

By Patience Lunda

Researchers promote crop diversification

Research conducted by academicians from five countries has cited the use of agroecological approaches in dealing with pests as one of the effective ways of controlling pests in crops.

The research, conducted among farmers in Mzimba District, sought to measure the effects of pesticide use and agroecological approaches on crops and soils.

Agroecological approaches include agricultural methods such as crop diversification, use of natural fertilisers, pollinators, botanical sprays and the use of natural enemies.

The research was aimed at finding ways that farmers can use to attain food security by identifying new ways of increasing crop yields and identifying how to deal with pests that destroy crops.

Speaking after disseminating research findings on Wednesday, Farms for Biodiversity Project Principal Investigator Rachel Bezner Kerr, who is also a professor at Cornell University in the United States, said pests can be controlled easily if several approaches are devised.

Kerr said there is a need to create good habitats for natural enemies to effectively deal with pests such as fall armyworms.



AT WORK—Researchers and farmers—Pictures by Patience Lunda

Natural enemies are organisms that kill, decrease the reproductive potential or reduce the number of another organism.

“We found that these agroecological practices are very important for having long-term resilient communities.

“The more natural enemies are present, the less maize is damaged. The more natural enemies of fall armyworms are present, the higher the yield of maize,” she said.

Soils, Food and Health Communities Organisation Executive Director Esther

Lupafya, who is one of the researchers, said farmers have been trained in how to prevent and control pests, knowledge that will be downscaled to other farmers.

Lupafya added that they have engaged the government on the research findings and are sensitising farmers to the importance of adopting the recommended methods.

“Research findings will help farmers as they will now be in a position to control pests that attack their crops,” she said.

Additionally, the research

has found that there are many plants that can be used to make botanical sprays which can be used for protecting crops from pests.

One of the farmers involved in the research, Pressings Moyo, said the findings will help him save money through the use of agroecological approaches.

“This is money that would otherwise have been used for purchasing pesticides,” he said.

The research, which started four years ago, was conducted in 63 agricultural fields in 24 villages in Mzimba District.



KERR—Agroecological practices are very important for having long-term resilient communities



LUPAFYA—Research findings will help farmers