Milling money from cassava

According to Tom Omara, an agronomist at Naro, the market for cassava is unlimited at the moment. Farmers are making profits of about Shs2.5m per tonne, writes **Denis Bbosa.**

It has dawned on Uganda cassava farmers that they must more than double their production to satisfy the enlarging market demand. But how can they get there minus embracing the changing cassava production patterns and methodologies?

Tom Omara, an agronomist on root crop research at National Agricultural Research Organisation (Naro) Namulonge with a special interest in cassava research and multiplication advises farmers to upgrade from the local breeds to the trending Nase11, Nase19, Narocasss1 and Narocass2 if they want to get tangible benefits.

"It takes nine years for Naro researchers to come up with one cassava variety. At the moment, we have one variety from Nase1 to Nase19 and the latest Narocass1 and Narocass2," he revealed.

Uganda produces more than five million tonnes of cassava annually. However, the industrial potential of the crop is not yet fully exploited. Omara says Uganda has no entrepreneurs of quality cassava seed despite the high demand.

Cassava is a commercial crop in Brazil, Thailand, China, Nigeria, Ghana and Mozambique in a range of applications.

Cassava can be grown anywhere in Uganda because 80 per cent is arable land according to a Naro survey. It is not advisable to grow on rocky water-logged land.

Omara stresses that it takes 12 months to harvest cassava, not six months as many adverts claim, and it can last up to three solid years.

It takes 14-21 days for cassava to germinate while the best planting season should be at the start of the first rains (March-April) so that the second rains (August-October) find the plantation on proper course.

One stands a good chance if he plants in the second rain period because he will go through the dry period unscratched.

Best storage practices

Cassava is already in store in the soil and so those growing for home consumption are advised to use the piecemeal approach of only getting what they can consume.

Naro scientists are still working on the shelf life of cassava but the methodology is not yet fully adapted.

Shs300m

AMOUNT OF MONEY FARMERS MADE WHEN THEY SOLD CASSAVA TO RWANDA LAST YEAR



Cassava is a climate resilient crop, meaning that it can grow through any season.. FILE PHOTO

Choosing the best breed

You cannot go beyond Nase11, Nase19, Narocasss1 and Narocass2 which government has recommended for its Naads programme. In terms of yield, Narocass1 beats the rest because for one acre you get 18 to 25 tonnes yet for Nasse11 and Nasse19 you get 15-18 tonnes. A farmer will earn Shs2.5m from a tonne of cassava on local market.

The local breed can only give you four to five tonnes per acre. For one plant (stool) of Narocass1, you can get 8-25 root tubers.

Yet Nase19 offers 8-25 tubers. The tuber size is determined by the type of soil - sandy, you get long and relatively small size yet for other soils you can get big but short size.

Limitless market

The market for cassava is unlimited, according to Omara. Uganda Breweries Limited (UBL) requires 6,000 metric tonnes to produce *Engule* beer. The ethanol processing plant in Lira (Kampec) requires 10 tonnes of dry cassava. Various companies require cassava starch which they export to China for pharmaceuticals, and the demand continues to be high. South Sudan refugees crave for cassava while last year, 2,000 bags of cassava went to Rwanda for about Shs300m. The huge local and Congo market also remains demanding.

Value addition

Cassava products with huge investment opportunities include; starch, quality flour and chips for use as raw materials in bakeries, breweries, bio-ethanol, paperboards, bio-degradable plastics, animal feeds and textiles. According to Omara, a capital of Shs10m is enough to invest in a set of stainless cassava processing unit. He emphasised that not all cassava varieties are suitable for value addition. For quality flour, Omara recommends Nase 19 and NaroCas1.

Agronomy

- Land preparation: x2 ploughing
- Stem cutting length: 15-25cm
- Planting depth: 6-10cm
- Spacing: 1m x 1m
- Number of plants per acre: 4,000
- Maturity period:12-18 months
- Weeding regime: 6-8 times depending on weed type
- Intercrop with beans or maize, month after cassava has grown.

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