

A White Kenya farmer devises an ingenious formula which may have important uses for South Africa.

Michael Low does a deal

By Bremer Hofmeyr

LAND IS THE KEY TO KENYA. It was at the heart of the Mau Mau struggle. It is the basis of the nation's economy.

The Minister of Finance has given figures showing that half of Kenya's population is under 16 years of age. The population is expected to grow from 7,000,000 to 17-million in 25 years. And the cry will continue "Give us land."

After Independence the Government bought up a million acres of European farmland, and subdivided it into small holdings for Africans. It was a crash programme with its attendant difficulties. Sometimes it worked, sometimes not, and many Africans drifted back to the towns.

Many new farmers made the land a means of subsistence. But Kenya's national economy depends on exporting farm products, and the exports from these million acres dwindled. How to give land to a large number of people and still sustain the national economy? That is Kenya's problem.

Two months ago I was on a Kenya farm that points the way.

Michael Low farmed 1,092 acres at Sabatia, not large as Kenya farms go. At 6,300 feet altitude he gets 43 inches of rain a year.

He pondered the question of skilled African farmers for Kenya, and his mind went to the men who had worked for him for up to 25 years. They knew the land and how to farm it.

He conferred with them and together they marked off 425 acres and divided it into nine farms of 30 to 70 acres. He sold this to the Government on condition that the Government sell it back to his best farm workers on a 30-year loan. The men became independent farmers.

Water was piped to each of the nine farms. With money raised through the sale of the

land Low fenced and developed his own farm to produce more.

The maize production of the original 1,092 acres—now 10 farms—has doubled. Each farmer also milks his own cows and his coffee trees are rich with berries.

The Africans have chosen to continue working part-time for Low to ensure a constant income. But they themselves employ unskilled labour on their own farms. So 30 per cent. more men are employed on the same land—an important fact with Kenya's unemployment problem.

The African farmers and Low have formed a marketing and purchasing co-operative. The co-op owns machinery which individual farmers hire. So despite lack of capital the small farms are mechanized. Thus far no farmer has defaulted on his annual loan repayment to the government.

Various ghosts have been laid to rest. Europeans in Kenya have believed that if Africans owned the land standards must go down. I went over the African farms. The standards are high. If anyone begins to get slack, it is his fellow-Africans who go after him hammer and tongs.

What impressed me most was the mutual courtesy and respect in which each man held the others.

Stock theft is a Kenya headache and Low lives in a exposed position on the edge of dense thorn-covered African reserve. But only once since his co-operative experiment began has he lost a cow. He mentioned the loss to the African farmers and said no more about it. They disappeared into the bush and two days later his beast was back.