Hello, I’m Marina Santee. And I’m Ruby Jones. Welcome to Spotlight. This programme uses a special English method of broadcasting. It is easier for people to understand, no matter where in the world they live. ‘I read of climate change in the newspapers. But I can feel its effects on myself and my crops. The sun seems hotter. The temperature is higher. And the wind is drier. I hear about the greenhouse effect but I do not understand it. But the results are less water in the Amazon, floods in parts of northeast Brazil and more whirlwinds.’ Climate change is an issue that everyone seems to be talking about - not just farmers! In fact, people now consider it a health concern! World Health Day is on April the seventh every year. For 2008, the central idea is ‘Climate Change.’ In today’s Spotlight we tell how good farming methods can help feed people well and help protect the environment. Francisco Geraldo Neto is a farmer in Caicara village, northeast Brazil. He and his family grow fruit trees, vegetables, cereal and traditional plants. In the beginning, it was difficult. Slash and burn methods had damaged their soils. Farmers have been using the slash and burn method for centuries. They use it to clear forests or woods. It involves cutting, or slashing, down the trees. Farmers then burn the remains. They use the ash to enrich the soil. And they use the clear land for their farms. But after a few years the soil becomes poorer. Crops decrease, and unwanted plants increase. When this happens, farmers leave the fields to recover. These ‘fallow fields’ may take many years to recover naturally. During that time, the farmers move to new lands. They begin the slash and burn process again. In the long term, slashing and burning uses more land and it can damage the soil. There are advantages and disadvantages with the slash and burn method. Environmentalists are concerned about the possible long term damage to the land and the environment. However, finding other methods is not always simple, or possible. Here is a story that tells how new methods helped one farmer. Hanna Mupondu looks around. It is a long time since she has visited her home village, in South Africa. She is excited! She walks down the dusty path. She looks around at all the beautiful painted houses and sighs. She wishes that people followed this tradition where she lived! She loves all the brightly coloured artwork! Hanna walks up to her aunty’s house. The older woman opens the door and smiles! ‘Hanna, dear. It is so nice to see you! Come in and have some tea. Now tell me, how are you and the family?’ Hanna forces a smile. The past year has been difficult for them. Their farming business is not doing so well. She tells her aunty: ‘Our corn harvest this year was bad! The soil is tired! My husband says it is time to change fields - to slash and burn. I worry that the fallow field will not be productive’. The aunty looks at the young woman. She is concerned. She can see lines of worry across Hanna’s head. She says; ‘I am sorry to hear that you have troubles. But maybe I can help you. Come outside. I want to show you something.’ Hanna walks outside and looks around. She sees beautiful sunflowers everywhere! She asks why they are there. She thought sunflowers were just weeds - unwanted plants. Her aunty explains: ‘We are growing these wild sunflowers in our fallow field. Five years ago we felt hopeless. Our harvests were poor. The soil was terrible, just like yours. There was too much acid in the soil after slashing and burning. But then, your cousin, Kofi, noticed something. He saw that crops grew better in particular parts of the field. It was where there were wild sunflowers before we began farming it. The next growing season, we decided to experiment. Kofi buried old plants and leaves into a large part of the field. And - our harvest produce was much better from that part of the field!! No more slash and burn for us!’ Hanna is surprised! Everybody used the slash and burn method. She did not know there was another way! Her aunty explains more; ‘We no longer let grass grow and then burn it. Instead, we plant particular trees and shrubs in our fallow field - like this wild sunflower. These woody plants put goodness back in the soil. Come close; see we are growing more than one kind of plant!’ Hanna looks around at all the different plants growing. But, it seems like a lot of work, working in the fallow field and the current field, planting new plants, waiting for them to grow. Surely it was easier to just let grass grow - and then burn it. Her aunty admits that it was not easy at first: ‘It is true we cannot grow crops in the fields for a few years. But the plants in the fallow field give us green manure. We cut them back and use their leaves to feed the field we are farming now. And our animals can eat the sunflower leaves. Another tree produces fruit. You should tell your husband about fallowing with trees and plants’. Hanna is not sure. Anyway, they do not have any sunflower seeds. But her aunty has thought of that. She gives Hanna some cuttings! New plants will grow from these cuttings. Hanna is not sure about the whole idea. But she takes the cuttings anyway. It is kind of her aunty to try and help. Two years later, Hanna writes to her aunty: ‘Dear Aunty, I hope you are well. Thank you for giving us the wild sunflower cuttings. My husband was not sure at first. But I found some sunflowers growing wild. I offered to work extra hard in our field. We used the wild sunflowers as green manure before planting our corn crop. And our produce improved a lot! ‘I wanted to say thank you - and spread this message. So I have painted our house with yellow sunflowers! The children helped me. And they learned about our old tradition. Even my husband likes it! I feel connected to my home village - and the wisdom of sharing farming ideas!’ The writer and producer of today’s programme was Marina Santee. The voices you heard were from the United Kingdom and the United States. Hanna’s story was supplied by Farm Radio and adapted for this programme. Computer users can find our programmes on our website at http://www.radio.english.net. This programme is called; ‘World Health Day: Farming Methods.’ If you have comments or questions about our Spotlight programmes write to us. Our e-mail address is radio @ english . net. Thank you for joining us in today’s Spotlight programme. Until next time. Goodbye.