It is one thing to be going about your business doing what you know to do best with a passion and quite another thing to be instantly thrust into the limelight, literally sharing the stage with the President of the Republic of Kenya!

That was the recent experience of three key Farm Concern International (FCI) staffs at the Nyeri Agricultural Show at the Kabiruini Showground.

Mr Gerald Watoto, FCI’s Markets and Trade Manager Kieni West, Mr Timothy Mburu, a Commercial Village Facilitator (CVF) from Kamburaini Location in Naru Moro District and Mr Ngatia Waithaka, CVF of Mukima Commercial Producer Group (CPG) say they were greatly honoured to receive President Mwai Kibaki’s keen attention and they endeavoured to explain to the Head of State how Farm Concern International is impacting the lives of smallholder farmers in Kenya.

As President Kibaki marvelled at the variety of traditional vegetables on display he also engaged Mr Mburu in an insightful conversation into his knowledge on traditional African vegetables and tree nurseries.

Pointing to the FCI exhibition tent, the President wanted to know more about FCI as an institution, to which Mr Ritho, who is the Marketing Manager of Taifa Sacco, a micro-finance credit institution and FCI partner, explained FCI’s role as a market development agency for smallholder farmers and the partnership between the two organisations. Farm Concern International is an Africa-wide market development trust, engaged in developing and implementing pro-poor business models, marketing programmes and strategic alliances to enhance trade efficiency and economic growth among poor smallholder farming communities.

It was then Mr Waithaka’s turn to explain to the President the critical role that value addition plays within the onion value chain in sustaining domestic horticulture when Mr Kibaki asked him in perfect Kiswahili “Value addition inasaidia nini kwa soko? (How does value addition impact the market?).
Mr Waithaka was quick on the mark to answer that value addition in the onion value chain begins with good hybrid seeds, good agronomic practice including the curing technique as a pre-harvest procedure, proper drying and storage to fetch premium prices from the market.

The President responded with a nod and a remark to the FCI farmer: “Kazi yako ni nzuri mzee, naishukuru.” (Excellent job, sir I do appreciate your talking to me).

In his speech at the event, President Kibaki said he was encouraged by the wide range of crop and livestock products exhibited at the show which demonstrated the massive potential for agribusiness in Central Kenya region.

Trade in horticultural products in Central Kenya region earned small scale farmers 14.5 billion shillings in the previous season compared to 10 billion shillings five years ago. The President said the government would construct an additional six fresh produce markets in the region to further promote horticultural production. “These fresh produce markets will go a long way in meeting the need for clean environment for fresh horticultural products,” he added.

He added that there was need to make the sector more gainful and attractive to the youth. “We can achieve this goal by moving up the value chain. I, therefore, urge farmers and business people to diversify into value addition through processing of agricultural products. This will enable us to increase earnings and generate employment opportunities,” he said.

He also called for a more intensive sensitization of the youth on the lucrative opportunities available in the agricultural sector, with an assurance to farmers and the youth in particular that the Government will continue to step up measures to ensure farming becomes a lucrative commercial activity.

Among the measures earmarked are the development of road infrastructure and provision of affordable electric power. A total of 3,882 public facilities in Central Kenya are targeted for electrification by 2010. Of these, 3,286 or 85 percent of these facilities, among them 1,818 trading centers, have been connected to the national grid.

Agriculture is earmarked as one of the key pillars for achieving Kenya’s industrialisation under the Vision 2030 economic blueprint. It has been identified as the main productive sector that will deliver Kenya’s economic transformation.