



White Julius Kalima  
Balaka District, Malawi

## Agriculture feeds people, minds and the economy

As a small landholder from Balaka District in Malawi, White Julius Kalima spent many years worrying about where he would get enough food to feed his family. But today, new farming practices and access to agricultural innovations have helped Kalima bring a new vision and prosperity to his farm.

As a leader in his community, he is bringing that new vision to the farms of his neighbours as well. In fact, new crops and unprecedented yields are having an impact on the well-being of the entire county. According to the World Bank, during the past three years Malawi has achieved surplus food production, providing important export revenue for a struggling economy.

With nearly 90% of Malawi's population engaged in farming, agriculture is the mainstay of the economy,

making up more than 80% of Malawi's export earnings. For a nation struggling with poverty, food shortages and low education levels, increasing farm productivity is a way to feed the country's nearly 13 billion mouths, improve the livelihood of the largely rural society and improve the nation's balance of trade.

Kalimas' land holdings are large in comparison to most Malawians and he grows a variety of crops including cotton and maize. Kalima remembers what farming was like before he started using more efficient farming practices, including new cultivation practices that



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prevent erosion, improved insect control with safer pesticides, and better adapted seed varieties.

“I was always worried and there was no guarantee of having a good yield,” he says. “I was using a lot of money to prepare the garden and profits were very little.” Through the adoption of new agricultural innovations, he has increased his productivity, generating profits for the farm. With those profits he is now able to send his children to school. “I’m very healthy, my family is healthy, we have plenty of food and in addition to my family, I take care of five other families,” he says.

Extension advice has been critical to Kalima’s success. “The Agriculture Extension people are teaching us better methods and provide us with hybrid seed. These seeds are high yielding resulting in good profits,” says Kalima, who chooses to buy new seeds for all his crops rather than planting his farm-produced seed. “This seed is of more value in production.” Kalima notes he can plant once and it grows well, avoiding the need to keep replanting which happens with poor quality seeds.

Pesticides have played an important role in improving Kalima’s productivity. More effective and less harmful insecticides have made insect control safer for farm labourers and more effective in protecting the crop yield from pests. Insects such as bull worms and aphids are of particular concern for the cotton field. “I also use herbicides as you can see in the cotton crop. It’s clean, no weeds,” he says proudly.

Foliar fertilizers help give Kalima’s cotton crop a much needed nutrient boost in the middle of the growing season and that means better yields. “That fertilizer will make these plants grow even much taller,” Kalima says. “Next time you will not be able to see me walking in this field, it will over grow my height.”

While Kalima appreciates the innovations that protect and promote his crop, he identifies one innovation that he really needs to produce a big leap in productivity.

“I wish I had a tractor or a small machine that could help me plough,” he says. “I use oxen but they get exhausted very fast, so I am not able to plough a big area.” A tractor would help Kalima to plough four times the amount of land that he has today, and that tractor would also benefit others in his community.

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Kalima has learned the importance of sustaining the environment and he has adopted a number of land management practices that will help future generations of Malawian farmers to succeed. He manages his land to prevent water run off, he plants trees near water sources and he has established his own woodlot. As chairman of the regional farmers’ group, Kalima is a leader to many of the farmers in his area. “My children, my family and entire community are learning about the practices that I’m doing to protect the soil, conserve the water and protect the environment,” he says.

Like his government, Kalima understands that everyone must work together to make Malawi a successful and healthy economy – a nation where their people are nourished both in mind and body.

generations

