The county government has introduced a crop insurance scheme on a pilot basis to cushion farmers against losses caused by the fall armyworm invasion. So far, two sub-counties where the armyworms attacked farms last season have benefited from the scheme.

“A consortium of eight stakeholders are using Area Yield Index Premiums subsidised by the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation,” said county crops officer Reuben Chumba, adding that farmers were paying Sh500 per acre. According to Mr Chumba, the pilot project will cover two sub-counties before being rolled out to the remaining areas. “Currently, 367 farmers are targeted, with at least Sh105,000 in premiums expected to be paid to the insurance firms involved,” he said. The county has received 18 litres of Dimilin, an insecticide, from the national government. This will be distributed to the four sub-counties, according to Chumba.

Meanwhile, maize farmers in some parts of Western region have formed village blocks to help pool resources to deal with the fall armyworm menace. The blocks have been formed in Kakamega and Vihiga counties. “A village block comprises several households with a view to sharing and exchanging experiences as well as mobilising resources, however little, to help us prevent and control further spread of the deadly pest,” said Zachary Ombete, a farmer from Ebusembe village in Emuhaya sub-county, Vihiga. He is among 150 farmers trained in the economic importance of cereals, detection and life cycle of the fall armyworm, mode of attack and control measures.
How to keep your dairy feeds mould-free this wet season

April 28th 2018

Standard Newspaper

During heavy rains, conservation of fodder or grass to silage or hay is a major challenge. In normal routine management practices, cutting of grass to be conserved in form of hay may be difficult as it is a requirement for this grass to wither for a day or two before you carry out the baling. If baled when wet, grass may turn mouldy then attracting aflatoxins which will have adverse effect on the nutritional and high toxicity risks. Again this results in reduced food intake and other foliage hence poor productivity. The other challenge is that if there is flooding in fodder fields, this could result to rotting of fodder crops like maize leading to poor herbage and wastage.

What to do

Given that hay and silage take time to dry, how can farmers tackle this. First, make sure grass for baling is cut at the right stage ie flowering stage. This is because this is when it is most nutritious. At this stage, the pastures are too succulent and hence the need to reduce the moisture content to about 30 per cent to 40 per cent to improve the dry matter content and the palatability of the pastures. Farmers should construct hay burns whereby the drying/wilting of the grass can be done with relative humidity and drying in the burns will also restore nutrients as there will be no direct contact of the grass with the sun. The hay burn should also have a slatted floor raised from the ground so that the bales don’t come into contact with water or termites. For the silage, cut the ensiling material at the right stage probably the milky stage if it is maize and also do chopping either using a chaff cutter or a tractor. For small scale farmers, use the heavy gauge polythene (gauge “1000”) and make sure that compaction is done properly and ensure there is no contact with water.

Dangers of feeding cattle on wet feeds

Fodders and legumes which are too succulent like lurceme may lead to a condition known as bloat (accumulation of excess gas in the rumen) and this is a serious condition if not rectified can cause death. Also mouldy feeds are not palatable and may cause mycotoxins which cause mycosis (fungal infection).

So how do you keep the feeds dry and safe to eat during wet season.

For the grasses or pastures, it’s important to let the rains subside so that the grass can be cut withered at hay burns by reducing the moisture content and conserving in a cool dry place to control moulds. The other important point is that hay contains a lot of dry matter and these are the nutrients required by the animal for maintenance, growth, pregnancy and lactation. For the very coarse and dry hay/pasture, molasses can be added to improve on the palatability.
European Union to fund cashew nut farming
April 28th 2018

An initiative targeted at smallholder cashew nut farmers in Kwale, Kilifi and Lamu has been launched. The project is supported by the European Union through member countries Slovakia, Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary in conjunction with Ten Senses Africa Ltd and Farm Africa.

Funded by the European Trust Fund, it will see smallholder farmers roped into the cashew value chain, significantly raising their incomes from the crop. The project aims at raising and distributing over one million improved cashew and sesame seedlings and seeds over a four-year period and targets over 15,000 farmers in the region. In addition, farmers will be certified as producers of organic and fair-trade cashew and sesame. A cashew factory with a capacity of 2,400 tonnes a year is also in the plan.

Tomato farmers in Laikipia counting Losses
May 1st 2018

Ndirangu Kingóri, a tomato farmer in Laikipia West, is a disturbed man. Mr King’ori has been growing tomatoes on his five-acre plot at Wangwachi village for the last 10 years. This has been his main source of income. It has helped him educate his five children, two who are in the university.

Early this year, he borrowed Sh. 500,000 from a local bank to invest in his tomato farm next to Wangwachi dam, whose waters he has been relying on for irrigation. Then the rains came, and his entire investment went down the drain. Today, he is among hundreds of tomato farmers counting losses, as tonnes of the crop rot in the farms for lack of market. A crate of tomatoes that previously fetched Sh. 6,000 is now going for a couple of hundreds of shillings, if one is lucky to find a willing buyer. “We are now feeding our tomatoes to cows and pigs. This is a total loss to us and even as we speak, the bank is breathing down my neck demanding loan repayment,” said Kingori.

Such is the change of fortunes, that even the cattle and pigs have had enough of the tomato, leaving them rotting in sodden farms. “Mine will not touch tomatoes, they are rotting away in the farms because we have nowhere to sell them,” said Julia Wambui. To cash in on the situation, middle-men are trooping to the farms, offering peanuts for crates of tomatoes.
According to Ms Wambui, only buyers from Tanzania are offering better prices. “They visit the area once in a week, that is when we sell the produce at Sh2,500 per crate. The local buyers are exploiting us. We are now considering quitting the business,” she said. The situation has left leaders in the area scratching their heads for a solution. At the weekend, Agriculture Cabinet Secretary Mwangi Kiunjuri and Laikipia West MP Patrick Mariru came face to face with the dire situation the farmers are in and promised to find a solution. Governor Ndiritu Muriithi has said his administration is seeking the support of the private sector to set up a tomato processing factory.

**Tomato factory**

“We are ready to partner with any private company so that a factory can be established to end this rot. It is regrettable that the only tomato factory nearby is Kabazi, many kilometers away,” said the governor. Whether a private company will come in and partner with the county on the tomato processing factory idea is not certain for now. What is certain is, that King’ori has lost the Sh500,000 he invested in his tomato farm.

**80,000 coffee farmers to be paid promptly**

**May 1st 2018**

*Standard Newspaper*

More than 80,000 coffee farmers will next week receive payments for last month’s produce after a bank allocated Sh200 million. The prompt cash payment is part of reforms being implemented to improve the sub-sector, where farmers have suffered long wait for payments.

A total of 47 coffee cooperative societies in Meru are expected to receive payments for their April deliveries from next week, at Sh20 per kilogramme of cherry. On Wednesday, Cooperative Bank Managing Director Gideon Muriuki and Meru Governor Kiraitu Murungi, launched the cash model that will save farmers' long waiting for payments for cherries delivered.

Dr Muriuki said the bank had committed an initial capital of Sh200 million to make the model, which was borrowed from Ethiopia where farmers enjoy the advantage of prompt payments, successful.

**Save millions**

The Government is piloting the system in Meru and it is hoped it will save millions of farmers the trouble and challenges of delayed payments. “This model is important for Kenya. I have no doubt if this works in Meru then other counties will replicate it for the benefit of coffee farmers. The national Government is eager to see how it is implemented,” Muriuki said.

Addressing farmers and officials of coffee societies, Muriuki said the system of disbursing payments to farmers had been meticulously studied and found to be watertight. He said the bank had initially been worried on how the money would reach the intended beneficiaries, but they were now convinced that implementing the model would be smooth. “We agreed to support the cash model. This cash model must succeed,” he said.