

## Delegate Report

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### Fact-finding in Zambia - the IFAJ 2015 Media Tour

Details of the 2015 IFAJ Media Tour to Zambia caught my eye immediately. Development economics was a fascinating part of my agri econ course at Reading Uni in the late 60s, and here was the chance to see for myself the track record of an important African country. In addition, as editor of Practical Farm Ideas, which includes Soil+ Cover Cropping International, there was no doubt the chance to see home grown innovations at work on farms as well as finding out Zambian soil management methods.



*Dr Rob Smith (4<sup>th</sup> from left) Senior Vice President and General Manager AGCO, with Tom Welkie, GSI Global; Manuel Godfrey, Yara; Paolo Pompeii, Trelleburg; Klaus Epstein, Bayer; Nodin Oma, AGCO*

The Media Tour promised the chance to meet farmers. Central to the week's tour was the opening of a major AGCO development - the AGCO Future Farm near Lusaka. This is both a demonstration and educational facility designed to serve farmers throughout the region. AGCO generously contributed financially to the the IFAJ tour, so that we participants simply had to find our way to Lusaka. Each national Guild could put forward

one journalist, and one reserve, and I was the lucky one to be selected.

The chance to see a country as part of a professional group opened doors which would have been hugely difficult for the roving reporter, and at the same time made sure that time was not wasted. The tour leader, Josephine van Gelder from Agriterra, devised a programme which suited the wide needs of the 12 participating journalists, as well as providing the sponsors with exposure to a group of writers who, collectively, talk to over 3 million farmers worldwide.

"We will provide you a look beyond the images of hunger and poverty and explore the initiatives and opportunities," was of particular attraction in the information pack, as I know my readers are interested and respond to alternative farming ideas and opportunities. Some have followed up on East European articles and so it seemed interesting to explore and describe the opportunities in Africa.

The seven day Tour started with desk meetings with the Agriculture Minister, Given Lubinda, the Zambian NFU, and Zanaco, the national bank. These gave a background to the industry which is the second most important, after copper mining, in the economy. With around a million farmers agriculture is hugely important in terms of subsistence for 85% of the population, many who live in poverty.

We learned that only 14% of the cultivatable land was in production, and as soon as the tour started this statistic was all too apparent. The land area of the country is about 30% greater than that of France, and some 60% is cultivatable. Wherever we went the soils had a high sand content, making for easy erosion and poor moisture retention.

The six farm tours showed the possibilities for farmers with knowledge, skills and ability, plus in many cases the necessary capital, to make things happen. This was, for me, the highlight of the trip. Three of the farms were under 100 acres, one arable, one beef and the other dairy. None had a tractor, or used contractors. The work was done by hand, including maize planting. As a contrast we visited a 30,000 acre farm growing irrigated crops, tobacco and with five beef herds, and another farm visit was to a 600 cow dairy business which would not have been out of place anywhere in the developed world. A visit to a feed lot owned by the largest integrated agri-business in the country was followed by a visit to a sugar cane operation which is co-operatively owned.

In short, we were shown the possibilities for modern farming in the country, and tour members with an investigative instinct could also see the drawbacks and problem areas, which are not insignificant. But there is no doubt that the country holds huge potential, and the government is anxious for this to be developed. Minister Lubinda explained the present policy which is to provide 10,000 ha sections to 11 farming businesses, and so far two of these have been taken up.

A lightbulb moment occurred at the Magoye Smallholder Dairy Farmers Co-op when I asked the manager “If your fairy godmother was to visit tomorrow, what would you request?” and his answer was a tractor, mower and baler so their small-scale subsistence farmers could conserve grass when it had good feeding value during the hot rainy season (Nov – Apr) for feeding during the dry season from May to October. Many herds of 2 to 5 cows are fed expensive concentrates and pick what’s around, losing condition and being almost entirely unproductive.

The IFAJ Media Tour 2015 was a huge success, not least because of the leadership of Josephine and the enthusiasm and humour of the participants. The group asked perceptive questions and we all found that 12 brains were a great deal better than one when it came to fact-finding. We learned from each other, co-operating over notes and information, and are sharing pictures.

Sincere thanks to the GB GAJ for putting my name forward for this enlightening tour, to AGCO for their sponsorship, and to Agriterra, and Josephine van Gelder and Kingsley Kaswende from ZNFU for putting it all together.

I hope to have a detailed report ready by early July.



*Combining maize on the AGCO Future Farm where it yielded 7.3t/ha*



*The group get the details about a modern pig multiplier unit from Graham Rae*



*Irrigating potatoes, a relatively new crop for Zambian farmers*



*Well managed cattle graze managed pasture*



*One of nearly a million traditional farms that provide no more than subsistence*



*Cottages for workers are very basic – but these have electricity which is well distributed*



*Photogenic and a typical rural scene in Zambia*



*This crop of maize is not an unusual sight, and shows why national yield is 2t / ha*



*Cattle in a Zambeef feedlot show how agricultural production can be raised*



*Many growers and small farmers rely on markets such as this one in Lusaka*



*Small scale dairy farmers bring their uncooled milk to this central cooperative – often by bike*



*This expanding dairy herd now numbers 23 cows, still hand milked*



*Large machinery is needed for big acreages*



*International journos get a tour of the AGCO farm*



*Hay making is easy in this weather. Improved pasture gives an impressive yield*



*650 cow dairy farm could be found in any other developed country*



*Zero-till trials – this irrigated land has been drilled with wheat*



*Tobacco grading. The crop is labour intensive*