

Rose Nakatwila, Mbeya

We planted the first coffee when we came here in 1998: my husband, Jonas Mwakawanga, was an agricultural extension officer and we started the farm together when he retired. We built our own house, sunk a well, and worked together to develop the farm, until his death in 2003.

My husband first taught me how to prune. Pruning is one of the most important jobs on a coffee farm, and has to be done twice a year if I'm to get a good harvest.

I have 3,704 trees and it takes me about three weeks to prune them all properly. I start at seven in the morning, hang my radio on a branch to listen to while I'm working, and stop about two in the afternoon. When I started to prune I worked slowly, but now I'm used to it and can work really fast.

I love farming. Each job on the farm is important, and I don't enjoy one of them more than another - in fact I enjoy all the jobs I have to do. For example, if I'm weeding I know I'm helping the plant to grow well, and if the plant grows well I'll have to prune it because that will make it bear a good crop of berries.



As well as coffee I grow maize, groundnuts, beans and sunflowers, and some rice. I have three cows and forty chickens. I get almost eight litres of milk a day from the cows, so I can sell some, and the livestock also helps by producing manure for the farm. I employ casual labourers sometimes to work on the maize and the rice, but I prefer to work on the coffee myself. I love my coffee because it's my major financial support. Without coffee I don't know what my life would be like. When I'm working with my coffee trees I just feel comfortable, and when I touch the berries it's as though I'm touching money.

I'm growing old, but because of all the hard work and exercise I do on the farm I seem to be young. My children aren't interested in farming. They each have their own talents and I can't force them to build their homes here. I don't know where God will send my grandchildren: I want to stay because I love to be here, but I don't know who will take over the farm when I can no longer carry on.

I'm part of a farmers group called Fine Coffee. I have a motorized pulper and the coffee is pulped, fermented, washed and dried here on the farm. I also roast and grind my own coffee and drink it every day with milk and sugar. Some people believe that coffee will give you strength to work on the farm, but I don't believe that. I believe that if you don't have the commitment you won't have the strength to work on the farm. It's my commitment that gives me strength.

I Pruning was considered to be man's work, but Rose Nakatwila mastered the art so successfully that TaCRI now uses Rose as a model of good practice. After being widowed, Rose followed TaCRI's pruning and other coffee husbandry advice and has doubled her yield.