

EDITORIAL – JULY 2025 EDITION CELEBRATING MILESTONES ON THE ROAD TO WPC 2026

This July marks a significant turning point for Kenya's potato sector and its global positioning as we edge closer to hosting the 13th World Potato Congress (WPC 2026). We were honored to welcome Dr. Peter VanderZaag, President of the World Potato Congress, who visited Kenya to officially launch the logistics and planning for this historic event. His presence and confidence in Kenya's preparedness reaffirm our nation's capacity to convene over 1,000 delegates from more than 60 countries, making WPC 2026 a landmark Congress — the first of its kind in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Beyond WPC 2026 preparations, this edition of the newsletter highlights NPCK's ongoing initiatives to strengthen Kenya's potato industry.

[Click here to explore more on the Editorial](#)

WPC PRESIDENT PETER VANDERZAAG PARTICIPATES IN OFFICIAL VISIT TO KENYA TO LAUNCH CAMPAIGN FOR THE 13TH WORLD POTATO CONGRESS.



Group photo with President, adorned with welcome gifts, taken at the NPCK Headquarters during the launch of logistics for the 13th World Potato Congress (WPC 2026):

Dr. Peter VanderZaag, President of the World Potato Congress, was in Kenya this month to participate in the official launch of the logistics and planning for the 13th World Potato Congress -2026.

The session opened with welcoming remarks from the Chair of the WPC Kenya Planning Committee and NPCK CEO, Mr. Wachira Kaguongo, alongside the Committee Vice-Chair and CEO of FreshCrop Ltd., Mr. Chris Gasperi. In his keynote remarks, Dr. VanderZaag expressed strong confidence in Kenya's preparations and reaffirmed the global importance of WPC 2026, which will be the first time the Congress is hosted in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Committee heads representing the key workstreams — including finance, programs, marketing, social events, and technical tours — provided updates on ongoing plans and shared next steps as the road to October 2026 continues to take shape.

Group photo with President, adorned with welcome gifts, taken at the NPCK Headquarters during the launch of logistics for the 13th World Potato Congress (WPC 2026):

The event was followed by a site visit by the WPC President and the organizing committees to Sawela Lodges and Convention Centre, which will be the main venue for the 2026 Congress sessions and exhibition.

This milestone visit and event attracted key partners from across the potato value chain and received extensive media coverage from Citizen TV, The Standard, Seeds of Gold, Hortinews, Kilimo News, and others.

[Click here to explore more on the WPC 2026 Launch](#)

BUILDING GUARDIANS OF AGRICULTURAL QUALITY THROUGH SEED INSPECTOR TRAINING

In a country where agriculture forms the backbone of the economy, the role of seed inspectors is crucial. Seed inspectors are the frontline defenders of seed quality, ensuring that only high-quality, clean, and genetically pure seeds reach farmers. Their role is vital in upholding food security, protecting farmer investments, and maintaining national and international seed standards.

The primary objective of seed inspector training is to equip participants with the knowledge, practical skills, and regulatory understanding required to inspect, evaluate, and certify seed crops and seed lots. The training ensures that inspectors can:

- Identify and report seed crop non-conformities.
- Detect seed-borne diseases and pests (e.g., Bacterial Wilt and PCN in potatoes).
- Verify the genetic purity and physical quality of seeds.

Enforce compliance with national seed regulations and international protocols.



KEPHIS Team and the Private Inspector trainees at KEPHIS Head Quarters

[Click here to explore more on the Seed Inspector Training](#)

NPCK'S VBA ENGAGEMENT MODEL: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN FARMERS AND SERVICES

In a bid to improve productivity and market access for potato farmers in Kenya, NPCK has adopted an innovative, farmer-centered approach, the Village-Based Advisors (VBAs) model. This model leverages the power of grassroots networks to deliver critical agricultural support while fostering sustainable livelihoods in potato-growing communities. VBAs are trained individuals within potato farming counties in the county to serve as a key point of contact for farmer engagement. They are mostly the lead farmers in their areas and are carefully recruited and trained on several core aspects in the potato value chain. Some of these aspects include good agricultural practices, collective marketing through aggregation, collective purchase of farm inputs and certified seeds through Viasi Soko digital platform, and establishment and management of baby demonstration plots. Through these roles, VBAs serve as agents to equip fellow farmers with the knowledge and tools needed to enhance productivity, reduce the effects of post-harvest losses, and gain access to better markets.

On the Viasi Soko digital platform, VBAs are instrumental in promoting training farmers on the use of Viasi Soko for easy access to farm inputs and extension messages.



VBA training session in Meru County

[Click here to explore more on The VBA Engagement Model](#)

EMBRACING SMARTPHONES IN DAILY FARM ROUTINES TO BOOST POTATO PRODUCTION

We are living in the 21st Century—an age defined by rapid technological advancement and innovation across all sectors, including agriculture. We've progressed from the era of bulky desktop computers to compact, powerful devices that now fit in our pockets: smartphones. These devices have evolved into smart tools equipped with technologies that can transform farming, especially potato production.

In agriculture today, various innovations have emerged in the form of mobile apps, web-based platforms, and content-rich websites.



This is a farmer using a smartphone in the field to access real-time information, boosting productivity and efficiency in his farm.

[Click here to explore more on Smart Phones in daily farm routines](#)

MERU COUNTY POTATO STRATEGY; ENHANCING IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH HARMONIZED STAKEHOLDERS' EFFORTS

Potato production in Meru County has been on a downward trend due to several existing and upcoming challenges, including difficulty in accessing clean and certified seed potatoes, poor production methods that contribute to soil nutrient depletion, and unreliable rainfall or insufficient water for irrigation among other key challenges. This calls for the industry to have a strategic direction and set priorities. The industry activities should also be well aligned with the county government's priorities. Consequently, there is a need for the industry to have structured coordination and communication (according to the Meru County Potato Strategy 2024-2029).

To promote the adoption of the National Potato Strategy (NPS) and drive growth and expansion in the potato industry both at the county and national levels, all potato-producing counties need to develop their own County Potato Strategy (CPS). This will enhance coordination, with enforcement managed at the county level.



Stakeholders during the review meeting

[Click here to explore more on Meru County Potato Strategy](#)

CONTROLLING BACTERIA WILT IN KENYA

Kenyan potato belts are typically cool, high-elevation regions (e.g. Nakuru, Meru, Nyeri, Marakwet) with ample rain. Night time temperatures are low enough to favor potato tuber bulking – for example, Marakwet’s “very cold” climate is ideal for potatoes. However, *R. solanacearum* thrives in warm, moist soils and poorly drained fields. Infections rapidly spread during rainy seasons or irrigation if waterlogging occurs. The pathogen can survive deep in soil (even >1m depth) and on plant debris. Water-saturated soil and heavy run-off favor spread (bacteria wash into drains or onto adjacent fields). Thus, well-drained fields and avoidance of waterlogging are critical.



Potato crops affected by bacterial wilt |Courtesy of African Farm Resource Centre



Potatoes affected by bacterial wilt |Photo Courtesy CIP

[Click here to explore more on Controlling Bacterial Wilt in Kenya](#)

THE POWER OF THE TUBER

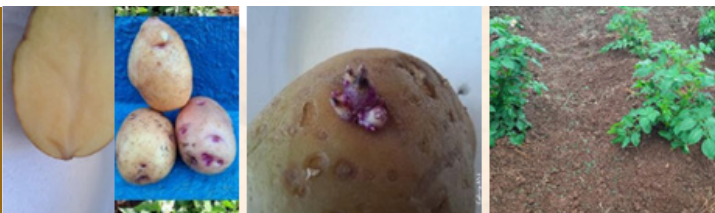
Potatoes are often considered a super crop in Kenya due to their immense economic, nutritional, and agricultural value. At the heart of this status lies the potato tuber — a silent powerhouse whose full potential is often hidden beneath the soil. One of its most remarkable qualities is its high yield per acre; under ideal conditions, a single hectare can produce 20 to 30 tons of potatoes, far outpacing crops like maize. This efficiency makes it an ideal crop for smallholder farmers, over 800,000 of whom depend on potatoes as a major source of cash income. With a short growth cycle of just 3 to 4 months, the crop allows for multiple harvests per year, ensuring steady earnings. Potatoes also serve as Kenya’s second most important staple after maize, widely consumed in various forms such as chips, stews, mashed dishes, and crisps across both rural and urban communities.



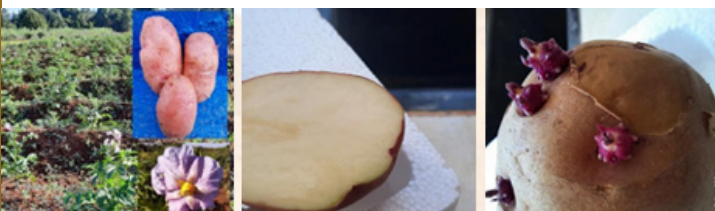
[Click here to explore More on the power of the tuber](#)

IN THE BATTLE AGAINST BLIGHT AND BACTERIAL WILT, RESILIENCE IS THE NEW YIELD.

As climate change intensifies and diseases like late blight and bacterial wilt continue to threaten potato farming in Kenya, farmers need more than just high yields—they need resilient crops. The University of Eldoret's ELDO IPI and ELDO FANAKA deliver both. With strong yields and moderate resistance to these major diseases, they help reduce reliance on costly chemicals and support more sustainable farming.



ELDO IPI: Balanced Growth with Disease Defense



ELDO FANAKA: High-Yield Meets Hardiness

Late blight, caused by *Phytophthora infestans*, can wipe out entire fields in cool, wet conditions. Bacterial wilt, caused by *Ralstonia solanacearum*, has no effective chemical cure. Both drive up production costs and reduce harvest quality. For smallholder farmers, disease-resistant varieties like ELDO IPI and FANAKA offer a practical, eco-friendly solution—built to thrive where others fail.

Released in 2023, ELDO IPI is a fast-maturing (3 months) variety suitable for both table use and chips processing. It thrives in altitudes between 2,100 to 2,700 meters above sea level, and performs well in regions such as Marakwet, Laikipia, and Uasin Gishu Counties. While it boasts a high yield potential of over 45 tons per hectare, its moderate resistance to late blight and bacterial wilt is its standout trait.

This moderate resistance means that the plant can tolerate disease pressure better than susceptible varieties, reducing the frequency and quantity of fungicide and bactericide use. For farmers in highland areas where these diseases are endemic, this translates into lower input costs, reduced crop loss, and more stable incomes.

ELDO FANAKA, also released in 2023, offers even greater yield potential—over 50 tons per hectare—and is suitable for slightly higher altitudes (2,300 to 3,000 masl). Like ELDO IPI, it is designed for both table and chips markets, but what truly distinguishes it is its resistance to blight and moderate resistance to bacterial wilt.

This variety's stronger disease resistance profile makes it especially valuable in wetter zones where late blight thrives. With a maturity period of 3.5 months and a dormancy period of over two months, ELDO FANAKA provides both productivity and post-harvest advantages.

Moderate resistance doesn't mean complete immunity, but it offers a critical buffer against disease outbreaks, especially in seasons with high disease pressure. These varieties give farmers more flexibility, allowing them to time their spraying strategically, minimize chemical use, and reduce environmental impact.

[Click here to explore more on ELDO IPI and ELDO FANAKA Varieties](#)

MANAGING PESTICIDE RESISTANCE IN POTATO PRODUCTION

Potato production faces various pest and disease challenges, leading farmers to rely heavily on pesticides. However, continuous and unplanned pesticide use often results in pesticide resistance, where pests and pathogens adapt, making control measures ineffective. Managing pesticide resistance is essential for sustainable potato production and farmer profitability.

Resistance develops when the same pesticide or mode of action is used repeatedly, allowing resistant individuals in the pest or pathogen population to survive and reproduce. In potatoes, common challenges include resistance in late blight (*Phytophthora infestans*) against fungicides, and insect pests like aphids and potato tuber moth developing resistance to insecticides. If unmanaged, resistance leads to increased production costs, crop losses, and environmental harm due to overuse of chemicals.



A photo of potato crop infested by late blight and early blight, in laikipia County taken during a farmer's field day.

[Click here to explore more on Managing Pesticide Resistance in Potato Production](#)

FROM SEED TO SUCCESS: STRENGTHENING POTATO FARMING THROUGH CERTIFICATION

A robust quality assurance system for seed certification is essential to guarantee a consistent supply of high-quality seed. In Kenya, potato farming serves as a critical source of food, income, and employment for thousands of smallholder farmers. However, low yields and frequent crop failures are often attributed to the use of uncertified or poor-quality seed. To address this, the Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS) plays a pivotal role in transforming the potato industry through a well-structured seed potato certification process. This process ensures the production of high-quality seed, maintains varietal purity, and enhances overall productivity. As part of its mandate to uphold seed quality standards, KEPHIS has trained private seed inspectors from the National Potato Council of Kenya (NPCK) under the Kenya Sustainable Potato Initiative, a project funded by AGRA.



KENYA PLANT HEALTH INSPECTORATE SERVICE (KEPHIS)

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FORM SR 1 (r. 6/20) APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION AS A SEED MERCHANT

To: The Managing Director
Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service
P.O. Box 49592-00100
Nairobi

I/We hereby apply to be registered as a seed merchant under the Name

Postal Address

E-mail address

Telephone Number

[Click here to explore more on Strengthening Potato Farming Through Certification](#)

ROOTED APICAL CUTTINGS (RAC): REVOLUTIONIZING SEED PRODUCTION AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY 26TH JULY 2025

In recent years, the ‘Rooted Apical Cutting (RAC)’ technology has emerged as a game-changing innovation in the seed production landscape—particularly in vegetatively propagated crops like potatoes. At the intersection of biotechnology and sustainable agriculture, RAC is not only increasing the availability of quality planting materials but also redefining the economics of crop production for smallholder farmers across Africa and beyond.

What is RAC?

Rooted Apical Cuttings are produced from tissue culture-derived mother plants in screenhouses or greenhouses. Unlike traditional seed tubers, RACs are clonal cuttings, each genetically identical to the parent plant and free of viruses and other systemic pathogens. These cuttings are rooted in a sterile medium and can be transplanted directly into the field as seed starters.



AGRA, NPCK and KALRO team members at one of the RAC private producer under KSPI project in Nyandarua county.

[Click here to explore more on Rooted Apical Cuttings \(RAC\)](#)

STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF WARE POTATO TRADERS IN KENYA’S VALUE CHAIN

Ware potato traders play a crucial role in completing the potato value chain by linking farmers to markets, ensuring the timely movement of produce, and maintaining a steady supply to retailers, processors, and consumers. Despite their importance, many traders operate informally and face challenges such as limited access to storage facilities, a lack of structured markets, and losses, especially with poor sorting and grading.

To enhance their impact, ware potato traders need to organize themselves into associations or cooperatives. This collective voice would enable them to lobby effectively for investments in essential infrastructure such as cold storage, grading sheds, and improved market spaces. It would also position them to advocate for better policies and stronger market linkages, ultimately expanding the market base for ware potatoes both locally and regionally.



Some of the packaging methods for the different markets.

[Click here to explore more on Strengthening the role of Ware Potato Traders](#)