

SOWEDA Trains Cocoa Producers on the Rational Use of Agricultural Pesticides

With its fertile volcanic soil, the South West Region presents one of the best settings for the cultivation of cocoa in Cameroon. It is in fact one of the reasons why for very long, the region occupied the number spot on the list of cocoa producing regions in the country. This cash crop plays an important role in the economy of Cameroon as it is the second largest export product. In the heart of the cocoa season therefore, farmers in the South West Region have their full attention on their cocoa farms.

In the quest to boost productivity, one of the principal issues coco farmers struggle with is plant diseases such as black pod, Dieback etc. and pests like capsids, stem borer and mealy bugs. The go to solution for this menace is the application of pesticides which protect crops from attack. However, the misuse of pesticides often occurs leading to hazardous effects on the plants, farmers and the environment.

Pesticide abuse usually comes in the form of farmers exploiting poor spraying equipment, the utilization of the wrong pesticides on cocoa fields and failure to use the proper protective garments during the application process. The indiscriminate use of pesticides is another problem which can lead to pesticide resistance and increases the risk of residues being ingested by consumers. The result is that plants are poisoned and farmers' health are endangered, stalling the advancement of the sector in the South West Region.

Cognizant of this pressing problem, the South West Development Authority in a bid to assist farmers, has organized training sessions to increase and improve farmers' knowledge on the rational use of agricultural pesticides and the appropriate treatment calendars.

Phase one of the training took place from 17th - 19th September 2022 in Mamfe, targeting cocoa producers in Manyu, Lebialem and Meme Divisions while the second phase of the training ran from the 31st of August - 02nd September 2022 in Kumba grouping farmers from Fako, Kupe Muanenguba and Ndian.

During the 3 day trainings, cocoa producers were taught how to identify major pests and diseases and how to effectively select, formulate, handle and apply pesticides for specific problems. The trainees also learned how to make proper use of spray equipment, the different spraying techniques and equipment maintenance. Special attention was laid on helping farmers to understand the risks of misusing pesticides and ways they can avoid endangering their health, that of consumers and keep the environment safe.

Speaking at the end of the training in Kumba, Njimli Berline, a 31 year old cocoa producer in Kumba explained that the training was timely and very beneficial as it has provided her with knowledge on how to take better care of her cocoa farm.

“Thanks to this training, I now know that I have been misusing pesticides. With the knowledge I have gained from here, I will be changing my farming pattern and will reduce my use of chemicals” she added.

Much like Njimli Berline, 63 year old Dieunie Goerge from kwa-kwa says the SOWEDA training has helped him to become a better cocoa farmer. “After so many years as a farmer, I still had not mastered the cocoa calendar and I still had difficulties choosing the right pesticides. Now I know better and I have even learnt how to use organic pesticides. I am certain this will help me get better yields and I wish to thank SOWEDA for this endeavor”.

The South West Development Authority has used these trainings to upskill and expand the knowledge of about 70 cocoa producers between the ages of 18 and 63 as to the best practices when it comes to pesticide use in their cocoa farms. The Establishment plans to carry out even more trainings targeting cocoa producers to provide them with the necessary technical assistance needed to make cocoa farming an even more attractive activity, offering more opportunities for poverty alleviation and sustainable development in the South West Region.