Lately, Mrs Nyirakanyange Josephine isn’t complaining. The mother of five and member of Twiyubake Commercial Producer Group within Karambi Commercial Village is using the training from Farm Concern International to grade her Irish potato harvest and win a good market. So far she has sold 10 sacks of mixed potatoes, weighing in at 1,450 kg at FRw 90 per Kg making resulting in a total of FRw 130,500 (US $ 217.5). She also sold ten sacks of big potatoes weighing in at 1,400 kgs worth FRw 147,000 (US$ 245).

As a direct result of the improved incomes from her sales, Nyirakanyange has been able to save FRw 17,000 (US$ 28.3) with her Commercial Producer Group towards medical insurance for herself and her children.

However, like most potato farmers in Kazi, Susa and Karambi, Nyirakanyange is challenged by the lack of adequate storage facilities for her potatoes. The practice in the area is to bag the commodity and place it on the verandah (patio) of their homes.

At Kamakara Commercial village, 28 year-old Mr Habimana Emmanuel is beaming with pride at his recent achievements. Recently, he was able to make better sales by at least FRw 20 (US$ 0.03) per kg. Although it does not look like much to an outsider, for Habimana it means a lot. He has just taken up health insurance for himself and he also plans to extend his Irish plot.

Before he met Farm Concern International’s field staff, he suffered much loss consistently but this is turning around now that he has been taught to ensure his crop reaches maturity to be able to withstand the long distances to markets and transit time before it changes hands again to various consumers.

In the meantime, both farmers and traders are reaping the obvious advantages of improved relationships amongst themselves, creating good rapport and creating basic standards for grading, quality and value. Pricing is more transparent and both buyers and sellers are better able to plan their businesses and consider investments for future growth.

Farmers are reporting break-even for their efforts and traders claim that their risks are greatly reduced because farmers can assure them of a secure volume and quality. At the same time farmers have been quick to learn the advantages of identifying their markets long before they begin production and they have warmed up to the prospects of diversifying their markets and fetching better prices.

By negotiating collectively through their collection centers, farmers are able to secure better prices and more assured outlets for their produce. They are taking advantage of the economies of scale that come with acting collectively, thus greatly reducing costs for inputs and labour for instance. They are better organized, and involved in developing effective communication channels to tackle joint challenges. They also plan together as a group and most empowering of all, farmers have realized that they have the capacity to set up viable businesses.