



DIGITAL TRACEABILITY FOR FOOD SAFETY



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Communal biochar composts fostering unity



Small-scale farmers in Dewe pose for a pic after making a communal compost and mixing it with biochar.

The water woes in Dewe situated in Mashonaland East are so dire that sometimes there have been incidents of physical fights over the precious liquid.

Responding to this situation, the Organic Farming Academy, which is producing biochar in Rushinga and two other locations, had to roll out communal composts in May.

According to Islum Marimazhira, who works with small-scale farmers contracted by Organic Africa, the only way to address the water crisis was to move the compost making close to existing water reservoirs like a nearby dam.

“The area is arid and water scarcity is a perennial woe. After deliberating on how best we could initiate the process of compost making with biochar we then developed the idea of communal composts.

The OFA biochar consultant, Tafadzwa Nyamande, explained that the biochar must be mixed with compost or liquid organic fertiliser in a matrix of at least 1 to 1 before it is applied to the soil which serves as a so-called carbon sink.

In addition to storing carbon, this carbon-rich product offers a wide array of other benefits. When applied to soil, biochar behaves as an amendment able to increase the availability of water and nutrients while balancing soil composition. This breeds healthy soil, which increases plant growth/crop yields whilst reducing the need for excess fertilizers and irrigation. Biochar has thus been used in a number of diverse agricultural applications over several centuries across the world, notably in the context of organic or regenerative farming.

The biochar is donated for free to farmers in Dewe who we trained in compost making with biochar,” explained Mr Nyamande.

OFA’s senior training consultant, Doreen Ngwenyama, said there are plans to roll out more communal composts with biochar around the sites of biochar production to support local producers and foster unity in the communities.

Traceability systems now digitizes the buying process



Technology knows no age : This elderly signs woman off using the Rural Sourcing application during buying of Rosella in Mbire in May while Organic Africa extension executive , Tatenda Sabau, (left) and other small-scale farmers look on.

The Organic Farming Academy (OFA) was contracted by Organic Africa, a leading producer of organic products for export, to introduce a traceability application throughout the companies operations.

The application was developed by German software company SAP. Rural Sourcing covers many features including farmer registration, field mapping, processing and storage.

In this year OFA is introducing the buying feature countrywide in close cooperation with SAP Rural Sourcing to continuously improve and further develop the application. The digitization of such processes significantly improves the availability of data, transparency and accountability, says Talent Jokonya, OFA systems

administrator, who has been actively involved in modifying the features to the clients needs over the past two years. The Extension Executives(EEs) would come to the office and enter data in excel sheets manually, which is time-consuming and always provides room for human errors. . But with the Rural Sourcing App, it has become very easy to capture and receive data on the same day. Once the data is uploaded onto the system, the dashboard can generate a variety of analytics extremely helpful to improve operations on the ground and future business decisions,” Jokonya said. He adds “The introduction of the digital system eradicates the inconsistencies experienced around the manual system because now the farmer can sign digitally and

receive an SMS confirmation receipt “The traceability application also captures the location of the buying and a picture of the farmer,”added the OFA systems administrator.

As part of the traceability system, QR Codes have been introduced and significantly eased the data capturing. The application has been introduced in Binga, Rushinga, Mbire, Mudzi, Mukumbura, Chipinge and Birchenough Bridge for the buying of Rosella and baobab fruits . The traceability application can manage to track the food production cycle from ‘farm to fork’ to enhance food security as most important requirement in the export market.

OFA in debut exhibits at ZITF, ADMA

The Organic Farming Academy (OFA) showcased its work at the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair and the Agricultural Dealers and Manufacturers Association (ADMA) for the first time leaving an enthralling experience.

The ZITF which is an international fair draws exhibitors from business, government, local authorities, embassies and non-governmental exhibitions and this year it ran from the 23rd to the 26th of April

Exhibiting under the 'Team Europe', OFA was sharing the Germany Embassy stand with other on-governmental organisations.

The private voluntary organisation showcased some of its work including the biochar project that was birthed last year. The carbon reduction initiative which is a collaboration with a Germany start-up, CarbonConnect, was captured in riveting video that attracted a number of visitors to the stand.

A biochar consultant, Tafadzwa Nyamande, says he was inundated with inquiries on the significance of the project and the production process.

"It was really interesting to find out that many people who visited our stand at the ZITF got charmed with the biochar project and wanted to really understand why it matters. They were also keen to find out how the biochar is produced.

"We had the finance minister Professor Mthuli Ncube visiting our stand and had a lengthy chat with him regarding this initiative," recalls Nyamande.

Other notable visitors included the Germany Ambassador and UNDP country director.

However, the ADMA exhibition stood out as the most worthy as OFA garnered a lot of interests from visitors from across the divide.

Running under the theme " ", it was quite a hectic 3 days for the OFA team as visitors flooded the stand to acquaint themselves with most of the organisation's work.

A number of people were keen in getting information on how they could enrol for the



OFA biochar consultant, Tafadzwa Nyamande, speaks to finance minister Prof Mthuli at ZITF.

organic certification training by OFA, according to senior training consultant Doreen Ngwenyama.

"At ADMA it was quite an exhilarating experience as we received a lot of interests from individuals and organisations that wanted to know how more about our organic certification training of small-scale farmers and wild-collectors.

"Most wanted to know what it takes to be a trainee of our training," she said.

The organisation's digital innovation of the traceability application, Rural Sourcing, designed by a Germany software company, SAP also triggered some interest.

"We had some farmers who expressed interest in our traceability application. They got acquainted with information on how the application works and how it particularly helps in enhancing food safety, transparency and accountability," revealed OFA systems administrator Talent Jokonya.

Again the biochar initiative ignited a lot of interest.

"What's encouraging is that across the age divide, there is the realisation that climate change is real and that we are implementing a project that is aimed at tackling this, aroused interest.

"Many came by just to understand how this biochar initiative is going to combat climate change and how communities tend to benefit. Some farmers in Centenary who are into banana farming even offered us their waste from the farm as feedstock to produce the biochar.

"Others were inquiring on how they can also get the biochar to enhance their soils. Most were taken aback that we are donating the biochar free of charge around communities where we have set up our production sites," explained Nyamande.

Young blood at OFA

The private voluntary organisation Organic Farming Academy(OFA) is welcoming an IT (Information Technology) intern Cynthia Zhawu to assist with the fine-tuning and development of a traceability system for organic farming and wild collection for export. Furthermore, she will also be involved in the digital monitoring, reporting and verification app for climate protection projects.

“I graduated at University of Zimbabwe last year with a degree in computer science and before joining OFA I worked at Sadcnet where I was in charge of web development and digital marketing,”she said.

“After some weeks I am very much at home here at

OFA. My workmates are very friendly and supportive towards both work-related and personal growth issues. Here I have already been exposed to a lot of technologies that will help me in my career growth,” she quips.

Part of her work assignments are field trips to the rural areas to test the digital smart phone-application under real conditions, for e.g., during buying of produce by the partner organisation Organic Africa .

Asked about this experience, Cynthia says she is loving every bit of it and it has changed her perspective on life. It’s very humbling to be working with rural communities, you learn to appreciate life

better and understand the thrust of OFA to improve the livelihoods of small-scale farmers and wild-collectors in rural areas.

“Every-time, when I am in the field it leaves me with a principle of working towards benefiting the next person and not only push self-interests,” says Cynthia.

Her mother is an extension officer in Murehwa and this has helped her to easily fit into an organisation that is involved in the agricultural sector. Apart from assisting in the work of the traceability and dMRV applications, Cynthia also assists to design and maintain the organisation’s website jointly with her colleagues.

