



A FARMER'S SAY >
By Michael J. Ssali

Food production for healthy living

This year's World Food Day theme carried the components of food security and rural development which today's column should discuss a little further.

Food security is defined as a situation when at all times a homestead has access to sufficient food to meet its nutritional needs for a healthy and productive life.

Farmers should feed well in order to be healthy and fit for efficient work in their fields to cause the needed rural development.

Healthy living requires healthy food systems that meet the body's nutritional needs.

Our approach to agriculture has so far tended to concentrate on income generation and poverty reduction without paying due attention to the farmers' nutritional needs.

They should be educated about the different nutritional values of the crops they grow and the advantages of eating healthy diets.

It will translate into stronger, healthy, people working in the fields, less visits to health facilities, reduced expenditure on medical care, fewer infant and maternal deaths, and less farming time lost attending burials and taking care of the sick due to malnutrition.

Farmers will save more money to invest in transport vehicles for their produce, to take their children to better schools, to build better houses, and to invest in value addition ventures which are features of rural development.

Uganda loses US\$899million annually - as much as 5.6 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product - due to the effects of malnutrition according to a recent study, entitled "The Cost of Hunger in Africa". Nutrition education for our citizens will help to reduce the health burden.

Following the recent passing of the Biotechnology and Bio-safety Bill into law in Uganda, we expect nutrition to play a bigger role in agricultural research and we also expect that the farmers will embrace the crop varieties and farming practices recommended by the researchers.

A Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) news release dated 17 January 2014 stated: "The priority for agricultural research and development must become more nutrition enhancing, with a stronger focus on nutrient-dense foods such as fruits, vegetables, legumes and animal-source foods, as well as local biodiversity and diversified farming systems."

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