. It accepts that a lot of agriculture in the developing world is sustainable, small-scale, and about feeding families and communities.”

Once he understood how Farm Radio International works to foster food security in Africa, he wanted to help out. So during the winter months, when farm work is scarce, Danny devoted one day per week to volunteer at Farm Radio International's Ottawa office.

It was a change of pace from his work at Roots and Shoots Farm, a small, organic operation in Manotick, just outside of Ottawa, that grows 50 varieties of vegetables to sell to CSA (Community-Supported Agriculture) members.

But for Danny, the same values that fostered his interest in hands-on farming brought him to Farm Radio International. He says: **“we share the same vision of agriculture that is sustainable, ecologically sound and meets the needs of the community and the people who farm.”**

Farm Radio Weekly celebrates 200th edition

Farm Radio Weekly (FRW) is our news and information service for rural radio broadcasters in sub-Saharan Africa. Each week, FRW delivers the latest agricultural news stories of relevance to small-scale farmers to the inboxes of more than 2,000 subscribers. It is a service that hundreds of radio stations across Africa rely on for information and inspiration for their agricultural programs.

In May, we celebrated a landmark as the 200th edition was published. On this occasion, Martin Mwape, a Farm Radio Broadcaster for Breeze FM in Zambia, told us what FRW means for him and his station:

"I must confirm that I am a regular reader of Farm Radio Weekly. I find the stories good because I like farming and I also produce farm programmes. They assist me to pick up issues that I should address in my programmes. I personally do use some of the stories directly though with some edits because of translation issues. I use them in my weekly programme called Weekend Special which is all about news concerning farmers."

You can check out the 200th edition of Farm Radio Weekly and browse other past editions at:

<http://weekly.farmradio.org>



Donor Profile: Bill Schneider – "Why I became a Friend of Farmers"

To me, Farm Radio International is the ultimate social-stability builder. Nothing is more fundamental to social, economic, and political stability than the welfare of resilient, self-reliant farm communities – and doubly-so for subsistence farmers. Growing up on a beef farm in Wellington County, Ontario, I learned that self-reliance within a mutually-supportive community is everything – and nothing fosters that more than the initiatives of FRI.

In terms of my own priorities – I see 'Task Leadership Training,' or the ability to carry through tasks to a sound outcome – as something that is

essential for the next generation of youth in all parts of the world. I came to understand that this is something that FRI achieves through its work to empower small-scale farmers with the skills and confidence they need to succeed. Subsistence farming requires people to define issues as they arise, and then pull together the information, resources, and community goodwill needed to deal with them. FRI inspires young leaders to play such roles.

As I came to realize how strongly I felt about the work of FRI, it seemed desirable to establish some

sort of 'membership' so I could not only stay informed but eventually establish an active connection with the leaders of Farm Radio International – becoming a *Friends of Farmers* automatic monthly donor seemed to do just that.

Friends of Farmers are Farm Radio International donors who provide a steady and reliable source of funding through monthly donations. To become a Friends of Farmers, please contact Brenda Jackson, FRI's Public Engagement Officer, at 1-888-773-7717 ext. 3646 or brenda@farmradio.org.

New radio programs

improve food security and health

Here is a sample of our current and upcoming Impact Programs – programs that have a specific impact on a development challenge:

Expanding aquaculture in Malawi

Fish farming, or aquaculture, is a relatively low-cost venture that can enable African farmers to earn money and expand their families' diet. Based on interviews with farmers and agricultural experts in Malawi, Farm Radio International identified aquaculture as having a high potential for improving food and income security among small-scale farmers. We also identified a lack of information for farmers who want to begin or expand a fish farm. With the support of Farm Radio International, local radio stations will address this need through programs on issues related to aquaculture productivity and marketing.

This project will reach approximately 500,000 farmers and is supported by the Government of Canada through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Improving maternal, newborn, and child health in Burkina Faso

Radio has the power to foster dialogue on health issues – topics that can be sensitive and challenge cultural norms. In this project, we will work with local radio stations and a local production

house to create radio programs about maternal, newborn, and child health. This is part of a larger initiative by Farm Radio International's partner, World University Service of Canada, to reduce maternal and infant mortality and improve the health of mothers and children under five. Radio program themes will include access to nutritious food and the availability of health services. This project will reach families in four districts of Burkina Faso.

Helping farmers improve soil health in Tanzania

Often, a single new agricultural practice can have multiple positive effects. One such multifaceted practice is intercropping legumes or pulses with cereal or grain crops: it contributes to soil fertility, family nutrition,

and household incomes. Farm Radio International has long promoted intercropping through our scripts, and now, through this project, 300,000 farmers in soil-poor areas are being reached with information on the benefits of intercropping and practical advice on how to get started. Specifically, maize farmers are being encouraged to intercrop soybeans. The addition of soybeans improves maize yields, provides an iron- and protein-rich food for family meals, and produces a good cash crop for market. This project is supported by the The McLean Foundation.



FRW news bureaus focus on farmers

In 2010, funding from the *Canadian Auto Workers Social Justice Fund (CAW-SJF)* allowed Farm Radio International to take the unprecedented step of opening two FRW news bureaus in Francophone and Southern Africa. These bureaus are entirely dedicated to engaging African journalists to tell the stories and share the perspectives of African small-scale farmers. We are delighted to share the news that the CAW-SJF renewed their support with a follow up grant that will enable us to continue the work of these news bureaus.

