

Hortfresh Journal

Keeps you in

Editorial column

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A glance at 2009 horticulture news

It is apparent good to glance over the occurrences of this year event seven as it draws to an end. To many it has been a year of coping with the economic mess, whereby they have found themselves back to the drawing boards rethinking on how to cut costs, how to produce and manage more efficiently, how to sell better, and how to provide the items in demand. But with the announcement of 3.5 per cent growth of US economy in the third quarter of the year we can only be optimistic that the mess will be over soon.

The Valentine's Day; a period when most of flowers are sold was very low. It was followed by President Kibaki assenting to Bio-safety bill, which to some it was a panacea to low yields while to others it was a threat to human and animal health.

Mother's Day on May, the second most important day in the flowers sales calendar recorded slight improvement as compared to Valentine while the annual field day event saw flower farms showcase better flower varieties. Soko la Maua a local flowers promotion event by vendors took place in May it was opened by Nairobi Metropolitan Minister Njeru Githae, who pledged that a flower market with facilities such as cold rooms would be set up within the City.

The month of budget saw some of exporters supplies being zero rated and handed a life line through tax concessions to help improve their cash flow. Duty on refrigerated tracks and production machines for use in the horticulture industry were also zero-rated.

The eighth annual African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) Forum was held in early August and it offered an inspiration to accelerate growth in the sector. In the same month and extending to early September, Kenya hosted the 1st All Africa Horticulture Congress where a unique and regular opportunity for deep and direct exchanges between the diverse partners was realized.

Horticultural Crops Development Authority launched 2009-2013 strategic plan in September. Through implementation of this strategic plan, stakeholders will be empowered to create wealth and reduce poverty while promoting and developing a vibrant horticulture industry. Following closely was Naivasha Horticultural fair which has become the East Africa region face of horticulture industry and a paramount business fair.

The last and not the least was the launch of Kenya Flower Council (KFC) certification body status, an event that was witnessed by the Assistant Minister for Trade, Hon. Omingo Magara.

The financial crisis has dealt a blow to the industry, but even though, the year has been a beehive of activities. We wish you the best the remaining part of the year even as we wish you happy festive season.

Dorothy Rwaro

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Hortfresh Journal
Keeps you in Touch



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Flower farmers close to getting tax breaks



Flower exporters have unsuccessfully lobbied for years to get the government to include them in Special Economic Zones (SEZs), but now the plans seem to be at an advanced stage.

Trade Assistant Minister Omingo Magara said that the fact that horticulture creates employment opportunities in rural areas calls for Government support to the sector in order to stem rural-urban migration and help alleviate poverty. He said this during the Kenya Flower Council annual general

meeting held in mid-September this year. He asked the flower exporters to follow up with the government to include them in SEZs policy document being prepared.

When the move succeeds, the growers within the Export Processing Zones (EPZs) that will convert to SEZs will make massive savings from being exempted from over 20 taxes and levies, like Value Added Tax on electricity.

"We should be accorded special incentives such as export tax breaks and compounded tax system that are easy to manage," Kenya Flower Council chief executive officer Ms. Jane Ngige, had earlier urged Agriculture PS Romano Kiome.

The sector is also asking for Ksh150 million (\$1.8 million) per year as a stabilisation and marketing fund. Growers are owed close to Ksh1.9 billion (\$23.5 million) in VAT refunds, money that if paid will stabilise their cash flow.

KFC chairman Kabuya Mwito said the flower industry has so far succeeded on its own but with stiff competition and shrinking demand, Kenya needs to embark on specialised marketing to stay afloat. "We can no longer survive on comparative advantage," he said, adding that despite the high cost of doing business, Kenya is one country in the world where a flower farm can be set up and run in the shortest time possible.

Despite the sector earning the country over 40 billion Shillings in foreign exchange last year, it faces numerous challenges like poor roads and insecurity in the flower growing regions.

Hot Exporting Tips

- Do adequate preparation and carry out market research. Half of the research can be done at home by using secondary data available from trade libraries, other companies, company contacts, surfing the web, etc. The information gathered will very much influence the quality of the company's export plan.
- Analyse the market. Visit target market and discuss with people to understand the market. If you are to use agents and distributors, select them from a knowledgeable point of view after having met them and done due diligence, etc.
- Adapt your product or service to suit market conditions. Consumer products cannot escape this fundamental requirement. Often the exporter will have to adapt to sizes, packaging, labelling, standards, etc.
- Commit enough time and allocate adequate resources to exploit export markets. Is the management team committed to exporting? Exports should not be a part-time or fringe activity, but should be part of the company's mainstream business.
- Do not neglect/put export marketing in second place. Having someone within the company who speaks the language of the target market is a big asset. Export managers should be able to communicate in at least two business languages.
- Start nearer home. This is good advice for starters (inexperienced exporters). Neighbouring markets are easier to visit and business practices are similar in many respects.



Having an advert that

look & feel professional

When advertising in a journal, your advert should look and feel professional. Use strong text and eye-catching graphics to focus the reader on what sets your product or service apart from the competition - your Unique Selling Proposition (USP). The message should get across effectively.

The headline is the most important part of any print advertisement. It must inspire action. It is what will convince the reader to read more. Take your time and get it right. Experts say that if you spend 10 hours creating an ad, 9 of those hours should be used creating the headline.

Headlines should either convey an idea, or intrigue the reader to learn more. If your headline is in the form of a question... ARE YOU UNDERPAID?... make sure that the answer will always be YES!!!



When possible, use color. The response rate to color ads is significantly higher than that for black & white.

The length of your ad text should be appropriate to your product or message. Long ad text looks informative, and may be useful for technical products. Short text leaves plenty of room for graphics and is a quicker read; use it if you're putting an image.

Keep your message concise. You can't expect a reader to spend a lot of time with your advert. Keep it simple. Stress benefits. Emphasize your unique selling proposition. Don't beat around the bush or be too cute. Get to the point. And be very careful with humor. Note every reader will get your joke.

Don't use complicated language or jargon. To prevent yourself from slipping into the jargon habit, think of this... if you're advertising in a journal with a circulation of 10,000, and just 5% of the readers don't understand a word in your advert; you've alienated 500 potential customers.

Your ad should talk to your potential customer, so don't forget about them. Use "you" instead of "we" in your text. Think about what specific needs you fulfill for them. In addition, many experts recommend that you think of your advert as speaking to your potential customers "one at a time." In other words, the advert

should inspire the reader on a personal level.

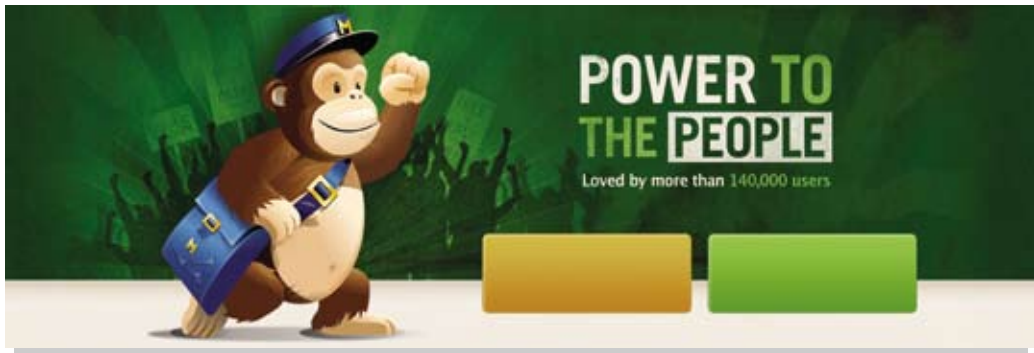
Remember the call to action. What do you want the reader to do once he/she finishes reading the advert? Don't let them guess... spell it out - Write or call for more information; Come in for a free training; Come in today, Sale ends Saturday. Think of this as how you close the sale.

Strong graphics make a strong statement. Keep them focused on your message. Some ad experts recommend advertisers follow the "rule of thirds" - one third of an ad should be a graphic element, one third should be text, and one third should be white space (no copy, no graphic).

Too much in your ad makes it look too busy. You will appear unfocused. Readers will avoid your message. Very often, less is more.

Keep the look of your ads consistent. If you change the text on a regular basis, don't change the look. You can create an effective image by providing continuity and consistency to the reader.

Whatever you do, don't let your ads look like your competitors' ads. You need to create a distinct personality for your company. If your ad looks like one from your competitor, whose ad do you think the reader will think he/she is reading?

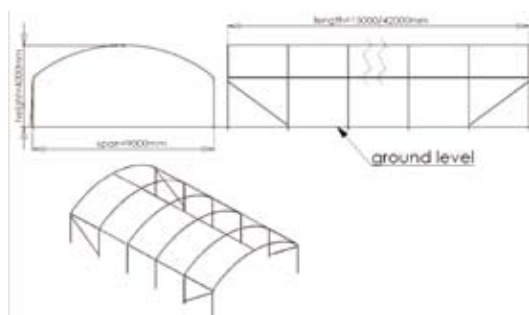


Tunnels for Growing Vegetables



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- The width of each opening is 10.0 meters AMD 8.0, and the overall length is: 15 or 20 or 30 meters.
- The height at the vertex is 4.0 meters: this enables a large volume of air so as to achieve greater thermal inertia (prevent drastic temperature changes) and better ventilation.
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- Cables 5 mm for supports at the side.
- Galvanized bolts.



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ANSA... the answer to Getting Fresh Food on your Table



Ansa Horticultural Contractors is a fresh produce grower and exporter that gives a brand to the freshness of Kenyan produce. They strictly control freshness and product quality throughout - during cultivation, harvesting, transportation, storage, processing and distribution up to the superstore's shelves.

The company has invested in cooling and advanced technology in food handling techniques. They have developed new product lines and explored untapped potential within the fresh produce industry, creating a niche for itself in fresh produce exporting business.

They work in collaboration with the farmers, through providing inputs and all technical support guaranteeing growth of superior, quality produce.

Appropriate pricing and on-time deliveries have helped the company to stay ahead of competition. Constant communication, strict quality control and analysis and continuous review of their products have resulted in long term customer service even at times when the business is low. Their experience in production, marketing and distribution has continually enabled them to offer a strong and expanding partnership with their clients.

They market their products under three broad categories; Asian vegetables (Karella, Green chillies, Okra, Dudhi, Valoor, Raw Mango, Ravaya, Curry leaves, Saragwa, Raw Papaya, Guwar, Scotch Bonnet), Fruits (Passion fruits, Mangoes, Avocados, Bananas, Pineapples) and Vegetables such as Mange tout (snow peas), Haricot verts (fine and extra fine), Sugar snaps and Garden peas among others.

From the farms the products are labeled as ANSA brand deliveries, packaged in accordance to customers' requirements using strong, attractive recyclable materials at the company's premises at Nairobi, off North Airport Road just behind the SDV Transam building, before being airlifted to European and Asian market.

Originating from Africa, the firm manager Mr. Kang'ethe says their products face high freight charges amongst strict and unbalanced trade regimens, which he wished that the government would come up and regulate.

To meet the market requirements, Ansa Horticultural Ltd has implemented all the requisite food safety standards and has received certification from Global GAP, HACCP and BRC. They are currently working with the Pesticides Initiative Program and the Committee for the promotion of ACP Horticultural exports PIP/COLEACP in strengthening their competitiveness. The company is also a member of the Fresh Produce Exporters Association of Kenya.

Concerning proper environmental maintenance, and quality assurance in the growing of horticultural crops, Mr. Kang'ethe said that they always have a technical team on the grounds that ensure proper chemical applications.

Their vision is to be a leading producer and exporter of Kenya's finest produce at competitive prices in strict compliance with all the requisite food safety standards.

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KFC Achieves Certification Body Status

The Kenya Flower Council (KFC) recently officially launched the certification body status at a city hotel, an event that was witnessed by the Assistant Minister for Trade, Hon. Omingo Magara.



Global recognition

During the colourful occasion that was attended by other industry players including its members and key stakeholders the CEO, Mrs. Jane Ngige informed the participants that the attainment of the certification body (CB) status of the Council involved a thorough audit by the South African Accrediting Authority (SANAS).



The KFC CEO pointed out that the accreditation meant that the Council had met the set minimum requirements of a certification body and thus it has the credibility to conduct third party audits on cut flowers and ornamentals against the KFC benchmarked Code of Practice (COP) to Global GAP standards. This implies that KFC has an equivalent status and credibility like any other certification body worldwide, as per ISO Guide 65.

The achievement makes the council to be among the first few local organizations to achieve the certification body status. Indeed, it is the only local CB of its kind that has the mandate to certify flowers

and ornamentals against the above mentioned standard. This means that organizations intending to be carried against the same will thus reduce the huge cost expenses incurred to get experts of other external certification bodies from outside the country.

Hon. Omingo Magara commended the flower industry for what it contributes to the national economy. He singled out the curbing of urban rural migration and source of employment the industry contribute to.

However he challenged the council to evaluate whether it has unleashed its full potential and has touched the "real nerves" in order to tap the benefits and support it could receive from the Government.



Certification versus Accreditation:

What's the difference?

Simply put, certification refers to the documented and objective evidence that an organization's quality management system meets the requirements of a particular standard. For instance, once an organization, e.g. a flower farm is subjected to an audit by a CB, it will have to meet the minimum requirements of the given standard before it is certified. Thus, if successful, it achieves certification, which is valid for a prescribed period. At a given interval, surveillance audits are usually done to maintain the certification. Thereafter, a re-certification process is done. Thus the organizations that conduct third party audits with a view to ensure that they meet the set criteria in a given standard are thus referred to as certification bodies.

Accreditation on the other hand implies that an organization has been externally assessed and found to have recognized competence to conduct audits on prescribed standards. This means that for an organization to be a certification body, it has to undergo a rigorous audit on its management system to be endorsed as a CB. Locally, The Kenya Accreditation Service (KENAS) is the only accreditation body. However, SANAS from South Africa and UKAS from UK are other examples of accreditation bodies.

Source: Muraguri Julius Author of ISO 9000 Secret: Unlocking World Markets



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Rain harvesting



Relatively few African countries have an average annual rainfall exceeding 1,000 mm. More countries receive an average annual rainfall below 500 mm, and are thus considered to be dry lands. However, despite a history of drought and floods, rainwater has the potential to supply safe water and enhance food security through effective rain-fed agriculture.

Many Kenyans living in Central and Western provinces may not realise that their annual rainfall is, in fact, pretty much the same as the wettest parts of the UK or Ireland, areas of the world with no water shortfall. The difference is that there, it rains on many days a year whereas in Kenya the rain comes in two great dollops each year, and most just runs into the ground or down the rivers and into the ocean.

Ever seen water run off after a rainfall and wondered why doesn't someone harvest

...the only way out



this stuff? If you weigh the cost and risk of drilling a well against the cost of a rainwater-harvesting system, it seems obvious worthy to harvest the rainfall and use the water when it is not raining. Rainwater collection is any method that brings and unites into a body or unit of rainwater in an organized fashion.

Traditionally, collection of rainwater for drinking, livestock and domestic use is an established practice in Africa. However, techniques used have become inadequate due to population growth and reduced rainfall. New methods of rainwater harvesting are taking root; for example, roof catchment and collection in tanks are particularly popular. Plastic or concrete tanks are preferred over metal tanks, as the latter corrode.

There is growing acknowledgement of the value of rainwater harvesting in rural areas. In Kenya, for example, road runoff catchment, water and farm ponds, sand and sub-surface dams, and conservation tillage are being adopted to increase agricultural production.

With the use of appropriate technologies, rainwater could play a bigger role in irrigation and combating the effects of drought. Investment in research and development to produce new irrigation systems that use water effectively should be encouraged. Widespread adoption of low-cost tube irrigation can contribute to poverty alleviation and improve food security and protect against famine.

The rains as predicted by the Meteorological Department have finally started falling. The question that begs asking is this: "Are we ready to harvest any of the rain water, or we'll let it all drain to the oceans, carrying with it all our top soil?" Learn, live and do the needful, harvest rain water and this water shortage problem will be solved easily, instead of expecting that someone else will fix the problems for us.

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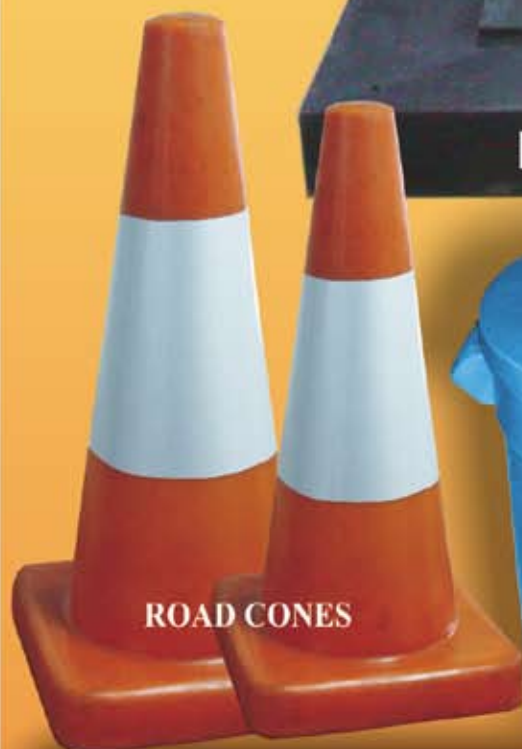
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Ethiopian Horticultural exporters considering Sea Shipping

A new transportation approach is being considered by Ethiopia horticulture producers and exporters. Messina Line of Italy and Mersk Line of Denmark are working out a deal with exporters to give them refrigerated container service for shipping their products. This alternative when fully successful will relieve exporters from using the costly air freight at a time when global crisis is beating.



The new product is a special plastic bag that works by removing ethylene gas, which is released by most fruits and vegetables after harvest; the exposure to this very gas accelerates aging and ultimate deterioration.

The new bags use an organic mineral to remove ethylene gas and prolong the life and freshness of the produce. The bags also have pores through which the damaged gases produced by the fresh produce escapes.

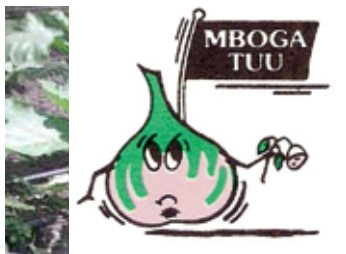
The technology will allow exporters to keep the flowers and vegetables fresh for up to 21 days, enabling them to use cheaper transport by sea thereby cutting transportation cost by 40 percent or more, after adding the 0.70 dollar cents cost of the plastic bag. The exporters pay 1.85 dollars per kilogram of flowers using air transport. Ian Fairlie, Maersk's Area Manager for Sub Saharan Africa was quoted saying "This will enable the exporters to reduce transportation costs by shortening the chain between the producers and final destinations,"

Due to the expense of air freight and its high carbon emissions, many countries are now choosing refrigerated marine transport. Currently, South American countries such as Ecuador and Costa Rica are regularly sending containers of flowers and foliage to the US market through sea freight. South Africa and Israel also export these products to Europe using reefer ships with temperature controlled facilities. Mersk had already made a trial voyage from Djibouti and Rotterdam carrying frozen strawberries.

Ethiopian Horticulture Producers and Exporters Association (EHPEA) President Mr. Tsegaye Abebe said they will first use the marine freight to transport fruits and vegetables, and then they will come to the flower shipments. He however said it is too early to comment on the future arrangement as they are still on planning.]

The plastic bags can be used for even the very sensitive flower types and the long trip will not affect the quality. Tsegaye noted that environment friendly customers would appreciate the new product.





MBOGA TUU, HOME OF VEGETABLES



In many countries of developing world, vegetables which are more nutritious than modern foods are neglected. Asian and some European countries have realized the gold in consuming vegetables to a point that they value them more than meat.

Mboga Tuu, a limited company is well specialized in growing and exporting of vegetables such as Augergies, Chillis, Karella, Okra, Valoor, Papdi, Patra, Gunda, Dudhi, French beans, Eggplant and many more food products. They have been in this business for more than 40 years having started under trade name Veg Air which later changed to Mboga Tuu Ltd in the year 1987.

They have five farms, the largest being in Yatta covering an area of 200 acres, 90 acres being under vegetables and 90 acres under forest while the remaining area is occupied by dams, buildings and roads. The other three farms are located at Isinya while the fifth one which they have recently acquired is at Kitengela. The company has its own packhouse fully equipped with cold store and packing machines.

The name Mboga is a Kiswahili word for vegetables while tuu is a stressing word which means in plenty. When combined the name Mboga Tuu will literally mean vegetables in plenty. The 75 acres land at Kitengela is all planted with several vegetables and each year they export a big number of vegetables, a situation that matches their name.

Their markets are mainly United Kingdom- London & Manchester, Norway- Oslo, Germany- Frankfurt and Belgium- Brussels. At the moment they are exporting over 100 tonnes a month to United Kingdom and Norway.

Chilli and Eggplant

Mboga Tuu grows three types of chillis peppers; the long chillis, the short chillis (bullet), thin hot chillis and different types of eggplants such as black beauty. Their crops are propagated from seeds by Naivasha Longonot farm. The crops take four weeks in nursery; they are transplanted and within eight weeks the harvesting begins which goes on to 36-42 weeks. A hectare of chillis produces on average 35 tonnes.

The spacing of eggplant differs from that of chillis, with chillis being spaced 30"x40" and eggplant being spaced 60x60 inches since they grow into a big bush, knee height high.

According to Mr. Agawo, Mboga Tuu General Manager the diseases common with the two are powdery mildew, bacteria wilt and verticillium wilt. Bacteria wilt and verticillium wilt are controlled by crop rotation which is done after two seasons, while powdery mildew is controlled by use of chemicals which are readily available at agro-chemicals. Red spider mites are the most common pests of eggplants while thrips are common for chillis.

Generally both crops are heavy feeders and depending on the soil moisture level they require watering ranging between 15 to 30cm cubes per hectare per day. The hot weather condition favours the crops as it enhances fast growth.

Currently, at Kitengela farm they have planted bigger leaved eggplants with an aim of getting bigger sized fruits and an increase in production, said Mr. Agawo.

To manage the soil, they grow other crops such as runners beans, brocoli, baby corns and French beans which are different crop family from chillis and eggplant.



The ethnic line determines the crops they grow with their main target being the Asian market where the demand is inexhaustible.

In conclusion, Mr. Agawo said that their future plans are to advance in their area of specialization and acquiring more market mainly the international supermarkets.



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Some of Prudent ways to protect business from economic crisis

The bubble that is the world's economy has burst is no longer news. What many want to hear is how to prevail over this monster which has dealt a major blow to countries foreign earnings, horticulture exports. Governments and players in the horticulture industry are crafting new interventions to help the sector stay afloat.

Many have been asking whether there are ways to protect their businesses from this ongoing crisis. The real solutions to the credit crunch will have to be found where the problem began. The capacity of national (local) financial institutions to resolve this is severely inadequate. The protection that exporters can have will largely come from their own prudent ways than from government guarantees or assurances of the national financial institutions.

Some of Prudent ways to protect ourselves from the crisis are:

- Anticipate many risks and hedge the businesses against them. These may range from payment failures, shipment risks and fraud practices. One may fairly argue that hedging finance is also affected by the crunch. But it is also not true that all insurance companies have closed all the windows.
- Note every business opportunity is a deal in these times. This calls for well informed business decisions that are adequately mirrored against the markets.
- Be less inclined towards Open Account Forms of payment. Forms that have stronger inbuilt mechanisms of guaranteeing payments are important during these crisis times. Letters of credit are an example.
- Seek for business opportunities in low cost and less risky markets. COMESA is expanding for example and the risks are much less compared to distant and complex markets of the EU and Americas.
- Be better negotiators; cause your business partners to appreciate the circumstances and together manage the supply or contract relationship.
- Go for contractual terms that reduce the level of risk.
- Segment markets and operate in niches where you are able to build or possess some degree of bargaining power.
- On credit, the alternatives aren't many. However credit guarantees extended to financially viable borrowers (exporters in this case) with good collateral is an option.

- Review your cost structures with a view of cutting/reducing the cost of doing business.
- The credit crunch is twin to global food shortage. A discerning exporter can diversify to mobilising food production, processing and trade to markets, where demand for food is projected to be vibrant for a while.

In conclusion, these are not cost free options. However the cost of operating business as usual might be far much higher and catastrophic.

Authored By: Naturinda Ben, Deputy Executive Director, UEPB



The Moby Dick Flower

growing for Business

Factors to be considered

1. Season timing
2. Quantity
3. Quality
4. Market availability/Market information
5. Distance to the airport,
6. Ability to ascertain the likely to be FOB per stem.
7. Value addition.

Season timing

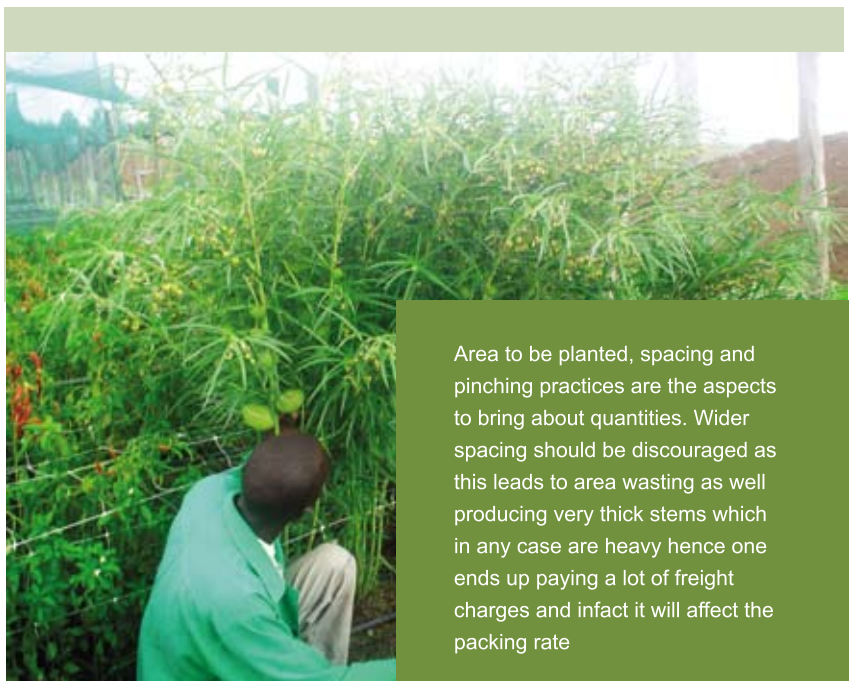
- The crop should be timed in the sense that the sowing should be done so that the production time should be when the prices are high. One aspect of doing it is by checking the previous prices for one year i.e. from week 1 to 52. This will show one what time to come to the market. Many at times trials for growing should be done before going commercial as this will enable one to know the exact growing period of the crop and this differs from place to place.
- For many small scale farmers who lack enough knowledge do a mistake on this aspect hence they end up making huge losses.

Quantity

- For one to achieve the economies of scale then there is need to have reasonable quantity of stems (exportable), thus farmers of Moby should also put it consideration, I will put a minimum of about 6000-7000 stems per week export reasonable. With this even if the prices are under pressure the farmer is likely to make some money.
- Area to be planted, spacing and pinching practices are the aspects to bring about quantities. Wider spacings should be discouraged as this leads to area wasting as well producing very thick stems which in any case are heavy hence one ends up paying a lot of freight charges and in fact it will affect the packing rate i.e. few stems will fill the box.

Market availability /market information

- It very necessary to know the trends of the market and the market requirement right before planting, the variety and quality required by the should be the driving force for the grower. Most farmers lack the access of the market therefore they should try as much as possible to liaise with their marketing agents so that they can get the information. This is not easy therefore if necessary advice from experienced people is required.
- Most farmers rely on agents who consolidate the flowers and afterwards ship them, take their share



Area to be planted, spacing and pinching practices are the aspects to bring about quantities. Wider spacing should be discouraged as this leads to area wasting as well producing very thick stems which in any case are heavy hence one ends up paying a lot of freight charges and in fact it will affect the packing rate

and the proceeds given to the farmer, I would suggest that the business to be done in a win win situation where all the information should be shared with all parties i.e. the grower and the agent.

The mathematical aspect/ability to ascertain the likely FOB price per a stem

- As I mentioned earlier it is very crucial for the farmer to carry out some calculations so as to know the likely revenue for the crop, this should be done based on some factors i.e. the previous year weekly statistics of the price factoring in the other costs e.g. road transport, packaging, air freight, commission of his/her marketing agent plus all other costs incurred at the marketing point.

At this point if my reader is keenly following then he/she can agree with me that the grower needs a lot of information, some of the information may include the following:

1. In case hiring a vehicle for transport from the farm to airport, what is the cost of transport? How many boxes can the vehicle carry? Is the farmer able to fill the vehicle to its capacity? Having these information will enable the farmer to establish the cost of transport per stem.
2. What is the weight in kilos per box and what is the proper packing rate per box? - this will enable the farmer to establish the air freight cost per stem per size - this eventually will enable him to know the most profitable size to ship

Example

Size	Packing rate	Weight per box	Weight per stem	CIF price per stem	Sales
70cm	150 stems	15 kgs	0.1kg	0.17 Euros	25.5 Eur
60 cm	200 stems	14 kgs	0.07 kg	0.16 Euros	32.0 Eur.

From the above example imagine the air freight per kg is 1.00 Euro then all other factors held constant it will be economical to ship size 60 cm i.e.

For size 70 cm ----- Sales less airfreight (25.5-15) = 10.5 Euros

For size 60cm----- Sales less airfreight (32.0-14) = 18.0 Euros

In this case the farmer will be advised to downsize size 70 cm to size 60 cm.

3. The farmer also needs market information some markets deduct less commissions and other charges so the farmer should go to the cost effective markets where transparency is the subject of the business

Information on payment terms of each market is also very necessary and we have some markets called direct markets hence the farmer also needs to know the advantages of them compared to others.

Generally speaking I must mention that marketing and market information is very very crucial for the success of the any business and it should be noted that there is very good returns from flowers if all the factors are well addressed.

Distance to the airport

- This is not a limiting factor as far as the grower can meet the quantities and quality and so long as the place is fertile enough for the crop to grow, regarding the same I want you my reader to compare two farmers one a Mr. Kilonzo growing his flowers in Machakos on irrigation and a Mr. Ogega growing his flowers in Kisii.
- Kilonzo is likely to incur more expenses on the growing aspect for irrigation purposes and a bit less for transport to the airport.
- Ogega may not spend even a single cent for irrigation but he is likely to spend more on transport when the crop is ready.
- These two spending aspects are not supposed to deter any one from going into it as long as proper information is gathered first.

Value addition

This is a very important aspect especially in the flowers industry, I will deeply discuss about it on the next issue and this going to bring in some types selection of more than one type of a flower.

Greenhouses Could Help Farmers Extend Growing Season

Low-technology plastic greenhouses also called High tunnels may not give you more hours in a day but they will give you months of extra hours in a growing season. Neither rain, sleet nor snow shall prevent you from tending your appointed ground.

Buying fresh local tomatoes in all seasons and cultivating spinach and other leafy greens year-round could become a reality if farmers adopt high tunnels low-cost, low-tech, high-quality and high-yield plastic technology.

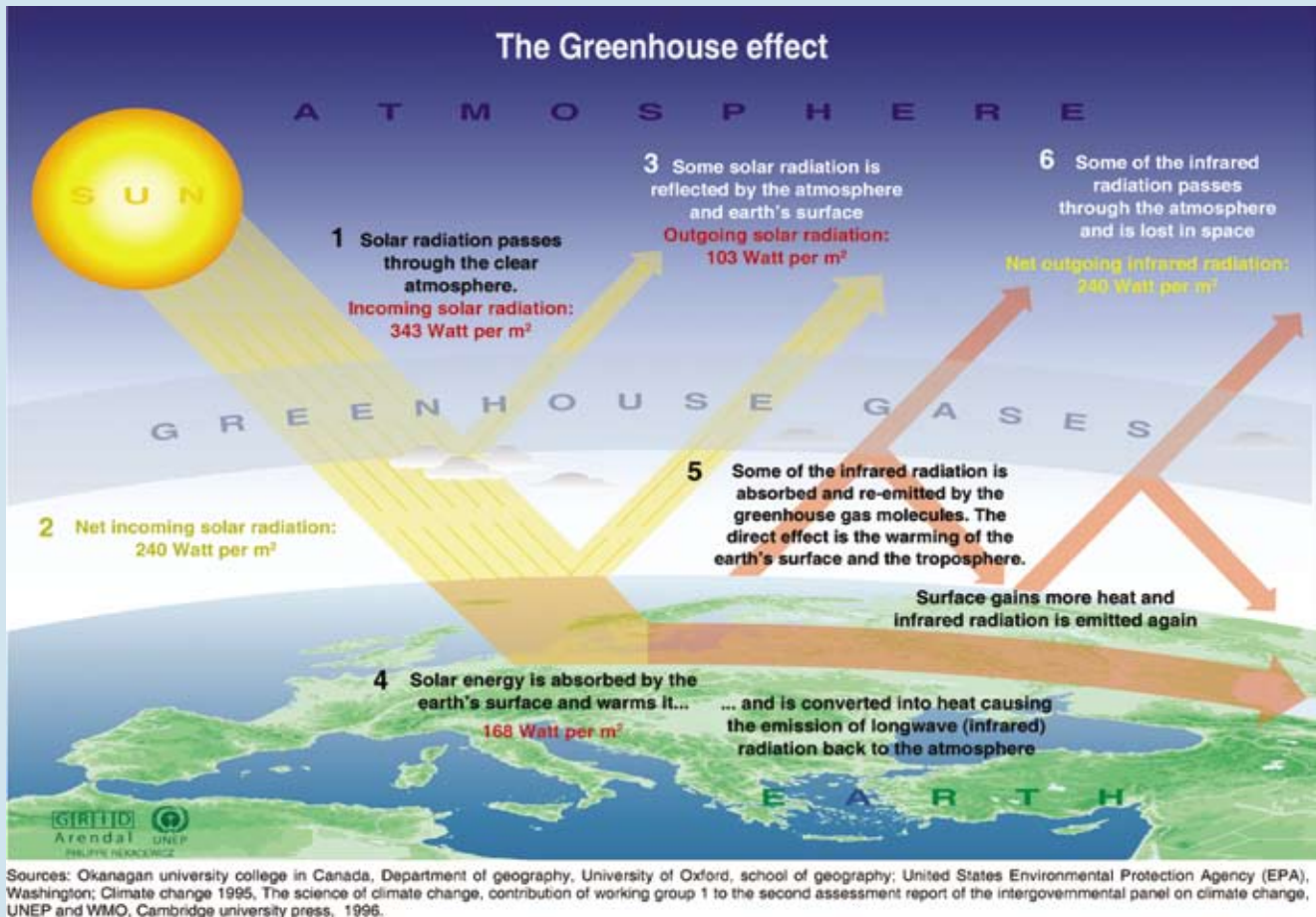
High tunnels can be used as a side enterprise to a larger farm operation, or you could start a large operation using four to six commercial-size high tunnels. They can be used for tomatoes or specialty crops, or for organic farming. They can even be used to put small fruit trees such as figs inside the structures.

High tunnels are single-car garage-size structures covered with clear plastic sheeting to manipulate soil and air temperatures using the energy of the sun. The structures are built by stretching plastic sheeting over a tubular frame. Three separate sheets of plastic form the roof and sidewalls of the tunnel. Farmers can raise the sidewalls to ventilate the structure. The end walls are constructed so the one-piece section has a doorway, but it also is designed so that two people can lift the section and place support poles under it so that a tractor with attachments can be used inside.

As temperatures drop, farmers can use other plastic technologies inside the structure such as low tunnels (small plastic-covered frames shaped like a Quonset hut), floating row covers made from various plastic polymers, and thermal covers, which use reflective surfaces to trap heat around the plants at night.

The high tunnel reduces your work, increases your harvest, helps you beat out your competition, and gives you the time to enjoy the work you love. While the high tunnel can be a boon to a large producer, it is a Godsend for the farmers market grower.

Conquering Global warming through Sustainability



The activities of mankind have elevated the levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. These greenhouse gases have led to warming of the planet. The main greenhouse gas is carbon dioxide.

Carbon dioxide is termed as greenhouse gas. This means that it absorbs long wave radiation more efficiently than short wave radiation. Short wavelength predominates in sunlight and penetrates the atmosphere warming the Earth. The Earth then returns long wave radiation. This long wave energy is absorbed by greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide which, in turn, radiate part of the energy (in long wavelengths) back to the Earth so warming it.

In the last 50 years, the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide has increased by 30% over pre-industrial levels. The main reasons for this carbon dioxide enrichment have been the burning of fossil fuels and the clearing of vegetation from land particularly tropical forests. This is resulting in phenomena such as:

- Changes in climate and rainfall pattern.
- Changes in ecosystem composition.
- More extreme weather.
- Increasing severity of urban heat islands.

Scientific projected climatic changes for Africa suggest a future of increasingly scarce water, falling agricultural yields, encroaching deserts, sea level rise and coastal erosion, and glacier melt. Already we can see a lot of changes in weather patterns that fit to the predictions.

In 1997 after rigorous negotiations, the world came up with the Kyoto Protocol, which laid down binding targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This treaty ends in 2012 and that is why world leaders will be meeting in Copenhagen in December for the UN climate change conference that is expected to negotiate a new treaty to replace the former.

The concept of Sustainable development is a philosophical stance or ideal solution to global warming. It is based upon our looking back at the damage that our interaction with the environment has caused and a striving forward to ensure that our actions today do not adversely affect the world for generations to come.

It has to be accepted that protection of the environment must go hand in hand with allowing both society and business to support itself and develop. If protection of the environment ignores society and business, then society and business will ultimately exclude environmental concerns.

An integral part of the drive for good sustainable practice, particularly in the commercial sector, is accountability for the production of the major greenhouse gas responsible for global warming - carbon dioxide.

Good sustainable practice in itself can only reduce the production of carbon dioxide. The only universal process that removes carbon dioxide from the atmosphere is photosynthesis. Photosynthesis is the chemical reaction by which plants use the sun's energy to combine water and carbon dioxide to make sugars for growth. Thus the only process that can claim to remove carbon dioxide is the utilisation of plants. For this reason, roof planting on a large scale and collectively driven at the legislative level, could play a crucial role in the sustainable development practices of the future.

Aloe Vera gel gaining popularity

It is estimated that the global trade in aloe vera raw material and derived products is worth about \$110 million.

The crop, which grows wild and is also commercially cultivated for its gel, has gained popularity with the USA being the major producer followed by Venezuela and Mexico.

Africa is well endowed with a wide range of indigenous aloe vera species, among them *scabrifolia*, *secundiflora*, *cadilophila*, *rivae*, and *turkanensis*, which produces a sap that is processed into gum and traded as bitter gum for use in the pharmaceutical and cosmetics industry.

On the international market, South Africa is the largest source of the bitter gum, followed by Kenya. Due to lack of an official policy framework, say experts, the trade in the crop has been vaguely regulated under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), an instrument that has failed to stop smuggling of the commodity at low prices.

A recent aloe vera resource mapping exercise in Kenya indicated that commercial farming has already taken root in 19 districts in the Rift Valley, Eastern, North Eastern and Coast provinces. Farmers in Western and Nyanza provinces, where the plant grows naturally, are yet to try their hand at commercial exploitation of the crop. While international prices have been ranging between \$5 and \$8 per kilogramme of gum, Kenya's aloe vera is often smuggled out of the country by middlemen at \$2 a kilo for farmers.

The newly published Aloe Utilisation Guidelines and Strategy seeks to remove middlemen from the crop's distribution chain altogether and provide opportunities for better market access to both producers and processors. It will also push for the domestication of regional and international agreements, treaties and conventions in respect to the crop's utilisation, improvement of stakeholders' capacity through education and awareness campaigns, and facilitate transfer of appropriate technologies to traders and farmers.

But unlike Kenya, which has taken too long to draft a national policy on commercial exploitation of the crop, Uganda had long recognised the role that the dryland crop can play in transforming lives in marginal areas. Uganda has since set up a Sh30 million aloe vera processing plant.

Kenya is looking unto Uganda for a role model for its infant aloe vera commercial farming. The two countries have a very high potential of producing aloe sap which, if fully exploited, could see the two dominate world markets.

The Kenya Aloe Growers Association is optimistic that the government will fight unauthorised imports of aloe products that have, over the years, tilted

competition against local manufacturers. The association Chairman Sospeter Njenga, who is also the technical director of Herbal Garden — an aloe products manufacturer — added that it is expected that the government will cut duty on importation of aloe vera juice extraction equipment.

It costs manufacturers around Sh20 million to bring such equipment into the country. At the moment, the only aloe vera processing facility that the country has is the four million shillings Baringo Bio Enterprise Factory, constructed in 2004 by money advanced to Kenya by the European Union.

However, as matters stand now, the government has its duty well cut out if it has to persuade more people to begin planting aloe vera on a commercial scale. Among immediate tasks is to ensure that farmers get good returns on their investments.

For instance, the Baringo factory is yet to make any significant impact on the way farmers look at the crop as it only pays Sh35 (US 50 cents) per kilo of aloe gum, only Sh15 more than what middlemen used to offer before the plant was constructed. Farmers have been calling for the factory's privatisation to make management responsive to market dynamics and their needs.



SENSIPLANT

The horticultural greenhouse industry is increasingly using sensors. Growers are looking for additional information to further optimise their crops, and wireless communications are in great demand. Measuring the humidity content of different types of substrates is an almost unknown activity in greenhouse horticulture. Growers currently often determine how much water to give based on their gut feeling - something which cannot be expressed in figures, so that irrigation is never consistent. This negatively affects plant quality whenever too much or too little water is supplied to the net, resulting in reduced quality and losses.

In cooperation with TNO, Hoogendoorn has now developed Sensiplant, a wireless measuring system to easily determine soil humidity in different types of substrate.

Sensiplant allows you to monitor and anticipate irrigation needs. By connecting this system to your PC, you are not just able to see current measurements, but also how humidity content changes over a period of time. You therefore know how much water disappears through absorption, evaporation or flushing, saving time and providing you as a grower with a tool to optimise your irrigation strategy. In turn, you can keep your water and fertiliser consumption under control, without negatively affecting the quality of your plants.

Sensiplant communicates with an access point connected to your computer across a wireless network. This wireless network can be expanded by placing additional routers in your greenhouse to create an expanded network for humidity content sensors to communicate across. Sensiplant can therefore function perfectly both on concrete floors and in roller containers.

Sensiplant is available as a basic package containing 5 sensors. In addition, this system can be expanded with further sensors, depending on the area you wish to monitor. The system does not depend on any specific brand of climate computer either.



More insights, courtesy of LetsGrow!

By linking the system to LetsGrow, you can combine data from your climate computer with those obtained via Sensiplant. That's how you achieve a perfect overview of the different factors influencing the humidity content of your substrate, as this link enables you to combine information about radiation, outside temperature and greenhouse temperature with the substrate water content.

Sensiplant provides you with information about the actual soil humidity and about how humidity content changes over a period of time.

- You can control water and fertiliser consumption without negatively affecting your plants.
- Sensiplant is wireless, so it can be used with both roller containers and concrete floors.
- The system does not depend on any specific brand of climate computer.
- A link to LetsGrow enables you to combine Sensiplant and climate data.
- Humidity measurements allow you to establish an optimum, consistent irrigation regime for your crops.

Sensiplant provides you with more information about your irrigation

and promotes the quality of your plants!

"The risk of water deficiency is highest when plants are flowering. There are some 4000 plants in one section. The moment these are dry for one day, this negatively affects quality. Greenhouses are growing ever bigger, with more and more crop sections, so you have to keep overall control of the situation. Sensiplant helps you to save time and avoid risks!"

Dion Ten Have, of Gebr. Ten Have C.V., who grow bellflowers at their site in the spring and cyclamen in the winter.

Sensiplant at Strijbisverbeek



strijbisverbeek
plants

Strijbisverbeek was created in 2006 when the 'Strijbis Potplanten' and 'Sander Verbeek' organisations joined forces. Strijbisverbeek is a company operating at 3 sites, in De Lier (2) and Maasdijk. They are growing Pot Chrysanthemums, Kalanchoes and Poinsettias on 12 ha. This grower has blossomed into the market leader in the pot chrysanthemum growing sector in the Netherlands in recent years.

Strijbisverbeek started measuring soil humidity using the Sensiplant on site at their Oranjepolderweg operation in Maasdijk at the end of September. We spoke to their crops supervisor Jeroen who grows pot chrysanthemums, kalanchoes and poinsettias at three locations in De Lier and Maasdijk..

What was the reason for your purchase of this system?

"As in our organisation, the decision about the correct irrigation is decided by different people, there was some discussion about whether the plant was

okay, or not wet or dry. We have a large number of different plants, so that this is somewhat difficult to determine. The Sensiplant system now offers us more insight into this, so that we can follow fixed guidelines for irrigation. We have a Priva climate computer, but as the system does not depend on any one brand of climate computer to work, it is a suitable product for us to use."

"There are 110 rolling tables with different varieties and colours of Poinsettia. These tables are all watered at the same time, which has varying consequences for the different varieties, as one type produces roots more quickly and therefore also evaporates and absorbs more water than another. It therefore sometimes occurred that one variety was dry while the other was still very wet. Sensiplant makes any such differences quickly visible. The system is currently used in 6 cm pots, as the substrate (potting compost) in such small pots dries out quickly."

How do you use the Sensiplant system?

"The Sensiplant system is used to support the crop supervisors' thoughts. Whenever I see in the greenhouse that the plants need water, I have this confirmed by the Sensiplant system, and vice versa."

"The Sensiplant system enables us to prevent quality impairments, as the

uniform measurements make differences (between varieties) better visible, and the correct moment for irrigation is much easier to determine," says Jeroen.

"The Sensiplant system allows us to prevent deteriorations in quality, as the consistent measurements make differences between species more visible. In addition, it is always easier to determine the correct moment for irrigation".

Sensiplant at Dijk van Dijk



Dijk van Dijk are growing Hydrangeas on 5 hectares of glasshouse and 4 hectares of field containers. The van Dijk brothers started their site together in 1980. At the moment, they are growing different types of pot plants, according to Leen van Dijk on an area of 7300 m² in size. Since 2001, his son Robin van Dijk has also been working in the company. The site has exclusively been growing Hydrangeas since 2000 now, with Ficus in the warmer part of the site to fill the winter gap.

Dijk van Dijk started to measure the substrate humidity content using Sensiplant at de Hooflaan 17 in De Lier in mid-September. We spoke to Leen van Dijk about this.

What was the most important reason for you to start working with the Sensiplant?

"The idea behind this was to obtain reliable information about the condition of the soil humidity and water absorption - a system enabling you to frequently check the plants' soil humidity in different substrates which could be done using sensors". Eventually, Leen van Dijk would really like to link these sensors to the irrigation computer to be able to automatically start irrigation using the measurements obtained.

What additional value does Sensiplant offer when growing Hydrangeas?

"Hydrangeas are plants which are very difficult to grow in the winter period. In our experience, the biggest contributor to this problem is the humidity content in the pot. Sensiplant offers a solution to this. It offers us a much more reliable picture of the humidity situation. We should be able to prevent problems such as leaf curl this way," says Leen van Dijk.



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Quotes and a little Laughter

- True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that a need which produces beggars needs restructuring." Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
- "I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion." -Thomas Jefferson
- It is not the coritirc who countess; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who stories valiantly... who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his places shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat." A Full Life is a life lived in Trust.

The most beautiful things in the world must be seen from the heart

- You cannot find fulfillment by observing others from the sidelines. Work together toward shared goals with a group of people you care about. Being passionate about helping other people or righting wrongs. Failing and then regrouping to learn from your mistakes. Making a difference in the world through your combined efforts.



Boost your productivity with a little office laughter and banter

EAGER TO IMPRESS THE BOSS

A young executive was leaving the office late one evening when he found the CEO standing in front of a shredder with a piece of paper in his hand.

"Listen," said the CEO, "this is a very sensitive and important document here, and my secretary has gone for the night. Can you make this thing work?"

"Certainly," said the young executive. He turned the machine on, inserted the paper, and pressed the start button.

"Excellent, excellent!" said the CEO as his paper disappeared inside the machine. "I just need one copy."
"A good belly laugh is worth two cups of coffee and one trip to your therapist." (Paul McGhee).