

UCDA wants poor coffee handling criminalised

By Martin Kitubi

The Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA) has called for tough laws to punish farmers and traders dealing in unripe and substandard coffee beans in the country.

Dr Emmanuel Iyamulemye Niyibigira, the UCDA managing director, believes this will combat the vice and promote good quality coffee for both local and international markets.

He said this during a breakfast meeting at the Kampala Serena Hotel to announce and launch preparations for the 16th African Fine Coffee Conference and Exhibition, slated for February 14-16, 2018.

"We cannot compromise the quality of coffee; the future of the industry will be bright if farmers and dealers in unripe coffee beans are punished heavily," he said.

Illegal coffee

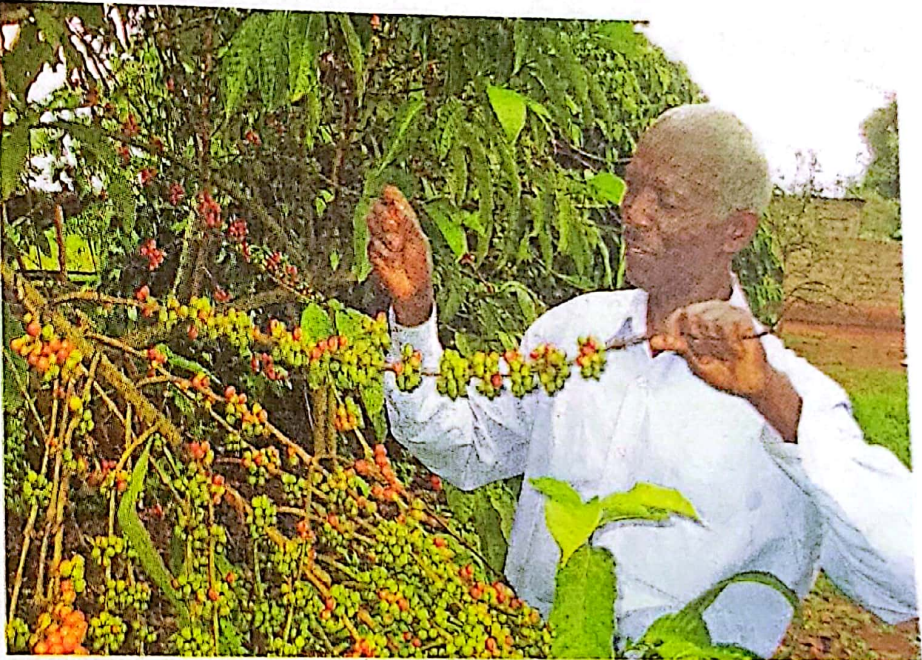
The national coffee governing and regulatory body recently drafted the National Coffee Bill, which calls for heavy punishments to farmers and traders dealing in "illegal coffee" and said these will be liable to criminal charges.

One of the provisions in the Bill recommends a sh5m fine, imprisonment for three years for farmers and traders who fail to comply with quality regulations.

UCDA currently uses the 1994 coffee regulations, which prescribe a fine of sh1m or imprisonment for three years in lieu or both.

Niyibigira added: "The law has failed to punish the culprits. They do not feel the punishment at all. It needs to be updated and enforced accordingly."

He blamed the sale of unripe coffee beans on middlemen,



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who take advantage of poverty among farmers and buy coffee from them before it is ready for harvest.

"We have learnt that middlemen move at night and harvest unripe coffee, dry it and sell to processors, which has greatly affected quality and it needs urgent response," he said.

Extension workers

UCDA has 50 extension workers in the country, who collaborate directly with the single spine extension workers' system at the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries.

The extension workers are mandated to monitor and ensure implementation of coffee regulations across the country and carry out quality checks to weed out unripe coffee dealers.

In the 2015 Uganda coffee roadmap, President Yoweri Museveni issued a directive to accelerate coffee production from four million to 20 million bags by 2020.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

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The UCDA board chairperson, Perez Bukumunhe, believes the vision can be achieved if stricter regulations are in place.

Uganda is ranked top Commonwealth producer of coffee, the second-largest in Africa and seventh in the world, mainly producing Robusta (80%) and Arabica (20%).

Coffee contributes about 30% of the country's total export earnings, second to tourism in foreign exchange.

The state minister for agriculture, Christopher Kibazanga, who was the chief guest, emphasised that Government will continue to close substandard coffee firms

to ensure quality production.

"The Government will not compromise with any coffee farm or individual failing production of quality coffee products for international markets," he said.

He, however, assured farmers of Government's commitment towards establishment of markets for their produce.

About 2,000 local and international coffee farmers and entrepreneurs have confirmed participation in the coffee conference and exhibition, 400 are Ugandan and the rest are from Africa, America, Asia and Europe.

International coffee equipment manufacturers such as Pinhalense, Palini and Alves from Brazil, Delta Technologies and LarMarzocco from USA and Italy will attend.

Uganda Tourism Board executive director Stepher Asiimwe said about 10,000 part-time jobs will be created for tour guides, hotels restaurants and drivers.