Editor’s view: Introducing the June, 2018 CA Alert

Conservation Agriculture is a concept that combines profitable agricultural production with environmental conservation and sustainability. It is characterized by three interlinked principles of continuous minimum mechanical soil disturbance, permanent organic soil cover and diversification of crop species grown in sequences or associations. It is used in most of the world's high-performing food production systems to strengthen soil structure and fertility, improve water retention and bring farmers savings in cost and labour for comparable yields.

During the First Africa Congress on Conservation Agriculture (1ACCA) held in Lusaka, Zambia in March 2014, the need for an unprecedented “Africanized Brown” Revolution focused on sustainable agricultural intensification based on Conservation Agriculture is highly necessary to increase food production, productivity and cope with the vagaries of climate. The 1ACCA gave birth to the Lusaka Declaration and Vision 25 x 25 (to have 25 million farm households practicing conservation agriculture by 2025), which was subsequently adopted by the AU Heads of State via the Malabo Declaration, and the climate smart agriculture Vision 25 x 25.

As it has turns out, promoting CA in sub-Saharan Africa implies promoting smallholder farming, since they manage one to 10 hectares and nearly 80% of the farmland. For Africa, there is therefore a very thin line, between the challenges to adoption of CA compared to the smallholder farming challenges. With about 1.5 million hectares under CA in the last 20 years, Africa has done well. Informed by the tremendous and transformative successes of CA practicing farmers in comparable neighbourhoods and agroecology, the adoption levels are far from what is possible and the lost opportunity should not be tolerated.

Besides the farm size, the marked differences between smallholder and large-scale farming is in the extent of commercialization and the level of mechanization being applied; it being predominantly rudimentary hand tools and animal traction based systems for the smallholders. There exists very successful cases and models of smallholder CA farming using improved hand tools and animal traction systems, as well as the large-scale farmers in Africa. However, there is a glaring missing-middle, whereby less than 5% of the area under CA in Africa in by the medium scale farmers, owning/using a tractor and managing 25-100 hectares.

Propelled by declining rural labour force, increasing feminization of agriculture, ageing farming population, low interest of youths in agriculture, increasing energy costs, declining farm incomes, climate change and high levels of post-harvest losses; a new trend is emerging in the adaptation and promotion of sustainable mechanized Conservation Agriculture in Africa. Supported by Agenda 2063 (The Africa We Want) to banish the hand hoe by 2025, and the framework for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization in Africa across Agri-food Chains, a new unstoppable wave to modernise Africa’s agriculture using science, technology, innovation and indigenous knowledge is on the rise.

On the production side, emerging sustainable CA mechanization technologies include no-till hand tools such as Jab planters and Li seeders as well as animal drawn implements.

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(subsoilers, rippers, no-till seeders and chemical sprayers). Others are two-wheel tractor and the larger four-wheel tractor subsoilers, rippers, sprayers, no-till seeders, pumps and harvesting equipment.

The Second African Congress on Conservation Agriculture (2ACCA) to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 9 to 12 October 2018 under the theme ”Making Climate-Smart Agriculture Real in Africa with Conservation Agriculture: Supporting the Malabo Declaration and Agenda 2063”, will bring together expert knowledge, information, and insights from practitioners from across different sectors and interests groups from the public, private and civil sectors under one roof to discuss and strategically agree on scaling-up CA as an integral part of the growing food and agriculture systems in Africa. The event will appraise progress made so far on 1ACCA resolutions and targets and where appropriate propose requisite corrective measures necessary for the attainment of the 10 points Lusaka Declaration resolutions.

Preparations for this event are in full gear under the able leadership of the International Steering Committee. The event is expected to be attended by 600 participants – comprised of farmers, policy makers, researchers, investors and industry players - from Africa and across the Globe. It is an opportunity for YOU too to be heard and contribute to making climate smart agriculture real in Africa.

In this June 2018 issue, we highlight some of the farmers’ success stories as regard to CA from different African countries as testimony of the envisioned benefits being accrued in different regions. It has proven to be transformational and life changing experience for the few, but exponentially increasing farmers who have fully adopted CA, considering the impact reports and case studies from the different parts of the continent.

This issue also gives priority to the second Africa Congress on Conservation Agriculture (2ACCA). The event is being organized by ACT in collaboration with the Government of South Africa, African Union Commission, the NEPAD Agency, Regional Economic Communities, International NGOs, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), European Union (EU), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN and various bilateral and multilateral partners.

ACT continues to appreciate and encourages all interested players and stakeholders to prioritize and plan to participate in the 2ACCA. Special invitation is extended to farmers and farmer organisations as well as practitioners in CA related enterprises, e.g. CA machinery suppliers. The 2ACCA organizers recognize the critical roles of farmers in the promotion, adaptation and adoption of CA based technologies and systems. Consequently, any and all contributions from other 2ACCA stakeholders, - be it on policy, research, learning, skills development, awareness creation – must thus be aligned to and address the challenges farmers face in realizing their full CA adoption vision. Special invitation is also extended to the CA value chain enterprises and agribusinesses.

Your participation in the 2ACCA will be highly regarded in shaping the promotion and adoption of Conservation Agriculture in Africa. For registration and more information about the 2ACCA, go to the congress website www.africacacongress.org or write to us at info@africacacongress.org

ACT acknowledges the various sources, authors, reporters, organizations and practitioners whose articles appear in this June 2018 issue, their geo-diversity is a clear testimony of the enthusiasm and interest from various organizations, countries, researchers and scientists in Africa towards Conservation Agriculture.

We encourage you to share your CA views and articles capturing the status and extent of adaptation and adoption of CA in any Country in Africa or beyond for sharing with others. Please submit articles, links or views to kim@act-africa.org. Use the #conservationagriculture, #africamechanize to share links on articles, journals, news on CA and tag us on twitter @ACTillage.

Apologies for any cross posting of some articles.
Facilitating the integration of crop-livestock and conservation

A modern farming town in northern Tunisia, Siliana is one of the first places in this progressive North African country of 11 million people to adopt Conservation Agriculture and its use in crop-livestock systems. At a gathering of the town’s professional farmers’ association, the members were eager to discuss successes and challenges. The SMSA, as the association is named, started with three farmers working on Conservation Agriculture during the first phase of the IFAD-funded project for “Crop-Livestock System and Conservation Agriculture (CLCA).” They minimized the disturbance of the soil, kept crop residues to maintain soil cover, and rotated crops. Often referred to as the three pillars of Conservation Agriculture, the simultaneous implementation of these practices helps mitigate soil nutrient depletion and land degradation, while increasing yields. It brings optimal production at the best cost.

Now with some 50 members, the SMSA has brought together the town’s farmers to implement Conservation Agriculture in their semi-arid climate and mixed-farming systems. The association also functions as a link to national and international agricultural organizations. “Since adopting Conservation Agriculture, we have saved 30% in fuel and labour,” said Nabil Sahli who acts as the group’s treasurer. “And we did this without any subsidies from the government.” Sahli added proudly. After three years of Conservation Agriculture, the SMSA’s annual sales have reached 127,000 Tunisian dinar (about $50,000), a substantial sum for the district’s three villages.

Conservation Agriculture uses specialized zero-tilage seeders to plant seeds directly into undisturbed soil, along with the fertilizer. This improves the soil fertility. Less cultivation has meant less fuel used in preparing the land, and more time for farmers for other activities. It has reduced seed and fertilizer inputs through precision planting and better placement of fertilizer, cutting production costs and upping efficiency. In Tunisia, the CLCA package has contributed to increased production at a lower cost compared to conventional agriculture. Read More

The Second Africa Congress on Conservation Agriculture

The 2ACCA will host leading regional and international speakers showcasing the latest updates on sustainable agriculture and ecosystem management. The program is taking shape under the guidance of the International Congress Steering Committee made up of leading practitioners, professionals and researchers. The 2ACCA process is characterised by the following key elements:

(i) Plenary High Level Ministerial Panel discussions
(ii) Special Farmers’ Session
(iii) Special session on Reporting Progress on 1ACCA
(iv) Case Studies and special working groups (thematic parallel sessions)
(v) Self-organized meetings around key CA-related issues (side-events)

(vi) Exhibition Booths and Poster Sessions
(vii) Equipment and machinery displays
(viii) Field Visits
(ix) Awards and Gala dinner

In this issue, we present in detail what is entailed in the Case Studies and special working groups (thematic parallel sessions); the Self-organized meetings around key CA-related issues (side-events); and the Exhibition Booths and Poster Sessions. Remaining sessions will be described in detail in the July 2018 alert.

The 2ACCA farmers’ symposium is focused to highlight key issues constraining adoption of profitable CA in different agro-ecology and farming systems of the continent. Aired concerns will form the basis for subsequent presentations and discussions organized under (i) thematic paper and poster presentations; (ii) field visits to learn from and interact with Researchers; CA farmers (Organic, Smallholder and Large Scale); CA Service Providers; and Agro-Dealers.
Investors, Financial institutions, Private-Public Conservation Agriculture farmers, Farmer Organizations, include Smallholder and Large-scale expected participants to the Congress for delegates to visit this area. The 600 structured to maximize the opportunity of the Congress and the program is Exhibition area will be the focal point and their work related to CA. The these sessions will provide an opportunity for exhibitors to enjoy the warmth of personal contact in face-to-face meetings with local, regional and international visitors to the congress; promote brand loyalty and transfer knowledge via technology displays, hospitality and networking; interact with the Media and press conferences and develop a strong brand building environment via product demonstrations, seminars, conferences and sponsorship opportunities. It could also provide an ideal platform to launch new products and find sales agents or distributors in new markets among others.

Organisations can apply for a booth, where they can expose materials, photos, and posters when they are registering for the congress. To register and indicate that you require a booth, kindly visit: https://www.africacacongress.org/registration.html.

In addition, you can get more information from the Sponsors and Exhibitors prospectus at https://www.africacacongress.org/generaldownloads/prospectus-sponsors-exhibitors-2nd-acc

The CA Awards Gala Evening

Adoption of CA in Africa is partly constrained by the absence of role models, champions doing it well and benefiting from it. We have role models and very good ones too. What is missing is identifying these, recognizing their efforts and contributions, documenting and sharing their successes and challenges. The initiators of the Africa Congress on Conservation Agriculture (ACCA) takes pride in greater performance, diversity, and innovation in promotion and adoption of Conservation Agriculture in Africa. They honour and recognize outstanding individuals or organizations dedicated to promotion, adaptation and adoption of Conservation Agriculture in Africa.

To accomplish this, a highly regarded reward scheme dubbed “CA Awards” has been identified as one of the key endeavours to identify and appreciate the champions. For this year 2018, CA awards will be during the 2ACCA and specifically at Birchwood Hotel Johannesburg, South Africa on 10th October 2018.

The Awards program is designed to showcase the people, products, innovations, and organizations that represent excellence in the field of Conservation Agriculture and to the society itself. It can be awarded to any individual or identifiable group of individuals, as well as to established institutions, associations, organizations or government bodies with a formal and recognized organizational structure contributing to the overall objectives of the awards regardless of nationality, profession or location.

The search for the winners of the 2018 CA Awards will be open and nominators invited to nominate outstanding individuals or institutions/organization that have made exemplary contributions, in diverse means, contributed to the promotion, adaptation and adoption Conservation Agriculture, as well as raise awareness on the different experiences in Conservation Agriculture in Africa.

These organizers of the 2ACCA collectively strive to a Congress that will, in both content and process, be attractive and worth-the-while not just to the CA networks, but other players and interest groups/organizations that may be important for enhanced CA value chain development and adoption. Thus, the programme will have concurrent sessions that will feature case Studies and special working groups (thematic parallel sessions) majorly to help realize active participation and discussions among the delegates in order to spire not only new but also useful knowledge on CA and agriculture. These will cover a wide range of topics that fit into the focal areas of second ACCA programme. This session will have the condensed papers classified under the 5-sub-themes presented. Currently thematic condensed papers are being received and reviewed by the Scientific and Technical Committee of the 2ACCA, composed of high profile and CA experienced professionals drawn from Africa and beyond. A maximum of 70 papers will be allowed for oral presentation during these thematic exhibitions under the five sub-themes and the rest will be shared as posters. However, a Condensed papers Book will be developed by consolidating all the submitted and approved papers and made available during the 2ACCA for all delegates.

Exhibition Booths and Poster Sessions

The aim of the trade exhibit will be to expose delegates to the latest technologies, share evidence and to challenge the current thinking and practice. It is also purposed to provide room for different organisations, especially NGOs, farmer associations, private companies, publishers, and others to present themselves and their work related to CA. The Exhibition area will be the focal point of the Congress and the program is structured to maximize the opportunity for delegates to visit this area. The 600 expected participants to the Congress include Smallerholder and Large-scale farmers, Farmer Organizations, Private-Public Conservation Agriculture Investors, Financial institutions, Non-governmental organizations and Extension service providers who will be encouraged to visit the exhibitions and posters sessions. Others are Equipment Manufacturers, Other Inputs Suppliers, Researchers and the Academia, Policy makers, Development partners, National governments, Regional and International organizations.

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The winners will be unveiled at a high profile CA Gala Event at the 2ACCA. The CA Awards are designed to have a financial or in-kind grant, certificate and a trophy. Thus, the organizers of 2ACCA invites sponsors to support the different award categories based on their interest and focus. Nomination will be open on the 1st August 2018 and the evaluation process will subsequently follow. The link and nomination process will be shared in the July 2018 issue. Thus, prepare to be part of the movement by nominating a farmer, a journalist, or policy supporter champion

Self-organised meetings around key CA-related issues (side-events)

The IACCA will also be used as platform to feature some self-organised meetings around key CA-related issues as side-events. Space of 90 minutes will be provided during the programme for Side Events and those in need should share topics, expected participants and who the Convener is via email cacongress@act-africa.org.
The Namibian Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry (MAWF) is fostering the uptake of Conservation Agriculture (CA) through the implementation of a national Conservation Agriculture programme. The programme supports the NDP 5 target of 50 percent of farmers adopting Conservation Agriculture by 2022. The German Cooperation, through the “Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH” is supporting the government in this endeavour, with a focus on the northeastern regions Kavango West/East and Zambezi.

There is a need for Namibia to adopt climate-adapted practices like Conservation Agriculture. Due to climate change, temperatures will rise, evaporation will increase and rainfall will decrease.

According to latest projections, conventional agricultural practices will become more and more difficult across the country. By 2050, conventional farming might become infeasible in most parts of the country, except in the wetter north-eastern regions of Namibia (Zambezi, Kavango East).

Conservation Agriculture can be practised manually or mechanically. The manual potholing method, where a hoe is used to dig planting basins is labour intensive and therefore only suitable for small areas. There are several variations of the mechanized form of Conservation Agriculture, either animal-drawn or tractor-drawn. In Namibia, the ripper-furrowing method is quite popular, where furrows with a depth of approximately 30 cm are created that break through the compacted soil (“hard pan”). Though this method still disturbs the soil at least in the first year, it allows for water harvesting, which is important in most areas of Namibia with relatively low rainfall.

Speaking to The Southern Times, GIZ’s team leader for Adaptation of Agriculture to Climate Change, Dr Alexander Schoening, said rainfall patterns will most likely also change, and lead for example to longer dry spells during the cropping season.

“Therefore, we need to modify the way we do agriculture. Conservation agriculture has proven to reduce erosion, use water more efficiently by reducing evaporation, and to build up soil fertility due to the organic material on the soil.”

Climate variability significantly affects cropping productivity around the world, but perhaps nowhere more so than in eastern and southern African countries. Compounding this, low agricultural productivity and research capacity have historically led to chronic food insecurity.

Responding to this critical situation, ACIAR’s work over the past eight years in the region has made impressive progress on food availability and nutrition.

ACIAR supports the Sustainable Intensification of Maize-Legume Cropping Systems for Food Security in Eastern and Southern Africa (SIMLESA) program that is turning around the livelihoods of farmers faced with the stress of poor seasons. Originally launched in 2010 and now in its second phase, the $18.6 million (AUD) ACIAR funded program aims to sustainably increase productivity of selected maize-based smallholder farming systems in each target country by 30% by 2023, reaching at least 650,000 farming households.

The intensification and stabilisation of rainfed maize-legume cropping systems offer considerable promise for boosting productivity, improving food and nutrition security and helping reverse the decline in soil fertility.

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In a variable climate, good science pays

- Increased productivity of maize-based smallholder farming systems has seen yields up to four times more than conventional farming methods.
- Over 235,000 small farming households have benefited from adopting Conservation Agriculture methods.
- Farmers can more easily access rural financing for business loans and greenhouse gas emissions.
Farmer modification: Simple no-till planter makes work easier in Laikipia County, Kenya

Planting huge tracts of land by hand can be a tedious activity that could go on for days, increasing the cost of labour for a farmer. In the normal planting system, farmers till the land probably twice first, before sowing the seeds manually. Peter Kahiu, a farmer in Laikipia County, however, does it differently and easily, using a hand-held machine that saves him a great deal. The farmer based in Muhonia village modify the Fitarelli animal drawn planter, which he attaches to a ‘walking tractor’ that requires just a little pushing as it does the planting.

“I modified the planter specifically for farmers who cannot afford the services of big tractors because of high prices. This machine allows farmers to do away with tilling their land with donkeys and bulls,” he says. According to Peter Kahiu who modified the planter to enable him practice zero tilling to realize high yields, the machine can also be used where farmers are not practicing Conservation Agriculture. Zero tilling or no tilling entails planting crops on soil that has remained un-ploughed after the harvest of the previous season. Peter attaches the single row planter onto a walking tractor that sow seeds in a row throughout the fields. It can plant at least six acres (2.4 hectares) a day.

“With this technology, the biomass of the previous harvest is not removed since it forms mulch while the weeds are killed using herbicides,” he explains. Alternatively, to cut or control the weeds, he uses a shallow weeder that he has also fabricated. It is an equipment akin to a shovel only that its edge is a blade that cuts the weed. The welder sells it at KES 300. Depending on the kind of crop being planted, he charges KES 1,500 for sowing maize and KES 2,500 for beans per acre. When using a tractor, most farmers part with KES 4,500 per acre.

His planter has two plastic hoppers mounted parallel on it. One of the hoppers hosts seeds like maize, beans, sorghum or millet, which are the common crops grown in the area.

Smart farming boosts harvests in arid regions

Mwala sub-county in Machakos is one of the arid and semi-arid areas (ASALs) in Kenya. Farmers there have to contend with long dry spells and short rainy seasons that as a result of climate change, have increasingly become erratic and insufficient.

This has adversely affected their agricultural yields, leading to minimal harvests and low incomes for many households that rely on farming as their livelihood source.

“There are times you harvest and the food gets over before the next harvesting season. So you have to struggle to buy food even though the money is not there,” says Juliana Kinya, a farmer in Katheka village in Mwala (Masii).

Such stories are common in most rural households, especially those in ASALs that occupy about 70 per cent of Kenya’s land mass.

As farmers like Ms Kinya bear the consequences of minimal rainfall at a personal level, the country also suffers. This is because agriculture is a major source of employment and the country’s largest single economic sector, accounting for 31.5 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and roughly 50 per cent of export revenue, according to government statistics.

The food shortages are also major contributors to the high child malnutrition rates in eastern Kenya where dryland agriculture in Kenya is practised. The region has a stunning (severe malnutrition) rate of 26 per cent against the country’s total rate of 34 per cent. Yet, malnutrition is an underlying cause of about 30 per cent of deaths among children below five years. The condition lowers the immunity, making children vulnerable to death from common childhood diseases such as diarrhoea and malaria.

“It also interferes with the optimal brain development. This results in low intelligence which will adversely affect school performance of affected children,” says Gladys Mugambi, head of the dietetics and nutrition department at the Ministry of Health.

To address farming hurdles in dryland areas like Mwala, agricultural experts are urging farmers to pursue an innovative farming technique known as Conservation Agriculture. The approach encompasses agricultural practices that minimise soil disturbance hence preventing erosion. Aside from reducing pest and diseases, they also enable the soil to retain moisture or water.

“These are problems that farmers deal with here all the time. That’s why we believe that Conservation Agriculture is the ideal farming technique for us,” said Sarah Kabiru, an agricultural officer with the Ministry of Agriculture in Mwala.
2018 Events

2018 No-Till Conference: 4-6 September 2018

The Club is proud to present another conference to assist you in your pursuit of a more sustainable farming enterprise! The No-Till Club 2018 Conference will take place on the 4-6 September 2018 at ATKV Drakensville Holiday Resort. This Conference combined with Cover Crop Workshop is focused on managing Adversity with Diversity with Emerging Cover Crop Strategies by Making Cover Crops Pay. The purpose and the take home message of this no-till conference is:

- It is imperative to examine your soil using analysis – checking - serious compaction-before embarking on No-Till
- Remember that No-Till is a system based on - creating protective mulch – cover crops – and a crop rotation
- Striving towards a more biological diverse and integrated cropping and livestock farming enterprise

For more information about the conference, visit: http://www.notillclub.com/index.php/conference

Ethiopia Conservation Agriculture Stakeholders’ Workshop: 4-6 September 2018

Venue: Debra Markos, Amhara Region, Ethiopia

Dates: 4 – 6 September 2018

Organizers: African Conservation Tillage Network (ACT), Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Resources, Sustainable Land Management Programme (SLMP II), Norwegian University of Life Sciences, CIMMYT, Development Fund (Ethiopia) and other Partners

Participants: The workshop will analyse the constraints to and benefits from adoption of CA for different and complete value chains. Participants will therefore be drawn from all agricultural sectors including the SLMP II, agricultural research, government institutions, higher learning institutions, non-governmental organizations, the private sector including farmer organizations, and related development partners in Ethiopia.

The overall objective of the workshop is to bring together conservation agriculture experts, farmers, policy makers, farmers and other stakeholders from within and outside Ethiopia, to share experiences and lessons on the adaptation, adoption and scaling up of Conservation Agriculture principles and practices in Ethiopia. The interaction will enable ascertaining key interventions – including policy support options, research for development, scaling up pathways/methodologies - to catalyse the scaling up - and adoption of and reap benefits from Conservation Agriculture.

For more Information Contact: SLMP II National Program Coordinator habatmuhailu@yahoo.com and info@act-africa.org

Conservation agriculture resource links for more information & knowledge


Conservation Agriculture at Cornell University: http://conservation.agriculture.mannlib.cornell.edu/

https://www.zotero.org/groups/348525/cornell_conservation_agriculture/items/collectionKey/KGBFX8BX?


2018 Events
The 2ACCA purposed to bring together expert knowledge, information, and insights from practitioners from across different sectors and interests groups at all levels of agriculture development in the public, private and civil sectors. The diversity of intended participants will enable the desired multi-disciplinary and cross-sector “treatment” of CA for climate-smart agriculture – a feature essential for the success of CA scaling-up as an integral part of the growing food and agriculture systems in Africa.

This is in line with the Malabo Declaration, AU’s Agenda 2063 and the SDGs. The purpose of the 2ACCA initiative is to facilitate diverse and open sharing of experiences and information on CA thereby fostering learning and widespread awareness and interest in the uptake and spread of CA in Africa. This includes CA’s role in enhancing sustainable agricultural productivity, strengthening environmental and social resilience, and fostering efforts to provide for food and nutrition security as well as jobs and economic opportunities, especially for rural communities, including youth and women. The 2ACCA initiative provides “neutral space” for networking, collaboration and partnership to support the scaling-up of CA systems as the sustainable basis for CSA development across Africa. Learn More

Standard Registration for the second Africa congress on Conservation Agriculture opens 1st February 2018. For more information visit: Second Africa Congress on Conservation Agriculture

ACT programs, projects and initiatives are firmly anchored towards achieving the 2030 SDGs.

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

For more information, please contact: Executive Secretary | African Conservation Tillage Network
KARLO - Kabete, Waiyaki Way | P.O. Box 10375-00100, Nairobi, Kenya | Tel: +254 20 8076064; +254 774 895 077
Email: info@act-africa.org | Web: www.act-africa.org

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