TRADE FAIRS FOR BETTER AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

Caleb Atuya
In October 2016, an agribusiness trade fair in Laikipia county, Kenya, provided over 6,000 farmers with access to information, services and training to help them improve their yields and farming activities. Exhibitors were also able to reach a large number of livestock farmers and increase their sales.

The Kenya Livestock Producers Association (KLPA) was formed in 2004 to promote the welfare of livestock producers and farmers in Kenya. Over the last 10 years, field days and trade fairs have been organised to improve the agricultural practices of farmers. Agribusiness fairs in particular have worked to stimulate and create linkages between livestock producers and service providers by creating a platform for business interaction and deal-making between the parties.

In October 2016 KLPA organised a farmers’ agribusiness trade fair in Laikipia county which was attended by over 6,000 farmers.

KLPA: objectives and approach

Of all the marketing instruments available, trade fairs offer the widest range of functions. Exhibitors – and farmers – can conduct business, elevate their image, and look for business partners. Trade fairs are also the ideal place for assessing the market, comparing prices and sales terms, and trying out new products and discussing their applications.

KLPA partners with the government, manufacturers and banking institutions, as well as farmer organisations, to create market linkages between farmers and manufacturers, suppliers and agro-vets. It organises training sessions where farmers can gain an insight into various value chains, and gain access to legitimate farm inputs and information.

In the past farmers have been lured into purchasing counterfeit products for their farming activities and have lacked proper information of how products should be used. This lead to low yields. To tackle this problem, stakeholders from various agricultural sectors are given a chance to showcase their products and services to farmers, and train farmers on the usage and benefits of these products. This creates a direct link between the two parties.

To prepare for the trade fair in Laikipia county, KLPA had two meetings with the county’s agriculture department to develop strategies to mobilise the county’s farmers. With local government help a permit to hold the event was secured. Four road-shows were held and banners and fliers were distributed to create awareness about the trade fair in various target locations like churches and weekly local administrative and farmer meetings.

Having confirmed the venue and date for the exhibition, the KLPA marketing department sent out invitation emails to all of the agricultural stakeholders it had on its database. The email campaign described the exhibition requirements and packages, and a deadline of one week before the event was set for exhibitors to confirm. Sixty companies accepted the invitation. SMSs were also sent out to invite farmers to the event through KLPA’s SMS platform.
Productive and numerous field days have made it possible for farmers to sample our products and we are happy about their positive feedback.

The fair consisted of:

- **A livestock show**: This was a key component. Farmers were given the opportunity to view high quality livestock in addition to learning about the latest breeding techniques. Livestock on display included dairy cattle, Sahiwal cattle, dairy goats, pigs, sheep, geese, broilers, layers, rabbits and bees.

- **A market place/exhibition area**: Over 70 service providers including banks, microfinance and insurance agencies, agro-input suppliers, governmental bodies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and learning institutions showcased their products in the general exhibition area.

- **Open forum/mini forums**: Each of the gold category exhibitors were allocated a tent with 30 seats. Farmers could visit these tents in groups to interact with the service provider.

- **Farmer Field School (FFS)**: Farmers from various producer groups were able to access FFS training, organised by KLPA and the Kenya Semi-Arid Livestock Enhancement Support project. Each session took about 1.5 hours and was facilitated by an expert.

- **Business-to-business (B2B) forum**: Representatives of 50 producer organisations hosted a B2B forum. The forum aimed to enable service providers to meet farmer group leaders and strengthen networks within the manufacturing and service industries. During a B2B cocktail event, farmer representatives were given the chance to express their views about what had transpired during the fair and any lessons learnt. Silver and gold category exhibitors also attended the cocktail. As Mr Nelson Maina, Manager of the agri-input supplier company, Elgon Kenya, observed, “Since we partnered with KLPA our organisation’s sales have increased and we have created many networks, thanks to the productive and numerous field days you guys are organising. They have made it possible for farmers to sample our products and we are happy about their positive feedback”.

---

**How did you learn about the event?**

- Seminar 1
- Internet 4
- Friend/colleague/my (farmer) organisation 21
- Media (newspaper/radio/flyer/banner etc.) 84
- Invitation 67
- Roadshow 4
- Road shows using motorbikes 1
- Organiser 5
KLPA, together with various partners and local agricultural manufacturers, helped promote farming activities in the area by providing farmer trainings and showcasing products. About 6,251 farmers from across the county attended. Ten livestock farmers groups were trained on livestock supplements by Coopers K-Brands Ltd.

**Farmer’s response: demographic information**

An evaluation showed that 69% of the farmers attending the trade fair were men and 31% were women. Farmers who participated were also relatively young; 14% were under 25 years old and 73% fell within the 25-50 age group. It took 69% of participants less than one hour to get to the trade fair, 26% spent between 1–2 hours and 5% spent around 6 hours getting to the trade fair.

Most people (69%) who filled in an evaluation were farmers, 8% came from educational institutions, 7% from input suppliers, and 4% were government officials. Agro-equipment dealers and financial service providers accounted for 2% while buyers and NGOs made up 1% of respondents. It should be noted that over 85% of those attending the trade fair were small scale farmers.

The greatest proportion of attendees (45%) heard about the event via the media, 36% had received invitations, 11% learnt about it through friends and colleagues, while 3% knew about it because they were in touch with the organisers. Information gained via the internet and roadshows were mentioned by only 2% of the participants.

The main reason people gave for attending was to get information and increase their knowledge (46%). Fourteen percent said they wanted to sell their products and services while 9% wanted to link with other organisations or find business partners.

Other reasons given included:
- Make contact with the larger agricultural community;
- Educate farmers on new farming technologies and the use of certified genuine seeds;
- Inform farmers about the availability of high yielding products;
- Emphasise the importance of good agrochemicals and pesticides and their safe use;
- Create public awareness about coffee production;
- Show what the agriculture sector can offer farmers;
- Provide extension services and increase knowledge.

**Banking on women**

KLPA had the privilege of hosting the Managing Director of the Kenya Women Finance Trust (KWFT) bank, Mwangi Githaiga, whose organisation had also sponsored the event.

KWFT partnered with KLPA to target citizens without bank accounts, with the objective of becoming one of the best banks. Githaiga accepted that it was a challenge to reach farmers because as a bank they did not have the skills needed to organise events, like the exhibitions and field days that KLPA organised, that could bring them into close contact with farmers.

During the exhibition KWFT staff distributed fliers containing information about their various products and services. Farmers were able to get training on the benefits of banking and how they could access credit via KWFT to finance farming activities.

KWFT succeeded in registering 1,000 farmers who appreciated the information and assistance they were given. “KLPA has done a tremendous job in organising this kind of event where a bank like KWFT can meet farmers,” Githaiga explained. “It has increased our regional customer database and this information will help us improve small-scale farmers’ livelihoods. The partnership we have entered into with KLPA is going to have a positive impact on the agriculture sector”.

Mwangi Githaiga, managing director of the KWFT Bank, during the Laikipia Trade Fair.
“The trade fair has increased our regional customer database and this information will help us improve small-scale farmers’ livelihoods.”
Impact, sustainability and relevance

All over the country, KLPA’s trade fair programme has been a success and resulted in a large turnout of exhibitors and farmers. The positive impact of the KLPA agribusiness trade fair on farmers is reflected in increases in farmers’ yields and income. Farmers no longer practice farming for household consumption; they now see agriculture as a business.

Farmers have been able to access legitimate agricultural products for their livestock and crops and receive training that has helped them improve their yields and farming activities. Through the iShamba information service, KLPA members also receive weekly weather updates that help them plan farming activities.

The trade fair also benefited companies. Sales have increased since the field days enabled companies to come into contact with potential markets and distributors in various regions. During the fairs, companies also received real-time data on regional farming activities which enabled them to monitor and increase sales.

As the producers’ voice in Kenya, KLPA is able to carry out such trade fairs and its county offices make sure that farmers continue to receive relevant information and are kept up-to-date on various farming activities. The county offices have also contributed to increasing KLPA’s visibility which has helped it run these programmes and secure the support of partners and sponsors able to facilitate the funding of the trade fairs that have been so beneficial for farmers.

Despite the successes of the trade fair, one of the difficulties KLPA experienced during the one-day event was the limited amount of time available to cover training in certain aspects of the value chain. Time management was also a challenge and illiteracy sometimes made communication difficult. And there were other challenges:

- Some of those attending did not pass through the registration desk and their details were never recorded.
- There were financial constraints including the cost of ferrying farmers from their villages, feeding exhibitors and arranging accommodation.
- Fatigue because of the long distances some farmers and exhibitors had to travel.
- There were challenges in finding a venue that would satisfy all parties and this resulted in favouring farmers more than exhibitors as the final venue was not near a major town where accommodation was readily available.
- Some buses were late or didn’t turn-up to ferry farmers to and from the trade fair.

Recommendations

Our work has shown that donor organisations and NGOs need to support and allocate funds for future exhibitions and field days to enable the organisation to run its programmes more smoothly. This would help it reach a larger number of farmers. Exhibitions need to be held at central venues so that attendees do not have to travel long distances.

Tight security must be deployed in regions where exhibitions are being held to increase security confidence, and organisers should liaise with county governments to ensure feeder roads are accessible and passable. At the same time, stricter ways of capturing attendee details should be devised as many people who attended did not register. More publicity – using radio, TV and roadshows prior to the trade fair – would attract farmers and exhibitors.

Caleb Atuya works as Sales and Marketing Program Officer at the Kenya Livestock Producers Association, KLPA.
E-mail: mail2caleb2010@yahoo.com

This is one of the results of the process started by the “Capitalization of Experiences for Greater Impact in Rural Development” project, implemented by CTA, FAO and IICA and supported by IFAD. http://experience-capitalization.cta.int

Country: Kenya
Region: East Africa
Date: June 2017
Keywords: Livestock; markets; trade fairs; extension