North Rift counties are pushing for a joint livestock vaccination to curb outbreak of diseases and ensure the animals are healthy and meet the demands of buyers. Uasin Gishu livestock chief officer, Dr Victoria Tarus, said that they are working on harmonised vaccination fees and common livestock vaccination certificates that are acceptable in all the counties to tackle diseases such as foot and mouth and lumpy skin diseases.

“We have realised that if one county vaccinates and others don’t, then it becomes difficult to control these diseases due to inter-county trade. We also want to increase the vaccination rate from the current 50 per cent to 80 per cent as recommended by the Kenya Veterinary Board,” added Dr Tarus, who chaired a meeting with other livestock officials from various devolved units. She observed that they are keen to attain free disease zone status in the North Rift Economic bloc. The bloc, formed in 2015, brings together eight counties — Uasin Gishu, West Pokot, Baringo, Turkana, Samburu, Nandi, Elgeyo-Marakwet and Trans Nzoia. “We have not been able to access the export market due to these diseases. We will be able to do so when the region has been declared disease-free,” noted county official. She explained that they will be lobbying respective county assemblies to allocate funds to contain livestock diseases in the region. Meat products from livestock in the region — like Baringo and West Pokot — are naturally salted, thanks to the area’s red soil.
A food processing factory in Nyandarua has secured market for local vegetables in Chicago, US. The first consignment of carrots and sukuma wiki left for the US on Tuesday morning, after a year of trials on quality, verifications, and consultation with the buyer. Optimistic growers camped at Midland Factory in Njabini waiting for the containers and witnessed the loading of the first consignment. Chief executive Sammy Njuguna said the vegetables were produced and delivered by over 5,000 farmers contracted by the company. “We got a contract with Silva International, a Chicago-based wholesaler and supplier of dried fruits and vegetables. We then embarked on recruiting and training farmers to meet the set standards. It has been a long journey,” said Njuguna. The company is paying the farmers Sh8 per kilogramme of carrots and Sh8.50 for a kilo of vegetables. The firm has also contracted farmers from Elgeyo-Marakwet, Narok, Kiambu and Meru counties. “We are still unable to meet the demand. It’s an open supply contract, we have no limit for the number of tonnes we can supply. It’s a huge market,” said Njuguna. Francis Kimingi, a contracted grower from Kinale in Kiambu, said the export market was a relief to the farmers since they have been selling to brokers a 120kg bag of sukuma wiki at Sh300.

Farmers in Busia have opposed plan by the sugar Task Force to meet them at the premises of the two sugar mills in the region. The programme released by Cabinet Secretary for Agriculture Mwangi Kiunjuri the team will tomorrow morning hold a consultative forum with farmers at the Busia Sugar then in the afternoon they will meet another group of farmers at the Olepito Sugar factory. This has not gone down well with farmers who have demanded the meeting be held a neutral venue and to them Agricultural Training Centre (ATC) is an ideal place for such meeting. The angry farmers argued that having two meetings held differently was tantamount to dividing them (farmers) since Busia Sugar and Olepito are barely 10 kilometers apart. One of the farmers, Peter Odima said farmers may give the meeting a wide berth if the Task Force co-chaired by CS Kiunjuri and Kakamega Governor Wycliffe Oparanya insists to hold them at the factories.“The Task Force is supposed to listen to farmers by organizing event at a neutral place but not to force us to converge at Olepito or Busia Sugar,” he said. Odima further castigated the move by the Task Force to push respective factories to fund for the function and facilitate the farmers who will attend.
Farmers across the country may not get subsidised fertiliser on time as a procurement row between the Agriculture ministry and the Solicitor-General threatens to derail the buying of the commodity. The row was triggered when Agriculture Cabinet Secretary Mwangi Kiunjuri wrote a letter to the SG’s office requesting a legal opinion on a contract signed in 2017 between the ministry and Export Trading Company Limited, which was hired to bring in the fertiliser. But in a letter the Solicitor-General Kennedy Ogeto directed the ministry not to procure maize using the same contract. “We advise the ministry considers alternative options to procure the required fertiliser in accordance with the law,” the letter directed.

The ministry had executed a two-year framework contract on January 12, 2017 with Export Trading But the letter also directed the ministry to allow the contract to expire and commence a fresh procurement exercise in accordance with the law. According to sources at the ministry, the minimum days they can take to procure the 150,000 metric tonnes or three million bags of fertiliser are 57 working days, which may be too late for the planting season. This is unless procurement is done on an emergency basis. Ordinarily, the fertiliser should be in by February to allow for distribution across the country in readiness for the long rain season in April.

In the letter sent to the ministry, Mr. Ogeto faulted the contract entered into with the ministry by former Cabinet Secretary Willy Bett in 2017, saying the deal was done without incorporating the advice issued by his office. The solicitor-general also raised concerns over the varying of prices midway the two-year contract with ETCL. Mr. Ogeto noted that the contract was for an initial order for 150,000 metric tonnes of various types of fertiliser and the document indicated a unit price for each and total final cost.

But other documents between the ministry, ECTL and the National Cereals Board had different unit prices from the contract. According to a source at the ministry, the government was ready to procure the fertiliser using Export Trading Company Limited and the AG advisory came as a shocker. “We were ready to buy the fertiliser before expiry of the contract when we received a directive not to proceed,” noted the source. “From October last year, the ministry has been negotiating on the renewal of the framework because there was no budget set for the purchase of subsidised fertilizer,” the source said. While addressing residents of Maina village in Laikipia-West last weekend, Mr Kiunjuri alluded to the difficulties farmers will face if the ministry does not buy the fertiliser. “We will try our level best to provide the fertiliser. However, if we don’t make it on time, traders should not exploit our farmers,” he said.
Hope alive as dew harvesting springs life into dry farms

In Kathongo village, Mbooni West, one of the driest parts of Makueni County, Kaloki Mutwota walks around his farm inspecting healthy papaws which have defied the local harsh weather to flourish. His face lights up as he explains that in about a month, his plants will start fruiting, having survived drought in the area. For the farmer, however, this was not possible a few years ago when most of his crops would dry up as soon as they sprouted due to erratic rains. But thanks to dew harvesting technology, a research initiative of the South Eastern Kenya University (SEKU) located at Kwa Vonza in Kitui County, Mutwota can now rest assured of crop maturity and bumper harvests.

The farmer was introduced to the technology of harvesting dew to grow crops by Peter Etukutan Ekatorot, a hydrology and water resource management student who recently completed his four year course at the university. The student and others under the supervision of Dr Moses Mwangi who teaches in the department of Hydrology and Aquatic Science, have for one and a half years been researching on how to tap dew from the atmosphere and condense it for use in growing crops. The technology uses Groasis water boxes, specially designed to tap and condense dew into water which is then stored in the box reservoir to water crops and plants. “The water box made of plastic is placed around the intended crop or plant directly above the roots. The top cover has gutter like rows which collect dew and directs the condensed water inside the box for storage,” Ekatorot explains. The water box collects 50ml of water in 8 hours. Though it may look little, the researcher says this is sufficient for a plant per day. And in an arid area, this is gold. To feed the crop or plant, the water box has a wick, like that of a lantern lamp attached to it and stretching to the roots of the plant. “The wick then transmits the water from the box to the plant through constant drops, just like it would happen with drip irrigation,” he says. Through this, Ekatorot says evaporation is minimal and thus the plant is assured of maximum water supply since it does not compete with weeds for the same. As such, the plant has higher chances of survival even in harsh weather, says the student. The technology has been a game changer for Mutwota who plans to roll it over his quarter acre farm where he also intends to grow cabbages and mango trees. When we visited his farm, we found him removing the boxes for re-use elsewhere. “With the help of the student, I planted 50 pawpaw plants in July when it was very dry. I thought it was a joke but I decided to give it a try. I have never watered them but now look at them, none dried up. It is like a miracle,” he says. He hailed the Groasis box as a simple technology that has no maintenance cost and urged other farmers in arid and semi-arid areas to embrace it. Mr. Ekatorot says once the farmer notices the plant is big enough and can now survive on its own, they are advised to remove the water boxes and re-use them elsewhere. “The technology is effective and can easily improve food security in arid and semi-arid areas and even among pastoralist communities in Turkana where the locals can change from pure pastoralists to agro-pastoralists,” says Ekatorot, who is waiting to graduate.

Dr Mwangi, the lecturer, says the idea behind dew harvesting is to avoid the trial and error reliance on rain fed agriculture which has proven unreliable in the wake of climate change. He explains that there is always water in the sky and which falls down in form of dew at night and which can be harvested either to grow crops or for household use. “Even in the driest of times, there is always water in the atmosphere which can be harvested. The idea here is to train farmers how to actually harvest the water in the skies to grow food crops, you don’t need to wait for the rains or exploit the underground aquifers.”
how to form, sustain groups

Daily Nation 25/01/2019

Agricultural value chain actors aspire to move far and, therefore, the formation of common interest groups (CIG) is crucial. Between 2000 and 2005, the National Agriculture and Livestock extension programme (Nalep) assisted in formation of 7,500 CIGS annually. However, reviews and discussions with farmers in 2010 indicated that over 70 per cent of CIGS had difficulties in reaching the intended level of financial viability and significantly contribute to increased income and improved livelihood of the members.

The growth and scale of operation for those groups was another concern. CIG formation still continues today and their viability and sustainability can be enhanced through empowerment of the group members, comprehensive and working constitution, quality management by the officials, well-maintained group records and having successful and sustainable activities as well as conflict resolution mechanisms.

Members need to understand from the word go that formation of a group is one thing while sustainability is another. They need to understand that group formation is a process with various stages of development and whenever they face challenges, they should relate them to the formation stages to assist them in understanding and solving the issues. The stages are: formation, storming, norming and the performing/maturity stage.

The formation stage starts when members come together for a common goal. At this stage, members demonstrate a lot of commitment to the group and willingly offer their services. At this point they should consider their mutual relations based on their needs, social structure, leadership and democratic factors. Challenges at this stage include superficial relationships among members, demonstration of dependency on existing leadership in decision-making and uncertain responses from leadership and colleagues. The storming stage is when members come to know each other better, disagreements are common while competition, tension and disunity are highly likely. Each also seeks to control the group. By the end of this stage, there is a clear ranked structure of leadership in the group. The norming stage is characterized by close relationships and cohesiveness among members. They are able to identify their needs and norms and conflicts are easily settled.
At the performing/maturity stage, the members see themselves as a group and get involved in tasks. The group redefines its goals in the light of information from the outside environment and shows an autonomous will to those goals.

One key issue that studies have shown to have positive effects on formation of sustainable group is the democratic say in the decisions regarding the outfit. Further, merger of small to larger groups has been found to enhance the powers of the group.

One of the critical issues that the group should consider during the formation stage is the constitution that is to guide operations. Members can borrow a constitution from an existing group and customize it to suit its needs. It can also seek the help of a professional to draft one. The social services departments in the counties and sub-counties not only offer such services but they also register the formed groups into legal entities in addition to offering the after registration advice and follow up.

The constitution has the following parts: Name; aims/objectives; membership eligibility; office bearers and their functions/roles; meeting procedures; venues; time and day; funds management; discipline of members, record management, amendment to the constitution, acceptance and endorsement of the constitution and dissolution of the group.

Quality leadership involves democratic management where the role of the leader is just facilitation in nature and precise implementation of the constitution is important. Key issues that the leadership should follow strictly include meetings, office tenure, responsibilities of officials and members as well as way and means of making the group self-reliant. Transparency and accountability should be the pillar of record maintenance.

Research has shown that successful and sustainable group activities lead to group interactions, cohesion, interpersonal trust and co-operation. Where two or more people come together, misunderstandings are likely to occur. The constitution should spell out the conflict resolution mechanisms. Members in conflict should be given a chance to express themselves and approaches selected by the whole group should be used to resolve the issue at hand. Issues and not individuals should be the concern of the arbitrating team.

Farmers Conference Centre (FCC)
Thogoto Mutarakwa Road
P.O Box 43148-00100
Nairobi.

Phone: +254 20 2180608
Mobile: +254 729903957
Email: farmers@kenaff.org