

# Agriculture in Zambia

## Farmers Guide

# 50 TIPS FOR FARMING SUCCESS

**How I turned  
my Gardening  
hobby into a  
farming  
business**

**WHAT SHOULD  
YOU BE  
PLANTING THIS  
MONTH?**

*Making a difference*

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*Success doesn't  
come from what  
you do occasionally  
but what you do  
consistently*

## EDITOR'S NOTE

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Dear Reader,

It is with great pleasure, humility and anticipation that we celebrate the launch of the Farmers Guide with this inaugural issue. On behalf of the Agriculture in Zambia (AIZ) Editorial Team, I would like to extend a very warm welcome to the readership of AIZ. I also take this opportunity to thank everyone that has contributed to the launch of this magazine.

In an era, bursting with replication, we wanted to do something unique. Something unexpected, that would stand out, be exhaustive and go beyond the pages of a digital magazine. We wanted the story behind each story to not only inspire you but also give you the resources that will help you jumpstart your own vision and dreams.

In this article, we bring "50 Tips for Farming Success" to help you be more efficient and profitable than ever before. From beginner farmer to experienced farmer, these tips could be what your farming venture might need to become successful.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for connecting with AIZ. Times are uncertain as the world deals with the coronavirus pandemic. I would like to say to you all: Mask up, stay healthy and stay safe. On our side we will continue to keep you informed through our website and new digital magazine. We want and will welcome your feedback and input. If you have any questions, suggestions, or concerns, please email [info@agricultureinzambia.com](mailto:info@agricultureinzambia.com).

Shimanga Mubitana,  
Managing Editor

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# 50 TIPS FOR FARMING SUCCESS

Building a sustainable business from farming is not as straight forward as it looks. Those that do it, however, understand that there's far more to operating a farm than simply preparing the land, planting seedlings, harvesting, and taking the produce to the market. You have to do much more than this. You must run your farm as a business and make decisions based on viability and the ability to turn a profit. While doing this, bear in mind that a business is profitable if the product it is offering is answering a community problem or community needs.

Because farming is a complex process where each activity contributes to the ultimate goal, all activities have to be managed properly. In other words, you need to take these 50 tips into consideration:



## FOR BEGINNER FARMERS

- 1. Gather Information** - Learn the ins and outs of what you want to produce and understand which markets will help you reach your desired profit.
- 2. Find a niche market** - A bit of everything when you're starting out is a bad idea. Let people know you as a guru in onion farming or guru in potato farming...
- 3. Set reasonable goals** - They have to be measurable and attainable.
- 4. Be passionate** - When you farm with love, it's not a job but a hobby.
- 5. Always be one step ahead** - Prepare for pests, bad weather...
- 6. Make clear land agreements** - Move beyond trying to own this land. Make your money now, buy your land later.
- 7. Secure a market before you grow your crop** - If you'll be selling to marketeers, know the processes for selling at certain locations.
- 8. Keep it small** - If you're just getting started, a few acres are enough. You'll increase production as you gain more experience.
- 9. Location is key** - Try to find a location that's close to vendors and consumers. It will save you on transportation costs and delivery times.



## OPERATIONS

- 10. Use time efficiently** - Develop standard operating procedures.
- 11. Aspire to have consistent yields throughout the year** - As much as profit is the end goal, maintaining consistent yields will give you return customers.
- 12. Advocate for your products** - You know how much it cost you to produce. If you can't advocate for your products, then avoid growing what everyone else is growing.
- 13. Off-season crops** - If you growing seasonal crops and depend on rainfall, it's time to have a backup crop that can grow with little water.
- 14. Use data** - Use your accumulated data to make business decisions.
- 15. Seek the help of business advisors and consultants** - If you feel you're not making progress even after putting in 100%, seek help.
- 16. Diversify to reduce risk** - Avoid sticking to one product, diversify. But, only do this once you're established as a farmer.
- 17. Assess risk and have a plan to manage and mitigate it.**
- 18. Be innovative** - Find ways to getting your name out there and working quicker.



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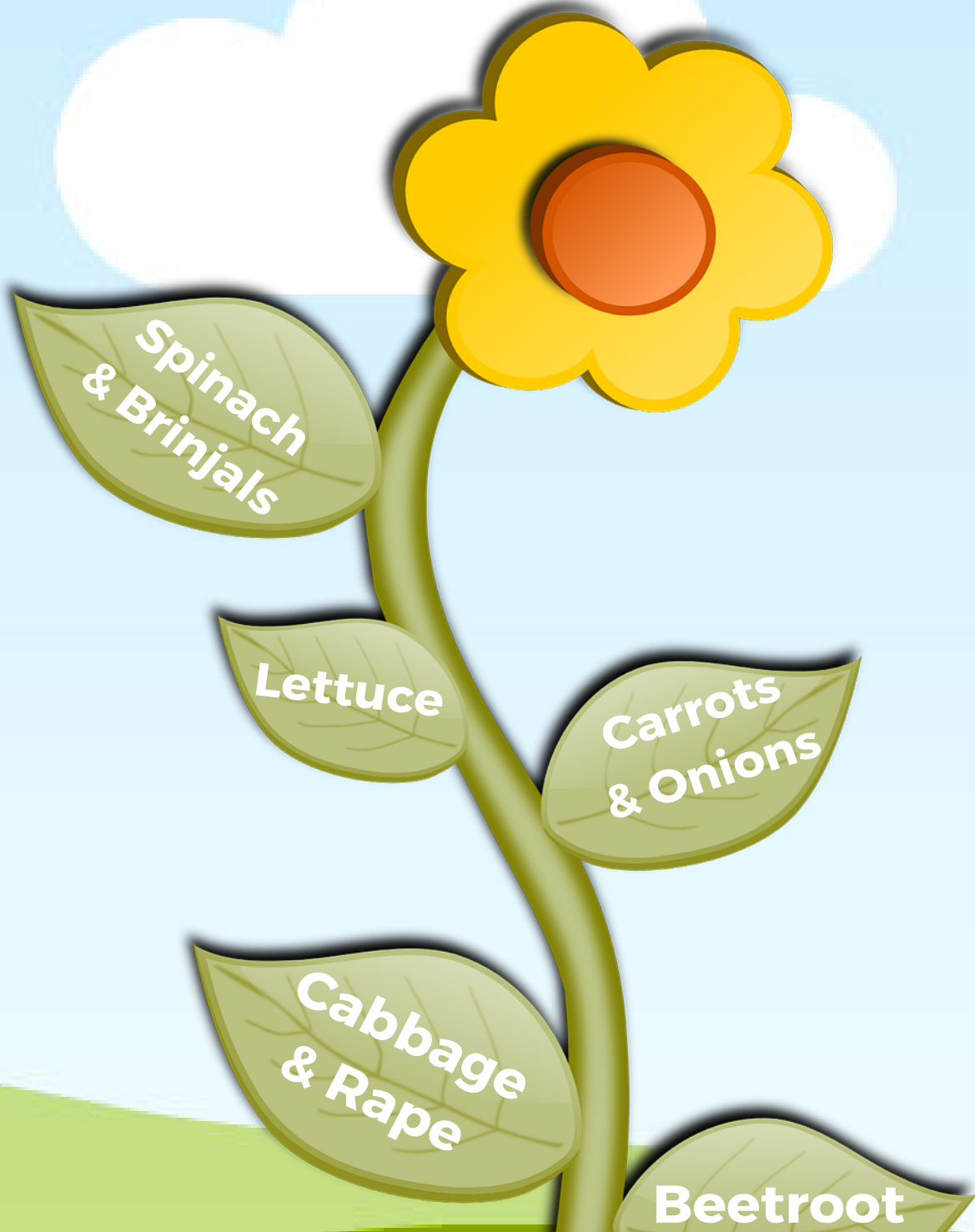
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**What should you be planting?**



## FARM MANAGEMENT

- 19. Always be one step ahead** - Prepare for pests, bad weather...
- 20. Manage time** - Record your time spent on all of your common tasks until you routinely finish on the specified time.
- 21. Consider Technology** - Be savvy with your farming machinery. Also, calculate your cost for machinery per acre.
- 22. Take Stock regularly** - This is the only way you can reduce on theft
- 23. Try to grow organic** - You want to keep your customers healthy. Therefore, try to keep your produce free of chemicals
- 24. Get your hands dirty** - If you have the physical ability, do the work.
- 25. Quality is key** - Produce a high-quality product so you can attract the right clientele



## CUSTOMER SERVICE

- 26. Put yourself in your customer's shoes** - Implement intensive customer segmentation so you can give the best
- 27. Have a sales outlet** and or offer mobile sales and delivery services
- 28. Deliver at any cost** by scaling up quickly to achieve future economies of scale.
- 29. Go the extra mile** - If you have to do door to door deliveries for a return customer, do it. Word of mouth is powerful.
- 30. Produce for a market** rather than just trying to market what you produce
- 31. Direct marketing** — Go out and find your own customers. In other words, cut out the middlemen.



## FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

- 32. Think about money but don't worry about it** - Money speaks all languages
- 33. Know your costs** - Simply starting and funding as you go can lead you into financial problems. Monitor your cost of production and what it means for profit
- 34. Control costs** - If you can make your own feed, make it
- 35. Maintain a balance** between satisfying your customers and making a profit
- 36. Set your breakeven price** - This way, you can take the guesswork out of pricing and make real profit
- 37. Keep an eye on cash flow** - even profitable businesses can fail because of liquidity problems
- 38. Plan for growth** to drive profits and to make a living with your operation.





## SELF MANAGEMENT

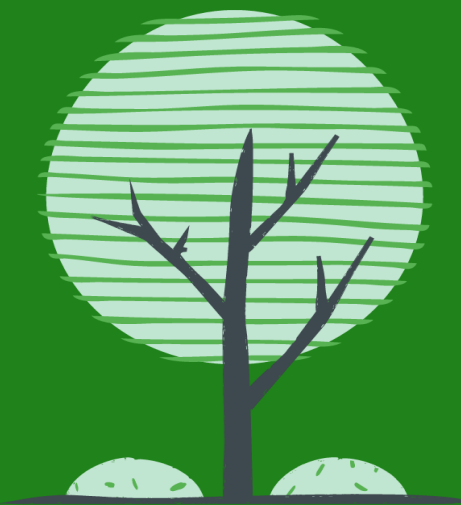
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- 39. Reflect** - Find time to reflect on what you're doing on your farm.
- 40. Look at the bigger picture** - it's easy to get carried away micro-managing when you're working on a small farm. However, when you start to expand your farm, you need to stop with the micro-managing and look at the big picture.
- 41. Think like a CEO** - You have to be strategic in your thinking. It will help you manage resources, people and relationships.
- 42. Accept competition** - If you give competition too much attention, you will start complaining. Accept that there are people doing what you're doing and strive to do it better.
- 43. Keep your eyes on the ball** - If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. Keep an eye on everything that is happening on the ground.
- 44. Never regret failure** - Trying and failing is part of the process. You don't want to regret not trying.
- 45. Find like-minded partners** - You have to have the same end goal in mind.
- 46. Begin with the end in mind** - This will help you have a clear indication of where your project is going and what exactly is required.
- 47. Have a written business plan** - Follow your plan and review it annually.
- 48. Keep learning** - knowledge is the key.
- 49. Be perceptive** about what brings value to your farm and what doesn't.
- 50. Pay yourself first** - You're not a charity organization. You're in the business of making money. Reward yourself.

# Farming Tip

## Keeping soil moist

*Some crops can tolerate drought, but crops live off the microbial activity beneath them. These microbes need water. So, keep the soil covered to preserve moisture if you can't water frequently.*





# How I turned my gardening hobby into a farming business

When I started gardening in my backyard, the process was easy. I didn't have to plant from seeds because seedlings for common vegetables are easy to find. All I would do was ask my gardener to make a few beds, buy seedlings – rape, spinach and onion – have them planted and that was it. I enjoyed watering them daily after work, and every and then, I would add manure from my sister's chicken run. We would weed when needed and plant new seedlings and we were guaranteed vegetables through out the year. When I had too many vegetables, I would harvest and distribute to family. However, one day, I approached a lady that sold at a market near my house and she agreed to buy from me. So, every morning, she would pass by to harvest a few to sell for the day. She loved the idea because she didn't have to sit with withered vegetables for days. This made me start to think about farming on a larger scale.

So, I rented a small farm in Kafue area that had water and irrigation lines installed. K3000 for the year looked like a good deal if I had crops growing all year. I decided to plant tomatoes. It was a brilliant idea. I employed a caretaker to stay on site during the day and manage the field. The tomatoes flourished until one Wednesday morning when I received a call that half of them had been harvested through the night by thieves. I was devastated. The money I had put in was painful to lose. However, we continued to harvest and managed to break even.

It was time to change strategy. I started to visit the farm more often and decided to plant root crops which had a tedious harvesting process. So, we planted potatoes. We prepared the soil for the planting of potatoes. First, we plowed the soil, spread fertilizer and then planted the potato tubers at a certain depth and soon after planting we sprayed the soil with herbicides. We continued to fertilize the crop and spray against insect pests and diseases. At the end, we harvested potatoes in a larger quantity than we had expected. This was the beginning. We wasted a lot of money following this process but with a few adjustments, we became profitable. I rented for 2 years and managed to buy a few hectares from the money I made. I now grow a lot of green vegetables, seasonal crops like soya beans and watermelon and every now and then, I grow carrots and potatoes. We sell wherever we can but have some contracts with restaurants and lodges for daily supplies. Here are three tips I'd like to share that can save you money and make your venture more profitable:





## Test your soil

There's nothing wrong with how I started off growing potatoes. However, one important step was missed. This is one step most farmers miss. In fact, I missed it for a while - **Testing soil quality**. This simple yet important step can save you a lot of money. We often feed, feed and feed the soil with compost and fertilizer without realising that it's unnecessary. Sometimes our crops don't perform well because there's too much fertilizer.

## Crop rotation

You have to plant a sequence of different types of crops on your land to keep your soil healthy. It helps manage weeds, pests and diseases. As much as it is good to be a master at one crop, you have to grow other crops that are in different families. I find it easier to divide my land. I grow different crops on different parts for 2 years and then swap.

## Sell your crops for the highest price

Try not to be in a hurry to get rid of your produce. As much as you have to grow big volumes to make money, you also have to produce high-quality crops if you want to maintain clients. Nourish your plants with quality based on your soil test. Also remember, nitrate-based solutions offer higher yields than urea-based solutions.

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