



Empowering Farmers Through Sorghum Farming in Murang’a County

County:	Murang’a		
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Target Audience:	County Governments, agricultural development partners and NGOs, youths, Private sector agribusinesses		
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Introduction

Farmers in the lower parts of Murang’a County, including Gatanga, Kandara, and Maragua Sub-Counties, have long faced significant agricultural challenges due to low and unpredictable rainfall. The erratic weather patterns in these areas often result in poor harvests of staple crops such as maize, which is highly sensitive to drought conditions. While mango farming has traditionally been a source of income, it is seasonal, leaving many households without a steady revenue stream during off seasons. These conditions contribute to income insecurity, reduced household food availability, and heightened vulnerability for smallholder farmers.

To address these challenges, the Murang’a County Government introduced sorghum farming as a strategic alternative. Sorghum is a drought-tolerant crop that performs well under low rainfall conditions, requires minimal inputs, and has a shorter growth cycle compared to other staple crops. By adopting sorghum, farmers not only reduce production costs but also gain a more profitable and reliable source of income, providing resilience against climate variability and seasonal market fluctuations.

Implementation of the practice (**Solution Path**):

To support farmers in Lower Murang’a, the County Government partnered with East African Breweries Limited through its subsidiary Kenya Breweries Limited to introduce sorghum farming as a viable and profitable alternative to traditional crops. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in August 2023 established a guaranteed market arrangement where farmers sell sorghum to EABL at KES 48 per kilogram. This arrangement provides farmers with income predictability, reduces market uncertainty, and promotes the adoption of climate-resilient agriculture in the semi-arid parts of Lower Murang’a.



Figure 1 Sorghum farm belonging to one of the farmer beneficiaries under the Murang'a County-EABL sorghum programme in Lower Murang'a

The programme targets organized farmer groups and cooperative societies to streamline implementation, aggregation, and payment processes. Farmers are mobilized and registered through cooperative societies across participating wards, enabling efficient coordination of seed distribution, extension support, produce collection, and farmer payments. Through the programme, over 2,000 farmers have

received approximately 6,000 kilograms of certified sorghum seeds free of charge.

Following registration, farmers undergo training on modern sorghum farming practices. The training focuses on land preparation, planting techniques, spacing, crop management, pest and disease control, harvesting, drying, and post-harvest handling to ensure the grain meets the quality standards required by EABL. Farmers are also sensitized on programme expectations, including adherence to recommended agronomic practices, proper crop management, and coordination with cooperative societies during harvesting and delivery periods.

County agricultural extension officers are assigned to specific wards and farming zones to provide continuous technical support throughout the production cycle. The officers conduct regular farm visits to monitor crop performance, advise farmers on pest and disease management, support the proper application of farming techniques, and guide farmers on improving yields and grain quality. This close extension support strengthens farmer confidence and improves compliance with the required production standards.

As harvesting approaches, farmers communicate expected harvesting timelines through their cooperative societies and County extension officers. The information is then relayed to EABL field officers, who coordinate produce aggregation and collection schedules. Harvested sorghum is either collected directly from farms or delivered to designated cooperative aggregation centres, depending on location and production volumes. This coordinated collection system has reduced post-harvest losses and minimized exploitation by middlemen.



Figure 2 Mature sorghum crop ready for harvesting under the County-supported sorghum farming initiative

Upon verification of grain quality and quantity, farmers receive immediate payment at the agreed rate of KES 48 per kilogram. Farmer earnings vary depending on production levels, with some earning as much as KES 30,000 per season, while smaller-scale farmers earn approximately KES 2,400. The guaranteed market and prompt payment mechanism has improved household incomes and strengthened trust between farmers, the County Government, cooperatives, and private sector partners.

Further, EABL has supported farmers through linkages to credit facilities, input suppliers, and technical advisory services aimed at improving productivity and strengthening participation in the sorghum value chain. This support was integrated into the broader Inua Mkulima Programme, which utilizes a digital Inua Mkulima Card to facilitate access to subsidized farm inputs and other agricultural support services, making the programme more accessible and affordable to farmers.

The initiative has also contributed to strengthening local economic systems by supporting businesses and employment opportunities across the agricultural value chain, including aggregation, transportation, distribution, retail, and input supply services. Through the partnership, the County Government not only promoted climate-smart agriculture but also enhanced market-oriented farming, farmer organization, and long-term agricultural sustainability in Lower Murang'a.

Results of the practice



The sorghum programme in Lower Murang'a has contributed to improved household incomes, strengthened climate resilience, and expanded market access for smallholder farmers across the region.

- Farmers who previously depended on seasonal crops such as mangoes and drought-sensitive maize have diversified into sorghum farming, which is more resilient to low rainfall and changing weather patterns. This has helped reduce crop losses and improved income stability among participating households.
- Through the partnership with East African Breweries Limited, farmers have access to a guaranteed and reliable market for their produce at KES 48 per kilogram. The assured market arrangement has reduced exploitation by middlemen, minimized market uncertainty, and increased farmer confidence in investing in sorghum production.
- The programme has strengthened farmer organization through cooperative societies, improving coordination in seed distribution, produce aggregation, extension support, and payment processes.
- More than 2,000 farmers have benefited from the programme through access to certified sorghum seeds, technical training, extension support, and market linkages. The initiative has therefore contributed to improved food security, climate resilience, and household incomes in Lower Murang'a.
- Continuous technical support from County extension officers has improved farmers' knowledge of modern sorghum farming practices, resulting in better crop management, improved grain quality, and enhanced compliance with market standards required by buyers.
- The programme has also stimulated local economic activity across the sorghum value chain, including aggregation, transportation, input supply, and cooperative-based marketing systems.

Lessons learnt:

- Farmer sensitization and continuous training are essential in promoting the adoption of climate-smart and market-oriented agriculture. Farmers are more willing to embrace alternative crops when they understand the economic and climatic advantages associated with diversification.
- Crop diversification is an effective strategy for reducing farmers' vulnerability to climate variability and market fluctuations. Introducing drought-tolerant crops such as sorghum helps strengthen household resilience in semi-arid areas.
- Access to quality seeds, extension services, and technical support significantly influences crop productivity and the ability of farmers to meet market quality standards.
- Partnerships between County Governments and private sector actors can create sustainable agricultural value chains by combining farmer support, technical expertise, and guaranteed market access.
- Organizing farmers through cooperative societies improves coordination, aggregation, produce collection, and payment systems, making agricultural programmes easier to implement and sustain.
- Linking farmers directly to processors and reliable buyers reduces post-harvest losses, minimizes exploitation by brokers, and increases farmer confidence to invest in production.

Recommendations (Conclusion)



The Murang'a Sorghum Programme demonstrates how targeted interventions can empower farmers, improve incomes, and build resilience against climate variability. County Governments should consider adopting similar initiatives to support smallholder farmers, especially in areas affected by low rainfall or seasonal crop challenges. By providing high quality seeds, training, and guaranteed market linkages, Counties can enable farmers to diversify their production, increase profitability, and secure more stable livelihoods.

This programme highlights the value of strategic partnerships between government and the private sector, showing that when farmers are supported and connected to reliable markets, agricultural practices become more sustainable and economically rewarding.

Further Reading / References:

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