

Foreword

Over the last couple of decades, conservation agriculture has gained increasing interest in Africa and worldwide. This approach to farming is very attractive for African farmers: it boosts yields, saves labour and money, and conserves the soil and the environment. It appeals to all categories of farmers – from small-scale subsistence farmers, to high-tech commercial producers. It can be used in all climates and on all soils where it is possible to grow crops. And it appeals to the general public and to national leaders as a policy to promote and approve.

Conservation agriculture contributes significantly to meet three of the Millennium Development Goals.

- **Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger** Conservation agriculture helps farmers produce more food – for themselves and for the market. It helps stabilize yields, especially during drought. It uses less labour and fewer expensive inputs than conventional agriculture.
- **Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability** Conservation agriculture produces a healthy, productive soil, halts erosion, reduces river pollution, increases the amount of organic matter in the soil, and takes carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere.
- **Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development** Conservation agriculture is a global movement. It brings development agencies, the private sector, civil society, research institutions, local organizations and farmers together to contribute to the other Goals.

Conservation agriculture also fits in well with two of the major NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) sectoral priorities: agriculture and the environment.

This book explains why conservation agriculture has such promise. It shows how farmers and extension workers can do it.

This book is the result of an initiative by a group of people from various institutions across Africa and throughout the world. This group includes farmers and researchers, extension workers and policy makers, governments, non-government organizations and the private sector. A unique alliance for a uniquely promising approach.

They have drawn on their own knowledge, on the work of their organizations, and on the successes of hundreds of thousands of farmers throughout Africa. They have put all these experiences together into this guide: the first manual on conservation agriculture covering the whole of Africa.

The method used to create this book – a “writeshop” involving more than 90 contributors – is highly appreciated. It shows an impressive will by a large group from many different countries, from different walks of life, and with different specializations and interests, to come together and produce a prod-

uct that all agree upon. The feeling of joint ownership will help the message of conservation agriculture spread much more quickly than if a single person had attempted to write this book alone.

It is our hope that this book will be distributed widely, and will be read by many. More important, we urge readers to put to use the information it contains. While the book is intended especially for extension workers and other agricultural service providers, we would also recommend that students in schools and universities read it. So should many farmers, and those who represent our peoples in various forums on agriculture and food security.

Finally, we want to recognize the international aspect of conservation agriculture. This book is African. But it reaches even further out. It will be a major input into the World Congress on Conservation Agriculture, to be held in Nairobi in October 2005 under a NEPAD arrangement and with the African Conservation Tillage Network. This congress marks a new beginning for a continent with an increasing will to get together to influence global policies and decision making.

We thank all involved in producing and distributing this book, and those charged with transforming its messages into practical use. Most of all, though, we hope that our farmers will be able to use conservation agriculture to bring prosperity to their families and for their societies.

Hon. Kipruto arap Kirwa

Minister of Agriculture
Republic of Kenya

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