Improve Your Maize Harvests: Grow Certified Seed of Open-Pollinated Varieties
Young man, I've been watching your fields for some time. Your maize is growing well. What's your secret?

Good morning, Sekuru. I'm happy you like my maize. I've been growing an improved, open-pollinated maize variety that's drought tolerant and well adapted. With this OPV I can plant on time, because I can recycle my own seed.
Recycled seed? When I tried that, my maize yields went down.

With hybrids, Sekuru, that's true. Your yields will go down, if you recycle the seed.
So how are OPVs different, Mzuzukuru?

Well, you can recycle them for one or two seasons, before you need to buy certified seed again.
With OPVs you can maintain the purity of your own seed, if you manage your crop carefully. You see, Sekuru, in maize the male flower is at the top of the plant and female flower, or silks, are in the middle.

Male flower, the tassel, produces the pollen

Female flower, the ear, produces the seed
Hmmm. But there's another thing: when I recycled my seed, besides losing yield, I had tall and short plants in my field. Even my grain was mixed. What can I do to avoid this mixing and have a uniform field, Mzuzukuru?

The pollen from the male flower can fall on silks of the same plant or be blown by the wind to silks on other plants. In this way, traits from different maize varieties can mix, when varieties are grown next to each other.
First, you choose an OPV that is recommended for your area and obtain certified seed from a reliable dealer.
And the further away your new OPV is from other maize varieties, the less pollen from other varieties will mix with it. Certified maize seed, for example, is produced from fields that are 200 to 300 meters away from other maize, to prevent cross-pollination.
Then, you should inspect your field before flowering and remove any plants that look different from the others. This will keep your seed pure.
When you harvest, take the ears for seed from the center of the field. That's where there's the least chance of pollen from other fields fertilizing your seed.
Finally, keep your seed separate from other grain and protect it from storage pests.
Certified seed germinates well and is free of seed-borne diseases. It’s produced carefully to avoid contamination. It’s grown harvested, stored, and sold under set standards. The government and seed services inspect and approve it. So it’s a pure variety, not a mixture.

Why start with certified seed?
So!! You say that certified seed is high quality seed. Can farmers like me produce it and sell it?

Yes, you can. But first you need to register with the government and the seed services as a SEED GROWER, to be able to sell seed outside the community or to a seed company.
You also need to meet certain standards set by seed services for seed growers. This is to ensure the quality of all certified seed available to farmers. If you're interested, seed services and seed houses can give you more details.
Improved OPVs are available on the market. They are sold as certified open-pollinated maize seed. Just ask at your local shop. Your extension worker can tell you which OPV is the suited to your area.

I almost forgot, Mzuzukuru: Where can I get seed of these OPVs?
Should I always grow OPVs? What about hybrid maize?

Grow OPVs in your poorer fields where you expect to harvest less than 15 bags per acre. Buy fresh hybrid seed and sow it in fields where you expect good yields.
Thanks for your advice!

And remember: both OPVs and hybrids do better if you apply some manure or fertilizer.

Thanks for your advice!