My father has always loved farming. He is 72 years old, but the smell of the farm, the sounds from the barn, and the whistles of the breeze blowing through the plants still bring a smile to his face. Sadly, his love for the land is no longer enough to keep his farm going. Hard work on the farm does not guarantee success.

Farmers continue to face many challenges ranging from low yields, poor soil fertility, land degradation, lack of markets, pests and diseases, and extreme weather due to climate change. Thus farmers now need new information, now more than ever on how to solve issues affecting them and to adopt new farming practices.

One of the biggest challenges in Kenyan agriculture is how to get relevant information to farmers using a medium they can easily access. To reach out to the farmer, various media have been used with varied success.

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In Africa, radio is commonly referred to as the “farmer’s best friend”. This is mainly because it is portable and has no boundaries. Unfortunately, radio lacks a crucial ingredient: visuals. Showing a picture of a Striga weed is much easier, and more accurate, than describing what it looks like.

I produce radio programmes for farmers. My programme airs every Thursday on Kenya’s national broadcaster, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation. Just when the farm family has finished dinner and they are preparing to go to bed, I give them something to sleep on.

My father is my biggest fan and my greatest critic. I take him seriously because I know his voice represents that of other farmers. One day as we shared a cup of coffee he said, “For a farmer, seeing is believing, son. Farmers need to see what you are talking about. We cannot see the soil you are talking about, or tell what kind of cows the farmer has and these are what matters most to us”. This encouraged me to start working with illustrated media.
When you put some clever words together, and add some nice pictures in a creative layout, you have a magazine. This is a portable medium which can easily explain step by step certain farmer innovations. As the literacy levels continue to rise in Africa, more farmers are turning to magazines as a source of information on how they can improve their livelihoods.

Lady luck smiled at me when I was among the few chosen ones selected to undergo a farmer-to-farmer video training by Access Agriculture. I was trained to write scripts, produce, edit and disseminate videos. It was wonderful working and sharing experiences with other colleagues from Africa on video production. We produced and disseminated a farmer training video on how to add value to kale by drying it and then selling it when prices rise during dry season. My greatest joy came after finishing the video, and listening to the excited voices of the farmers as they discussed what they were seeing on the screen.

In Africa where many households lack electricity or cannot afford the equipment to watch videos, many farmers are missing out on this great medium. Fortunately, there are now projectors with rechargeable batteries which can be used to screen farmer-to-farmer videos. Still, more could be done to ensure that more farmers benefit from video. Some farmers are also starting to watch videos on their cell phones.

You may wonder which medium is the farmers’ best friend? The jury is still out there. Perhaps the solution is to have as many friends as possible. Combined, the different media may be able to achieve the greatest impact on the farm.

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