Field days: Knowledge dissemination and entertainment

Introduction

Field days were introduced as a way of involving the farmer into the modernisation agendas of the ‘experts’. ‘By means of celebrating agricultural success demonstrated in the fields … it was hoped to induce less successful farmers to copy or mimic prize winning Master Farmers’ (Bolding 2004: 95). In line with the Transfer of Technology approaches, officials understood field days as occasions for AREX officers to impart agricultural knowledge to farmers, thereby assuming that farmers lacked such knowledge and needed to be tutored (Hedrick 1918). Unlike Master Farmer classes (discussed in Chapter 1), field days emphasised the practical rather than the theoretical side of knowledge, or knowledge disseminated in the context of the classroom.

Field days were also understood as occasions where farmers could share knowledge with each other in a guided and controlled environment. Although the host farmer was given the opportunity to explain to others what he did to get a good crop, the expert was present to offer guidance and correction when farmers erred in their explanations. This contradicts Bolding’s (2004: 100) assertion that

... most field workers perceive field days not as learning events fostering the effect of trickle down otherwise known as extension but events to legitimise their raison d’être as state agents committed to modernity, development and commercialised small holder agriculture (see also Worby 1995, on the ritualistic nature of field days organised by Agritex in North-Western Zimbabwe).

The data in this chapter will show that, although there might be many reasons for holding and attending field days, officers do take seriously their teaching and learning functions.
Officers disseminate knowledge about seed through pre-planting meetings and field days right through the season. Field days give officers the opportunity to disseminate information in a relaxed atmosphere, different from the school-room atmosphere. Such days are usually entertaining, with people performing dramas and singing songs of a political or agricultural nature, and in some cases there is an abundance of food and beer, though not at any of the field days I attended. All farmers get a chance to participate and share their knowledge.