"If we continue to behave normally, this disease will treat us abnormally. Behaving normal under these circumstances is akin to having a death wish..." These were the heart-wrenching words of the Kenyan Health Cabinet Secretary Mutahi Kagwe to a highly apprehensive nation in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak.

We are facing an unprecedented health challenge due to the pandemic and with the virus having no specific treatment or vaccine, the only way out is to institute measures that would curb its spread. Measures that would change our normal way of doing things in the words of the minister.

As a country, measures instituted to curb spread of the virus include cessation of movement into and out of worst hit towns; dusk-to-dawn curfew; closure of our international boarders; and closure of open-air markets. Measures that will impact in every sector of our economy but the biggest casualty being the agricultural sector which is key to our economy - with the measures, a much lethal killer has cropped up - hunger.
However, my fellow countrymen and women are very creative. Farmers have come up with ways of beating the challenges brought about by their compliance to measures put in place. In dealing with closure of markets, they have come up with ingenious ways of selling their produce. They have converted their cars into mobile markets. It is now a common sight in Nairobi seeing cars full of farm produce parked by the roadsides where people can buy from.

In the wake of COVID-19, a lot of resources have been channeled to the health ministry depriving the ministry of agriculture resources for extension services. Coupled with movement restrictions, on-farm visits and one-on-one advisory services are inaccessible to many farmers. Farmers have however turned to use mobile phones and online information platforms for information exchange. We have seen emergence of many Facebook groups for different farm enterprises and whose membership has increased exponentially. Here, farmers ask questions and get answers from fellow farmers – farmer to farmer exchange as they call it.

E-commerce has also come in to bridge the production and market gaps caused by cessation of movement. With 80% of customers having access to the internet, online markets are the new thing. Farmers are now using Facebook and WhatsApp groups to order. Curtailment of movement and the curfew has disrupted supply chains. Farmers can’t travel to cities to sell their produce without breaking the curfew hour restrictions. They are now putting their produce together and have one of their own takes it to the city for them. This way, not everybody has to go and those going are well resourced to comply with government measures. This has alleviated worry to many farmers since they don’t have to leave their homes.

Farmers, many wearing surgical masks, are also producing and sharing seedlings among themselves to avoid going to the shops. This has helped in reducing movement and the risk of interacting with people who may be infected.

With COVID-19, behaving normally is no option – farmers have stayed true to this by innovating ways of farming and feeding the nation. When the going gets tough, the tough will keep going and among them, will be farmers.