

Spray Service Provider Training Programme in Zambia

Promoting the safe use of pesticides amongst the small-scale farming community.

Already in its fourth season, Zambia's Spray Service Programme, an initiative from the private sector that promotes the safe and responsible use of pesticides, is benefitting small-scale farmers. Results for maize show an increase in yield of up to 300 per cent and a decrease in weeding time by 85 per cent, saving 60 per cent in costs. These gains have allowed female farmers, who mainly do the manual weeding, to have a better quality of life and more time to look after their families.

CropLife Zambia started the Spray Service Programme in 2008 in partnership with the Production, Finance and Improved Technologies (PROFIT) project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development. One component of the project focused on improving access to agricultural products by linking agro-dealers to small-scale farmers. As a result, the supply of pesticides increased, but problems concerning their application, storage, transport and disposal occurred. Organisers soon realised that it was virtually impossible to train all small-scale farmers in Zambia in the safe and responsible use of pesticides. The solution, developed with CropLife Zambia, was the concept of Spray Service Providers (SSPs).

An SSP is a farmer who has received special training to apply pesticides and hires out his services to fellow farmers to spray their lands. This implies that untrained farmers will not handle pesticides any longer and only those properly trained and certified to handle them will instead. Field staff from CropLife Zambia member companies train farmers to become SSPs.

There are many benefits for farmers hiring SSPs. A primary one is that the correct pesticides are used at the right time to target the correct pests, which ensures that the pesticides are used more efficiently and effectively. There is also a controlled line of distribution that prevents over-stocking pesticides and enables the introduction of container management systems. Using SSPs also means there is reduced human exposure to pesticides, protecting women and children.

CropLife Zambia provided SSPs with a basic protection kit, including a safe use manual, polythene spray coat/suit, respirators, gloves and goggles. The organisation also issued a photo identity card to each trained SSP for identification purposes when they are in the field and interacting with farmers. This official card differentiates them from imposters.

Spray Service Programme organisers used radio advertisements in local languages to introduce the SSPs to farmers. Ads were broadcast on community radio stations in popular locations popular and aired at a time when most farmers were in their fields. The ads introduced the SSPs as trained and certified and detailed their services, plus information about genuine pesticides and where to purchase them, how to apply pesticides and identify SSPs.

During the past four seasons, the programme has trained a total of 115 SSPs from member companies and in turn, they trained farmers to become SSPs. As of October 2012, a total of 1,250

SSPs service almost 10,000 farmers. The SSPs are mainly hired to apply pesticides on maize, cotton, tomatoes and tobacco.

In July 2011, an independent organisation evaluated the programme. Its report said, “Spray Service Providers had a direct positive impact on the livelihood of many smallholder farmers. In addition, indirectly, there was a trickle-down effect on small-scale farmers [who learned] by observing the productive fields of the Spray Service Providers, who are themselves farmers in their respective communities. Most of the farmers in all four provinces experienced an increase in the yield of maize from about 1.5 tonnes to as much as 4.5 tonnes per hectare. This remarkable increase in yield translated into increased household income and increased household food security.”

Results also satisfied participating member companies who saw sales of pesticides increase by as much as 600 per cent. Following the success in Zambia, CropLife Madagascar and CropLife Egypt adopted a similar programme. The PROFIT project ended last year, but CropLife Zambia continues to support the Spray Service Programme.

