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From Cotton Waste to Climate Win: New Biochar Network Launched in Sanyati



Farmers in Sanyati using cotton stems to make biochar

SANYATI-A new farmers’ network dedicated to biochar production has been established in Sanyati by the Organic Farming Academy (OFA) in partnership with the Zimbabwe Farmers Union (ZFU). The initiative, part of a broader climate resilience and soil health strategy, empowers local farmers to turn cotton stems previously a disposal challenge into valuable biochar using a low-tech, open-pit method. This marks an expansion of a biochar project started in late 2023 by OFA and CarbonConnect, a carbon-removal startup working to scale sustainable solutions for smallholder farmers. OFA trainers have been actively conducting workshops in Sanyati, introducing farmers to biochar production using cone-shaped open pits, a method both accessible and environmentally friendly. “We’ve so far met with over 400 farmers, all of whom expressed strong interest in producing biochar using this simple technique. Once they understood how biochar could improve soil fertility and help fight climate change, enthusiasm skyrocketed,” said Doreen Ngwenyama, a senior trainer with OFA.

The Sanyati region, known for its cotton farming, has long struggled with the disposal of cotton stems, often burned or discarded. Through this project, those stems are now transformed into a soil amendment that enhances crop yields while sequestering carbon. OFA’s biochar consultant, Tafadzwa Nyamande, explains the simplicity behind the process:

“We use the ‘open pit’ method, which involves digging a cone-shaped hole in the ground. A fire is started at the bottom, and thin layers of feedstock in this instance cotton stems are added gradually to minimize smoke. Once the pit is full, it’s quenched with water to cool and extinguish the fire. The end result is biochar, a charcoal-like substance rich in carbon.”

The plan is to scale this initiative to include a network of nearly 1,000 farmers, positioning it as a key climate action and land restoration model in the region.

Biochar Wows Farmers in Uzumba Maramba Pfungwe



Happy Couple-Sydney Mutata and Sekesai Maranjisi smile and proudly stand in one of the field where they applied biochar

UZUMBA-Exciting developments are unfolding in Uzumba Maramba Pfungwe, where an experiment with biochar has left small-scale farmers amazed by its potential as a powerful soil enhancer.

More than 160 smallholder farmers benefited from a biochar donation by the Organic Farming Academy (OFA) after undergoing training on its production, application methods, and agricultural uses. As part of the training, farmers learned to mix biochar with compost in a 1:1 ratio before applying it to the soil.

One of the early adopters, Chibanda Makuwerere Shacky (75), from Dewe, expressed satisfaction after applying the biochar-compost mix to his 1.5-hectare maize and sorghum fields.

“The biochar has really been a game-changer. Where I applied it, the crops did significantly better compared to where I didn’t. In the future, I want to produce my own biochar,” he shared enthusiastically.

A similar success story came from farming couple Sydney Mutata and Sekai Maranjisi, who applied the mix to their rosella, maize, groundnut, and sorghum plots.

“We are overwhelmed by the results. It’s clear that biochar has genuine soil improvement properties,” they said.

For optimal results, farmers were advised to let biochar sit in compost for at least three weeks, a process known as “charging” the biochar with nutrients. Application methods varied: some farmers incorporated the mix into planting holes, while others spread it during plowing. The recommended timeline was to apply the biochar-compost mixture at least four days before planting.

Meanwhile, preliminary soil analysis conducted by Cicada Agri-Tech Laboratory revealed that soils treated with OFA-produced biochar and compost had significantly higher levels of essential nutrients such as phosphorus, calcium, and magnesium compared to untreated soils.

OFA Showcases at ADMA Agric Show



The Organic Farming Academy (OFA) successfully showcased its pioneering work at Zimbabwe’s largest agricultural trade fair, the ADMA Agriculture Show, held from 5–7 June 2025. The event attracted over 250 exhibitors and provided a high-profile platform for agricultural innovation and collaboration.

OFA highlighted its key service areas: organic certification training, biochar production, and its innovative digital traceability solution, the Rural Sourcing App.

“We managed to showcase most of our work around organic certification training, biochar production, and our digital traceability application, Rural Sourcing,” said OFA Programme Coordinator Fiona Tinarwo.

The ADMA platform also allowed OFA to network with key players in the agricultural sector and explore strategic partnerships aimed at promoting sustainable farming. A surge in interest around organic farming saw many visitors gravitating toward OFA’s certification training programmes.

Representatives explained the benefits of certification, including access to export markets, and emphasized the need for proper training to meet international compliance standards.

“This year, we got quite a number of visitors as compared to our debut exhibition. Many visitors were inquiring much about our certification training programmes signifying a huge interest in organic production,” revealed Doreen Ngwenyama, OFA senior training consultant.

The biochar initiative also drew considerable attention. Visitors were impressed by the benefits of this soil amendment, with testimonial videos and soil test results vividly demonstrating biochar’s ability to improve soil health and increase productivity.

Approximately 200 visitors engaged with OFA’s stand, requesting regular updates on its activities, training opportunities, and information on how to participate in programs offered in their regions.

Drone Dreams Soar: OFA's Talent Jokonya Earns Pilot Certification



In the thick of things-Talent Jokonya (in the middle) during a practical session of drone pilot training.

The Organic Farming Academy (OFA) is celebrating a major milestone as its systems administrator, Talent Jokonya, has successfully completed an intensive two-week drone pilot training programme, earning his wings as a certified drone operator.

The training, conducted by Afrostain College, blended theoretical lessons, advanced simulations, and hands-on practical sessions to equip participants with a comprehensive understanding of drone technology.

Reflecting on the demanding course, Jokonya shared his experience:

"It was quite a hectic two weeks of both theoretical and practical lessons, with exams after every session. Most of the time, I would only get to sleep in the early hours of the morning."

At OFA, Jokonya manages the organisation's digital traceability system, Rural Sourcing, a mobile application designed by German software giant SAP.

The platform is used by OFA's partner, Organic Africa, to ensure end-to-end traceability of products from farm to fork. Key features such as farmer registration, field mapping, and digital buying streamline operations while enhancing transparency and accountability.

With drone operation now added to his skill set, OFA is set to expand its technological offerings into precision farming, an innovation-driven approach that leverages automation for efficient and data-driven agriculture.

"I'm grateful to OFA for this opportunity. Not only has it boosted my professional growth in the IT field, but it has also positioned the organisation to deliver more cutting-edge technology services to our partners," Jokonya noted.

Afrostain College, the institution behind the training, is the brainchild of young entrepreneur Wenceslous Nyamupfukudza. It has quickly risen to become one of Zimbabwe's premier drone pilot training institutions.

OFA trainers become GLOBALG.A.P. registered trainers to expand farmer support



TATENDA



DOREEN

The Organic Farming Academy (OFA) continues to invest in building the capacity of its staff, with two of its trainers recently becoming registered GLOBALG.A.P. trainers.

Tatenda Manyadza and Doreen Ngwenyama, who have spent the past three years training farmers for certification under various bodies such as EU/NOP, Ecocert, and Mabagrown, successfully completed their GLOBALG.A.P. training in May this year. This achievement expands the scope of certification services that OFA can now offer to smallholder farmers and wild-collectors transitioning into certified organic production.

GLOBALG.A.P. is a globally recognized brand of smart farm assurance solutions used to certify agriculture, aquaculture, and floriculture practices. It promotes safer and more responsible farming in over 135 countries.

Tatenda Manyadza expressed his excitement about the milestone, noting how valuable it is to be exposed to a variety of certification standards.

“I am pleased to have added another feather in my cap. This will enable us, as an organisation, to offer a wider range of certification training programmes. There is growing interest in certified farming, and I’m glad that OFA is committed to equipping farmers with the knowledge they need to meet international standards,” said Manyadza.

Doreen Ngwenyama echoed the same sentiment, stating that there has been strong demand from farmers interested in GLOBALG.A.P. certification.

“We have been inundated with inquiries on GLOBALG.A.P. certification training. I’m glad that we can now meet this demand and deliver the training to the highest standard,” she said.

To become a GLOBALG.A.P. registered trainer, candidates must attend an Integrated Farm Assurance (IFA) course and pass a rigorous proctored exam. Only those who score at least 80% in each section are admitted into the program.

With this latest development, OFA is now better positioned to support more farmers in accessing premium markets through credible certification.



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