



## AgroCares soil testing technology improves the yields of farmers in Meru

### Farmers Centre Ltd.

- Location: Meru, Meru County, Kenya
- Main crops grown in the area: wheat, maize, potatoes, coffee, tea, horticulture
- Soil types: clay and loam soil
- Farmers served: approximately 12,000 farmers are served from the shop at Farmers Centre - Meru
- Farmers in the Meru area: over 200,000 farmers live in the larger Meru area

### Challenges:

- Support local farmers to get to know the status of their soil and take corrective measures
- Expand their services

### Solution:

- Provide farmers in the Meru area with soil testing services and soil analysis results within 2 hours with an AgroCares Lab-in-a-Box
- Offer advice and recommendations and the right agricultural inputs based on the soil testing results

Farmers Centre Ltd, situated in Meru, Kenya, provides local farmers with a variety of agricultural inputs including seeds and fertilizers. Farmers Centre thinks it is important for farmers to get to know the status of their soil and take corrective measures. Therefore, they invested in a Lab-in-a-Box - a sensor laboratory developed by SoilCares (now part of AgroCares). With the Lab-in-a-Box (LiaB) Farmers Centre can provide Meru farmers with soil testing results within 2 hours. Based on these results, farmers get insight into the most suitable inputs for their soil.

### The importance of testing soil fertility

Soil testing brings many benefits for farmers. However, many Kenyan farmers do not have access to soil testing services. Mr Gilbert Kibiti, Owner and Managing Director of Farmers Centre: "Most of the large-scale farmers in Meru used to take their samples to a traditional wet chemistry lab in Nairobi which takes approximately 2 weeks to get back the reports. Some small-scale farmers with the help of NGOs and outgrowers also used to take their soil samples to a lab for analysis which also uses wet chemistry. But majority of the farmers were not testing their soils at all."

Farmers Centre realized the need for farmers to test their soil. Gilbert Kibiti: "Over time we received complaints by farmers that their yields have been decreasing even though they have been using a lot of fertilizers. They tend to blame the quality of the fertilizer or the seed varieties and this affects my business because I sell farm inputs. I figured out that investing in a LiaB and stationing it at my shop will benefit the farmers because they are then able to test the soil and order the right type and quantity of fertilizer they need to increase their yield."

### Successful implementation of AgroCares technology

The implementation of the sensor lab took quite a bit of time but SoilCares (now part of AgroCares) provided the support needed to facilitate the process. Gilbert Kibiti: "I appreciate the effort that SoilCares took to include me as one of the partners of the PASIFIK project (Providing Analytical Services for Informed Farming In Kenya). This project enabled me to obtain the lab at a subsidized prize as per the project terms. As soon as the documentation was complete, the process of importation and installation was quite fast. My staff was trained on how to operate the LiaB and they were able to start analyzing the soil quickly."

### Biggest advantage: soil testing results within 2 hours

With the help of Lab-in-a-Box, Farmers Centre can provide farmers with soil analysis service and use the report to advise them on the inputs to collect from the shop.

Gilbert Kibiti: "This new method of soil testing is much faster. The farmers living in the rural areas

usually bring their soil samples when they are coming to town to shop for inputs. They receive their reports within 2 hours and go back home with all the inputs they need. This has enhanced the customer service at my shop.

### The result: boosted sales and more business partnerships

Gilbert Kibiti: "A lot of farmers that have already analyzed their soils using our Lab-in-a-Box, followed the recommendations for inputs and have come back to say that their yield has increased tremendously. On the business side, the sensor lab has helped to boost other areas of my business including input sales and project partnerships with other stakeholders. For instance, I am currently a partner in a Kenya Market Trust (KMT) project that is supporting awareness creation for soil fertility management starting with soil testing."

### Recommending the Lab-in-a-Box to Kenyan agro dealers

As a result of their positive experiences with the LiaB, Farmers Centre are enthusiastic to recommend the technology to other companies interested in offering soil testing services. Gilbert Kibiti: "Ever since I bought the soil analysis lab from SoilCares, I have been recommending it to my business colleagues especially the large agro dealers in Kenya. A number of prospective LiaB owners have called me to ask about it and I am more than willing to advise them to buy the lab."



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