ZFU NEWSLETTER

1st Issue

In This Newsletter

Editor's Note

Welcome to the firstissue of the ZFU Newsletter, where we continue to celebrate and amplify the voices, achievements, and innovations shaping Zimbabwe's agricultural landscape.

ZFU has stood as a pillar of support and advocacy for farmers of all scales, from communal and smallholder farmers to large-scale commercial producers. Since its founding in 1991, the Union has evolved into a dynamic institution dedicated to empowering farmers through policy advocacy, training, market access support, and the promotion of sustainable farming practices. Our feature article dives into the ZFU's proud history, rooted in unity, and its ongoing efforts to ensure that agriculture remains at the heart of Zimbabwe's development.

We are also excited to bring you a compelling personal story from our Young Farmer Spotlight series. In this edition, we meet Ndinani Fortune Temba, a 29 year old ZFU member from Masvingo Province who has turned his passion into purpose through papaya farming. Ndinani's journey is a powerful example of the resilience, curiosity, and entrepreneurial drive that defines Zimbabwe's young agripreneurs. From costly missteps to discovering high-performing papaya varieties like Calina IPB9, his story is filled with lessons, insights, and a vision for shared growth. He reminds us that with knowledge, mentorship, and determination, young people can transform agriculture into a thriving, modern business even in the heart of urban settings. At ZFU, we believe in the power of shared stories and experiences to inspire growth and unity. As you read through this issue, we hope you find not only valuable information but also motivation to keep pushing forward, exploring new crops, trying new techniques, and connecting with fellow farmers across the country. Together, we grow stronger.
Enjoy the read!

By Tadiwanashe Grand

Designed and Edited by Tadiwanashe Gra nd
Editors
Shadreck Hungwe, Theresa Makomva, Nanganidzai Makoho, Panashe Kasinganeti

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It all starts with Land Preparation

Crystal Springs Field Day Shines Spotlight on Sorghum as the Future of Farming

By Esther Mwanza

Across the dry but determined landscape of Gwanda District's Ward 22, Crystal Springs Village was recently transformed into a hub of agricultural innovation and learning. Farmers from across the district converged here for a vibrant and inspiring field day that showcased not only crop excellence but also the power of collaboration in transforming rural livelihoods.

Hosted by local farmer Mr. Misheck Sibanda and his wife, the event attracted agricultural experts, extension officers, private sector representatives, and fellow growers. At the heart of it all was a thriving 7-hectare plot of sorghum a clear testament to the resilience and forward thinking mindset of Zimbabwe's smallholder farmers.

Sorghum, a hardy crop known for its drought tolerance and high nutritional value, took centre stage. Mr. Sibanda's successful crop stood as living proof of how farmers are adapting to the harsh realities of climate change. In a region increasingly affected by erratic rainfall and rising temperatures, sorghum is proving to be a smart, sustainable choice.

"This is more than just a crop it's a strategy," said Mr. Sibanda, speaking to fellow farmers during a crop walk. "Sorghum is feeding our families, preserving our soils, and opening doors to new markets."

Experts at the event echoed this sentiment, highlighting sorghum's multiple benefits. It supports food security by withstanding dry spells that typically destroy other staple crops. It brings economic opportunities through growing demand for both grain and processed products. And it promotes environmental sustainability through its low water requirements and ability to grow on marginal lands.

The field day also provided a platform for farmers to engage directly with technical advisors, learn about improved sorghum varieties, and explore value-addition possibilities.

Demonstrations covered everything from seed selection and crop rotation to pest control and post-harvest handling.

For many attendees, the event was a wake-up call a reminder that the future of farming lies not only in resilience but in innovation, cooperation, and knowledge sharing. The success of the field day underscored the critical role that organized farmer gatherings play in empowering rural communities and scaling climate-smart agriculture.

As the sun set over Crystal Springs, one thing was clear: sorghum is more than just a crop. It's a symbol of what's possible when farmers lead with vision, and when communities come together to build a stronger, more secure agricultural future.

Food Security in the Face of Climate Change: Challenges and Opportunities

By Ian Mujokoro

As climate change continues to reshape global weather patterns, Zimbabwe's agricultural sector finds itself on the frontlines of a battle for survival and adaptation. The recent El Niño-induced drought served as a stark reminder of the vulnerability of our food systems. Yet amid these challenges, new opportunities are emerging anchored in innovation, collaboration, and resilience.

Over the past few weeks, a series of impactful workshops spearheaded by the Ministry of Agriculture and supported by various partners have provided a much-needed platform for stakeholders to exchange ideas, share experiences, and craft solutions to safeguard food security in a changing climate.

Harnessing Technology for Climate-Smart Decision Making

From May 5th to 9th, a workshop focused on enhancing weather forecasting tools and improving the dissemination of critical climate information to farmers was held. This initiative, supported by the European Union under the Safe for All project, brought together a broad spectrum of stakeholders including Zimbabwe Farmers Union (ZFU), AGRITEX, ARDS, local government officials, and technical experts.

The workshop emphasized the urgent need for accurate, timely, and accessible weather data to support farmers in making informed decisions. This living lab approach fostered the development of actionable frameworks to improve climate resilience at the grassroots level. The collaborative spirit of the event reinforced the idea that securing food systems requires input and ownership from all players across the agricultural value chain.

Voices from the Ground: Farmers Speak Out

Throughout the sessions, farmers shared firsthand accounts of how shifting weather patterns unpredictable rains, prolonged dry spells, and increasing temperatures have disrupted planting cycles, reduced yields, and increased food insecurity in their communities. Their testimonies painted a vivid picture of the stakes involved, but also highlighted their willingness to adapt if given the right tools and support.

In response, agricultural experts introduced adaptive strategies, such as cultivating drought-resistant crop varieties, integrating precision irrigation systems, and adopting conservation agriculture techniques that preserve soil moisture and improve yields under extreme weather conditions.

Nutrition as a Core Pillar of Food Security

In a related effort, the Food and Nutrition Thematic Working Group Meeting held on May 13th at Rainbow Towers Hotel, brought a holistic lens to the conversation. Coordinated by the Ministry of Agriculture, the meeting gathered representatives from the Ministry of Health, ZFU, and other key stakeholders to explore the intersection of climate change, food availability, and nutritional outcomes.

Discussions emphasized that food security is not just about quantity it's about quality and access. Climate change threatens not only staple crop production but also the diversity of diets, leading to potential spikes in malnutrition. Experts stressed the need to promote the cultivation of nutrient rich crops, support smallholder farmers with market access, and ensure that agricultural policy aligns with national nutrition goals.

The Road Ahead: From Vulnerability to Resilience

Zimbabwe faces a critical juncture. The growing unpredictability of the climate poses a serious threat to our food systems but it also presents an opportunity to reimagine them. Integrated strategies must be deployed that include climate-smart agriculture, sustainable land use planning, and investment in infrastructure such as irrigation, storage, and processing facilities.

One pressing concern raised during the workshops is the need to climate-proof agriculture by promoting technologies and practices that build resilience from the ground up. This includes everything from enhancing soil health and diversifying crop systems, to developing early warning systems and strengthening value chains.

The intricate link between climate and food security is no longer theoretical, it's a lived reality for Zimbabwean farmers. But with a united effort, access to reliable data, targeted funding, and strong institutional support, Zimbabwe can not only mitigate th he impacts of climate change but also unlock a more secure and sustainable food future.

Hass Avocado Training in Bindura Sows Seeds of Prosperity and Climate Action

By Vincent Zvaipa

On May 5th, 2025, Acadia Kadondo Farm in Bindura became the site of a transformative training session aimed at reshaping the agricultural outlook for farmers in Mashonaland Central. Sponsored by ZimTrade, the initiative brought together around 20 farmers with a shared vision: to improve livelihoods, fight climate change, and tap into the lucrative export market through the cultivation of Hass avocado trees.

The training was as practical as it was inspirational. Each farmer committed to planting a minimum of 300 Hass avocado trees, covering at least one hectare of land. This move not only marks a shift toward high value crops but also aligns with climate smart agriculture principles.

Avocado trees, when planted at scale, contribute to carbon sequestration, playing a small but meaningful role in the global effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

ZimTrade's objective was clear equip farmers with the knowledge and motivation to grow for export, and in the process, improve household incomes. The numbers speak volumes: while local markets offer just $1 for two avocados, the export market pays up to $5.50 per fruit. With each seedling costing $10, the potential return on investment is significant, making Hass avocado farming an appealing enterprise for rural farmers.

Beyond planting, the training also delved into essential agronomic practices. Farmers were taught how to properly manage pests and diseases, with special attention given to phytophthora root rot a serious threat to avocado production. Trainers emphasized the importance of early detection and integrated disease management to ensure crop health and quality.

One key advisory point stood out: timing is everything. ZimTrade urged farmers to avoid planting during the hot season, as newly planted avocado trees require substantial water for establishment. Deliberate timing and proper irrigation planning are critical for long-term success.

Despite the overwhelming potential, a key challenge was highlighted the lack of a packhouse. Without centralized post-harvest infrastructure, farmers may face bottlenecks in processing, grading, and storing fruit destined for export. This gap presents an opportunity for stakeholders, including government and private partners, to invest in value-chain support systems that ensure farmers' hard work translates into market access.

The energy and commitment displayed at Acadia Kadondo Farm reflect a broader shift in mindset: farmers in Mashonaland Central are ready to diversify, go green, and grow global. With the right support, the Hass avocado sector could become a game changer for the province and for Zimbabwe's agricultural economy at large.

By MSD Staff Writer

A meeting was held at the Zimbabwe Farmers Union (ZFU) offices in Milton Park with Guss Wiersma, a project coordinator from the Delft University of Technology. Mr. Wiersma gave an overview of the SAFE4ALL project to bring everyone up to date. One key message from the meeting was that the tools from the project will be co-created such that they are customised to the three countries that are in the project (Ghana, Kenya and Zimbabwe). These tools will be developed through a process that includes input from the users themselves. This approach is different from most other projects where end users are given a completed product. Instead, SAFE4ALL will involve users in the early stages, so that the tools meet their actual needs. This will help ensure the tools are well received when the project is rolled out. The tools under consideration include: The Climate Atlas, Uliza WI Chatbot, AI-based Nowcasting for thunderstorms, Hyperlocal Intelligence Engine for weather forecasting and the Multi Agent Enforcement Framework.

These tools are at different levels of development which will be further enhanced working with the users in the three countries. From the round table discussion, a key concern was raised on the limited access to smartphones in rural areas, a requirement for some of the tools. Another issue was that most farmers are older and less familiar with technology, while younger farmers who are more comfortable with digital tools are fewer. This highlighted the need to encourage young people to get involved in farming. A plan for the next three days was developed, which included visits to Furamera (Ward 14) and Materera (Ward 15) in Marondera, where automatic weather stations from TAHMO have been installed.

Field Visits on Wednesday 7 May 2025
Representatives from MSD and ZFU including Guus visited the two wards, starting with Materera. At Materera, the meeting started with introductions. Dr. Kuipa from ZFU, Engineer Mazhara, Mr. Mason Mawoyo and Mr. Moven Manjowe from MSD took turns to speak to the farmers about the purpose and value of the weather stations. They encouraged the community to protect the equipment from vandalism, as the stations are there to serve them. The farmers were also given the chance to ask questions, which were answered clearly and respectfully. They were then shown around the weather station. Blessed Mutize from MSD explained how each part of the system works, to make the technology less intimidating. The same activities were repeated at Furamera, wrapping up the day.

Living Lab Workshop on Thursday 8 May 2025
A Living Lab workshop was held in Marondera at Chipiwa Lodge. The discussions during the workshop were fruitful. Attendees included Agricultural Extension Officers, the Department of Irrigation, Local Government, MSD, and ZFU. The workshop focused on defining the roles and goals of each stakeholder in the Living Lab, and a roadmap was developed for the upcoming months.

A breakout session allowed participants to work in five groups to discuss key questions: 1. What is your profession? 2. What expertise do you bring to the Living Lab? 3. What are your goals within the Living Lab? 4. What do you want to learn? 5. What would you like the outcomes to be? From these discussions, the final goals, key milestones, responsible stakeholders, and completion timeframes were mapped out.

Final Planning Meeting on Friday 9 May 2025
The week ended with a final meeting at MSD headquarters. The focus of the meeting was planning ahead, including setting a date for the next Living Lab workshop. It was agreed that the next session will likely take place by the end of June, after the roadmap has been refined. These activities carried out during the week showed strong collaboration at the national level and set a clear direction for the SAFE4ALL project which is in its second year of implementation.

Young Farmer Spotlight: Ndinani Fortune Temba's Journey into Papaya Farming

By Ndinani Fortune Temba
Compiled by Simon Mwanza

My name is Ndinani Fortune Temba, I'm 29 years old, and I'm proud to be part of the growing generation of young farmers in Zimbabwe. I'm based in Masvingo Province, and my journey into agriculture began at the end of 2024 with a single, simple idea: turn idle land into something productive, something that could feed people and generate income. That idea led me to papaya farming.

At the start, I didn't know much about growing papayas, or popos as we often call them. I just knew I had land and determination. I began by nursing seedlings and planting my first batch of trees. Along the way, I quickly realized there was a lot more to learn than I'd anticipated.

One of the biggest lessons came early: not all papaya plants are the same. There are three types male, female, and hermaphrodite. The male ones only produce flowers, no fruit. Female plants give fruit, but they need pollen from a male or hermaphrodite nearby. The hermaphrodite, or bisexual plant, is ideal because it can self pollinate and also produces fruit. If you want your farm to succeed, you need most of your trees to be female or hermaphrodite. Otherwise, you're just growing leaves and hope.

Back then, I didn't know any of this. I bought 150 seedlings from a street vendor just someone selling fruit trees. I had no idea what the seed source was or how the sex of the plant would impact my harvest. Six months in, I discovered that more than half of those trees were male. It was a painful realization. I had invested so much money, time, land and there was nothing to show for it.

But I didn’t give up.

I started doing research, learning from farmers in other countries, especially in Kenya. That’s when I found the Calina IPB9 variety. It has a much better ratio of female and hermaphrodite plants, which means more fruit and less disappointment. Through the Zimbabwe Farmers’ Union, I connected with a reliable supplier and got my hands on certified Calina seeds. I raised the seedlings myself and planted them at both my family home in Masvingo Urban, in Hillside, and on our rural plot.

This time around, things are different. The plants are thriving flowering and fruiting. I expect to begin harvesting by the end of winter.

Now, my vision goes beyond just growing papayas for myself. I want to help other young farmers avoid the mistakes I made. I plan to supply seedlings from proven, certified varieties like Calina IPB9 and offer practical advice based on what I’ve learned. Papaya farming doesn’t need a huge piece of land to be profitable. Even small urban yards can become productive. That’s what I’ve done in Hillside.

Papayas are a great crop. You can start harvesting within 8 to 10 months after transplanting. Each tree can produce 50 to 80 fruits per season, and if managed well, they’ll keep bearing fruit for up to three years. While flowering slows down during winter, moderate temperatures allow fruit to continue ripening throughout the year. The beauty of papaya farming is that it’s a low-cost investment with the potential for high returns.

Through my connection with ZFU, I’m eager to share what I’ve learned and support others who want to take the same path. Whether you’re a young person looking to enter agriculture or someone with land wondering how to put it to good use, I believe papayas could be your breakthrough.

Let’s grow together.

The Mushroom Industry in Zimbabwe: A Growing Sector with Vast Potential

Zimbabwe's mushroom industry is on the cusp of significant growth, driven by increasing awareness of mushroom's nutritional benefits, entrepreneurial spirit and favourable climate conditions. This article probes into the current state of the industry, its potential, and challenges.

Current State

Mushroom production in Zimbabwe is primarily small scale, with many farmers cultivating oyster and button mushrooms. The industry has seen steady growth in all provinces of the country, with farmers adopting sustainable practices such as the use of organic waste materials.

Opportunities

1. Leveraging favourable climate to meet global demand:
Entranced by a beautifully favourable temperate climate which allows for year-round mushroom production, Zimbabwean mushroom farmers can capitalise on the growing demand for organic fresh produce and contribute significant volumes on the international market. To unlock this potential, government needs to consider the sector for special grants as well as land allocation to mushroom farmers.

2. Diversification of the Agricultural Sector:
Mushroom farming can contribute to the diversification of Zimbabwe's agricultural sector, reducing dependence on traditional crops. Farmers who cultivate wheat, soya beans, bananas and maize as well as horse breeders can easily diversify their farms to incorporate commercial mushroom farming, as their farm waste is the key input used as mushroom substrate.

3. Job creation and income generation:
Mushroom farming can create employment opportunities and generate income for both the upper and low income households due low start up capital requirements.

4. AI Integration:
Mushroom farmers can leverage on the emerging AI technology, fused into climate controlled growing facilities and mobile apps, to optimise yields and efficiency.

Challenges

1. Technical expertise:
There is need for training and capacity building in mushroom cultivation and management. In order to bridge this knowledge gap, PUM partnered with the Zimbabwe Mushroom Farmers Association in March 2025 in convening an extensive mushroom cultivation workshop, moderated by the Netherlands based mushroom senior expert, Alex Hesteermans. Such workshops are key in ensuring local mushroom farmers posses the expertise to produce world class export ready quality mushrooms.

As the government's main agency for agricultural extension, AGRITEX should be encouraged to have their officers equipped with mushroom cultivation expertise, in order to localise technical advice and support within communities.

2. Access to finance:
Many mushroom farmers struggle to access funding to expand their operations to match national demand.

Conclusion

Zimbabwe's mushroom industry has significant potential for growth, driven by increasing demand, favourable climate conditions, and an entrepreneurial spirit among Zimbabweans. Addressing challenges and seizing opportunities can help the industry thrive, contributing to the country's current economic development towards an upper middle income economy by 2030.

By Tapiwa R Giwa
Zimbabwe Mushroom Farmers Association

Zimbabwe Mercantile Exchange

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