

Price. Currently, a kilogramme of vanilla costs Shs300,000 up from Shs200,000 last year.

BY MONITOR TEAM
editorial@monitor.co.ug

Farmers spend sleepless nights over vanilla theft

KASESE/BUNDIBUGYO. Vanilla farming is a very lucrative business in Rwenzori sub-region given its prices that have been steadily increasing over time.

Despite being profitable, of late it has proved to be a risky venture threatening lives of farmers and those dealing in it.

Some farmers are contemplating abandoning the business because of the endless battles they engage in with thieves.

Recently, five farmers were killed while guarding their gardens.

The farmers say because of the attractive prices, thieves have resorted to stealing immature vanilla beans.

Currently, a kilogramme of vanilla costs Shs300,000 up from Shs200,000 last year.

In Kasese District, the farmers have threatened to clear their gardens following the death of three of their own who were killed while guarding gardens.

Residents of Kamughobe I village, in Kisinga Sub-county, Kyarumba and Kyondo sub-counties, have expressed disappointment over government's alleged failure to protect them.

"My brother was recently shot dead by unknown gunmen while guarding a vanilla garden," Mr Wilson Kanyonyi said.

He added, "We have been guarding our vanilla gardens with our locally made weapons but with guns involved, we can no longer manage the situation."

Mr Kanyonyi said his brother was the second to die after a one Kaseru was stabbed to death in a vanilla garden.

The farmers say police advised them to hire private security guards at Shs500,000 per month but this is costly for them since vanilla takes seven months to mature.

Mr Chance Kahindo, the Kisinga Sub-county chairperson, confirmed the attacks saying: "We had told our people to fence their gardens and guard them locally but if the thieves have resorted to using guns, then we need the intervention of security operatives."

Mr Kahindo said vanilla theft has led to increased poor quality of produce in the market as thieves prematurely harvest it to make quick money.

The Rwenzori East regional police commander, Mr Richard Ecega, said,



Affected. Mr Andrew Ayebazibwe, a vanilla farmer in Ibanda, shows the immature vanilla that is being stolen.

PHOTO BY FEDNANO TUMAHAME

"It is true three people were killed by use of a gun, two killed by security guards while one was killed by unknown assailants whose gun is not yet recovered in Kyondo, Kisinga and Kyarumba (In Kasese) respectively".

Mr Dembe Stephen Masereka, one of the vanilla farmers, in Lhuhwahwa I village, Kajwenge parish Kisinga sub-county, said farmers have also resorted to harvesting immature vanilla beans as one way of protecting the crop from being stolen which may lead to its price decline again.

However, Ms Masika Esther Kimbembwe, the female district councillor for Nyakatonzi, has appealed to government to protect vanilla farmers.

"The rate at which vanilla beans are being stolen is alarming, the reason why we need a bylaw to regulate the trading of the crop," Ms Masika advised.

The Kasese District chairman, Mr Sibendire Geoffrey Bigogo, said authorities need to regulate growing and harvesting of the crop given its high value.

"We have had several complaints from our farmers that the quality is

ISSUES

Insecurity. Recently, five farmers were killed while guarding their gardens.

Costs. The farmers say police advised them to hire private security guards at Shs500,000 per month but this is costly for them since vanilla takes seven months to mature.

Appeal. However, Ms Masika Esther Kimbembwe, the female district councillor for Nyakatonzi, has appealed to government to protect vanilla farmers.

Immature harvests. Both thieves and farmers have resorted to harvesting immature vanilla beans.

compromised because of the high prices. We need to give license to whoever is trading in the crop in order to curb the illegal buyers," Mr Sibendire said.

He added: "Much as we have passed an ordinance, theft remains a crime stipulated in the penal code and police should do their work by apprehending the culprits. Our ordinance will basically regulate the buyers, I appeal to law those responsible to enforce the law," Mr Bigogo said.

One of the dealers, Mr Police Bagonza, says vanilla is supposed to be harvested in May and June but some people start buying before the season sets in.

"Other middle men have spoilt the business by buying immature vanilla which they keep until June. This has affected the quality of the crop and the prices may go down eventually," Mr Bagonza said.

Mr Allan Mayanja Nturanke, the production manager for Exporter of Organic Cocoa and Vanilla in Uganda, the main buyers of vanilla in the region, welcomed that the Kasese District council ordinance, saying it is a good gesture towards guarding vanilla farmers from thieves and mid-

dlemen who have exploited them.

Last week, in Ibanda District, police arrested a 19-year-old man over vanilla theft.

According to vanilla farmers in Kyeikuku village, Kagongo division, in Ibanda municipality arrested the suspect had a half sack of vanilla worth Shs5 million.

Last month, police in Kabarole District arrested a vanilla dealer over purchasing seven bags of immature vanilla.

The district officer in charge of criminal investigations, Ms Godliver Twinomugisha, said suspects convince farmers to sell them immature vanilla in exchange for hefty sums of money.

Mr Fred Kamabu, a vanilla farmer at Kakuka parish in Bundibugyo, said: "I now sleep in my vanilla garden because I can not afford to hire a security guard. We request our district leadership to give us security because our lives are at stake," Mr Kamabu said.

Market

Under their umbrella organisation, the Rwenzori Farmers' Co-operative Union, that operates in five districts in the region, more than 25,000 farmers will be able to gain from the crop if the issue of quality is handled properly.

The revelation was made by the Catholi Relief Services president, Mr Sean Callahan, in July while visiting farmers at Rwimi Sub-county headquarters in Bunyangabu District. "We (CRS) are very ready to get market for vanilla grown in Rwenzori if the you produce high quality value that can compete on the world market," Mr Callahan said.

Compiled by Enid Ninsilma, Felix Basilime, Moris Mumbere, Fednand Tumame & Longino Muhindo

briefly

Minister applauds NGO

MASAKA. The minister of Agriculture, Mr Vincent Ssemplija, has commended staff of Uganda Cares for their support towards HIV/AIDS fight in Uganda. While officiating at the celebrations to mark 15 years of Uganda Cares on Tuesday, Mr Ssemplija said many HIV patients who get treatment at Uganda Cares branches in the area are pleased with the organisation's dedication. "You have kept the promise and you should continue doing the same," Mr Ssemplija said. Dr Henry Mupfema, the country programme director for Uganda Cares, said having started with two patients in 2002 when the first clinic was opened up in Masaka, the number has risen to more than 94, 000 now. [All Mambule]

MPs request rejected

MASINDI. The Masindi District council has rejected a request by the area Members of Parliament and the Resident District Commissioner to have an ordinary council meeting to rescind on the district's position of stopping parliament from amending Article 102(b) of the Constitution. The district speaker, Mr Moses Kirya, on Tuesday said he cannot call for the said meeting because council has no funds to facilitate the councillors. Early this month, the district council resolved to oppose the removal of the age limit from the Constitution. [Ismael Bategeka]

Orphanages face closure

JINJA. The Ministry of Gender will crack down all illegally established orphanages, community based organisations and non-governmental organisations dealing in the welfare of abandoned babies and children countrywide, officials have revealed. The commissioner for youth and children affairs at the ministry, Mr Mondo Kyateka, during a meeting on violence against children in Jinja on Tuesday, said they will shut down the organisations because they have become a centre for child trafficking children. "We found out that they are trafficking and torturing centres for innocent children through beatings and use of bad language," he said. [Denis Edema]

Police arrest one

KABALE. Police in Kabale District have arrested a 47-year-old man over impersonation and possession of government. According to police, the suspect is a resident of Kashaki village, Bubare Sub-county Rubanda District. The Kigezi sub-region police spokesperson, Mr Ely Maate, on Tuesday confirmed the arrests saying the suspect had one box of coartem anti-malaria drug, vitamin C drugs, injecta plan all suspected to have been stolen from a government facility. He said the suspect is being held at Kabale Police Station pending investigations. [Robert Muhereza]



Process. Dried vanilla which is ready for processing. INTERNET PHOTO