

A stand of *Eucalyptus grandis* that Mr Burer has used wisely to occupy a seasonally water logged area on his land. (Photo: BGF)

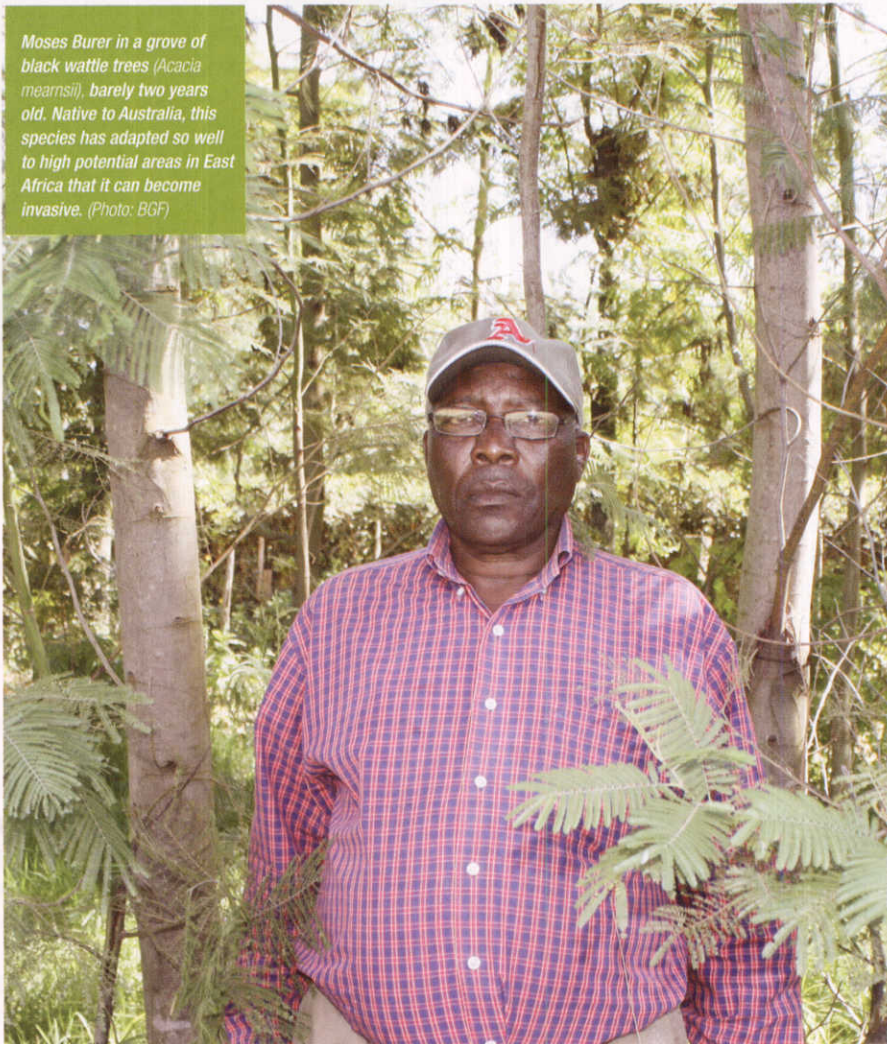


Better than money in the bank

Trees offer a viable retirement plan, as Moses Burer, a tree-grower in Uasin Gishu, can testify

By Jan Vandenabeele and Joshua Cheboiwo

Moses Burer in a grove of black wattle trees (*Acacia mearnsii*), barely two years old. Native to Australia, this species has adapted so well to high potential areas in East Africa that it can become invasive. (Photo: BGF)

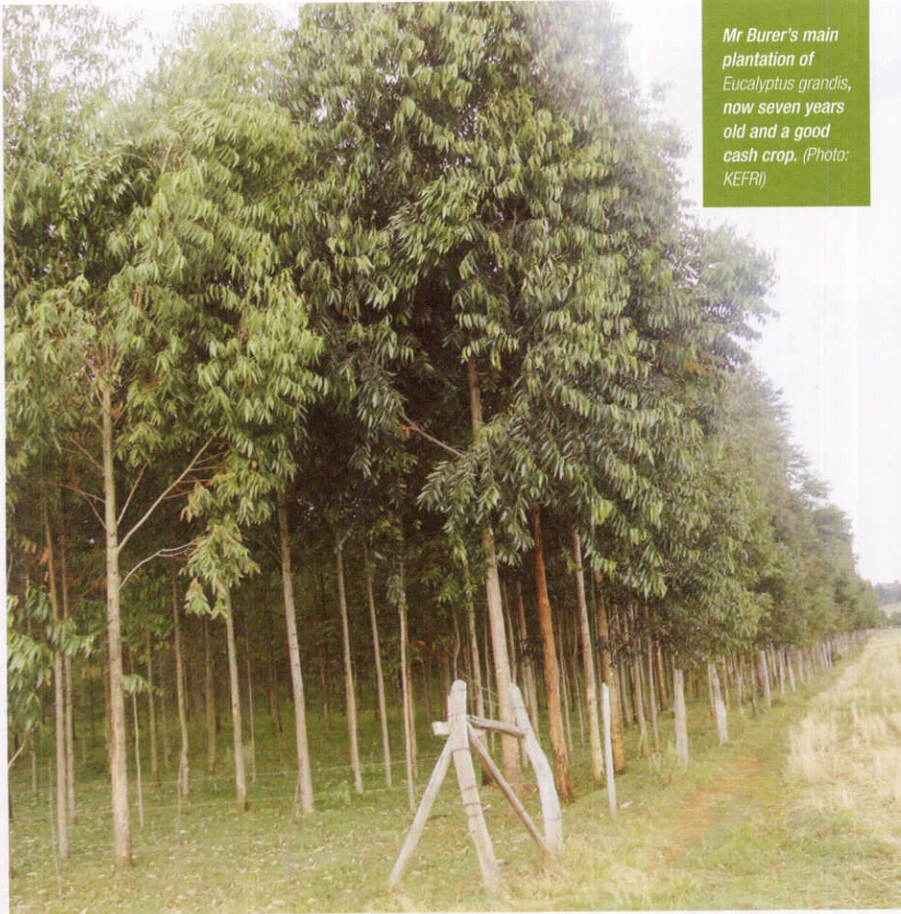


Moses Burer is a farmer in the Chepkanga area of Uasin Gishu, close to Eldoret town. Kenyan readers of course know this, but let us mention it for the benefit of others - Eldoret is in Kenya's Rift Valley Province, and is considered one of the bread baskets of the country. Altitude is about 2100 – 2200 metres above sea level (masl) and rainfall, at over 1100mm per year, is good. Mean annual temperature is 16.6°Celsius. Soils are rather heavy, with a clayish texture. Land prices are high, at Ksh 1 million per acre close to town, and down to Ksh 300,000 per acre further away.

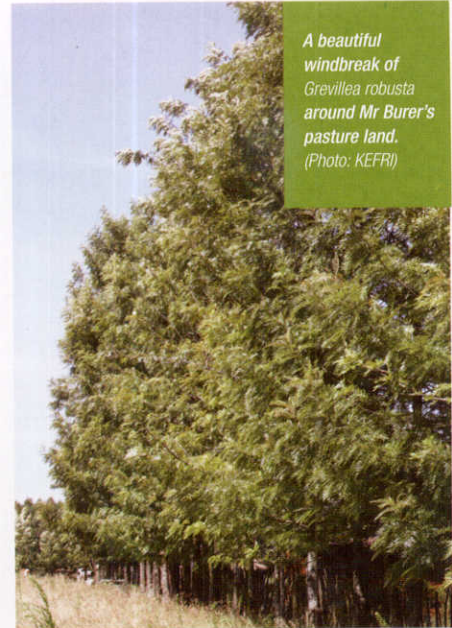
Mr Burer is retired from formal employment, but he has put his land to really good use. In total, he owns 40.8 ha (102 acres), divided over several plots. One of these plots, of 5.2 ha (12.8 acres), contains his homestead and some pasture land.

Typically, farmers grow maize and wheat in this area. But on his homestead plot, Mr Burer has wisely combined livestock-keeping with tree-planting, through dividing and surrounding his land with windbreaks and woodlots, of different species. A small piece of land has been ploughed recently for growing other crops.

Since 1995, Mr Burer estimates he has planted some 3,000 tree seedlings of *Eucalyptus grandis*, *Acacia mearnsii* (black wattle) and *Grevillea robusta* on the homestead plot. He has really grasped the business aspect of tree



Mr Burer's main plantation of *Eucalyptus grandis*, now seven years old and a good cash crop. (Photo: KEFRI)



A beautiful windbreak of *Grevillea robusta* around Mr Burer's pasture land. (Photo: KEFRI)

growing, after initial contacts with the Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI). The tree growth on his farm is excellent, and tree products like different sizes of sticks (for flower farms), poles (for construction and power transmission), timber, fuel wood and charcoal have a ready and nearby market.

Black wattle is thriving, and does not even need planting. Naturally regenerated trees are ready for exploitation after barely four years, producing sticks, construction-sized poles and fuel wood.

Mr Burer and other tree farmers in the area have a ready market in industries like Rivatex, Rupa and CPC, which all use fuel wood, and Tipsy, which treats poles.

A small landmark decision for Mr Burer was his purchase, in 2004, of a kilogram of *E. grandis* seeds, from KEFRI, to raise seedlings in his own

nursery. He used the seedlings to plant 8 hectares on one of his plots, and sold the balance to farmers in 2005.

In fact, Mr Burer has become an extension agent in his own right. Neighbours and other farmers visit his property to inquire about commercial tree planting and markets. Many people in the area have established commercial tree plots after seeing Mr Burer's success.

In 2009, Mr Burer purchased cypress and pine seeds, planting 1ha of *Cupressus lusitanica*, although he lost the pine seedlings through workers' negligence.

For Mr Burer, the key to successful tree growing was his contact with KEFRI. He bought good quality seeds from KEFRI's Londiani Forest Research Centre and participated in a eucalyptus growers workshop organised by KEFRI in Eldoret in May 2010.

An overview of Mr Burer's income from trees is as follows:

Year	Activity	Income (Ksh)
2005	Sale of 3,000 eucalypt seedlings to neighbours @Ksh 10 each	30,000
2009	Sale of wattle poles and wood to constructors	130,000
2010	Sale of timber of 80 cypress trees	50,000
2010	Use of the timber of the same trees for own needs, hence saving on purchase	120,000
2015 and after	Expected sale of 10,000 eucalypt trees over a three-year period	3,000,000/year
Yearly	Charcoal sales	
Yearly	His livestock benefits from shade and protection provided by the windbreaks	
Yearly	Sales of poles and minor products from regular maintenance of his woodlots and windbreaks	

In fact, Mr Burer is a friend of the Centre's director, Dr Joshua Cheboiwo, and as such gets plenty of good advice whenever he needs it. Most likely, this is reciprocated and KEFRI also learns something from the practical experience of Mr Burer.

To this end, Mr Burer was invited to the yearly Centre Research Advisory Committee (CRAC) meeting in 2009. This is one of the forums created by KEFRI to involve farmers in KEFRI's research. At these forums, the research body listens to the views of farmers and incorporates these in research work.

Mr Burer prepares his land by tractor ploughing and harrowing, which takes care of initial competition and ensures good seedling survival and establishment.

Spacing in his eucalypt plantation is rather narrow, at 2x2m, but it works because of the favourable natural conditions. During the first year, he intercroops the trees with maize, for maximum cost recovery. However, in subsequent years, he grows the trees on their own, to eliminate competition.

Income from poles for transmission can, in fact, beat income from agricultural crops. And once properly established, the initial, big investment is over and tree crops mature steadily, requiring less care.

Trees are in fact an excellent investment for old age and should be considered a pension fund. Only they are better, a surer value than money in the bank or in the stock market.

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