

How Ntambazi turned potato garden into goldmine

Farmers have started reaping big from value addition, Bashir Ntambazi of Masaka has demonstrated just that, writes Moses Muwulya.

Exploitation by middlemen is a common challenge many Ugandan farmers face.

This continues to see them reap less from their sweat as their produce is taken at low prices by middlemen.

However, Bashir Ntambazi, 35, a farmer in Bulenge Village, Buwunga Sub-County in Masaka District, could not bear the exploitation anymore.

Starting

The father of four, who mainly grows cassava and sweet potatoes, says he decided to add value to his produce so as to beat the hitherto unavoidable middlemen.

Ntambazi explains that when he adds value to his two major crops, he achieves a lot by selling them in various forms.

"Adding value has done wonders for me. At least I can now earn fairly from my sweat, unlike before," Ntambazi says cheerfully.

On his inherited three-acre land, Ntambazi mostly grows orange fleshed sweet potatoes; a variety which is different from the indigenous white sweet potatoes.

Source of knowledge

Ntambazi reveals that he has never looked back since he was invited through a friend by HarvestPlus Uganda, in November last year to attend a one-week workshop on crop management.

At the workshop, he met several specialists including Charles Musoke, a Seed Systems specialist working with HarvestPlus Uganda, who would later educate him on potato potentials.

"That was the turning point. I went back to Masaka fully equipped with knowledge on how to add value to my plants," said Ntambazi.

Making Beverage

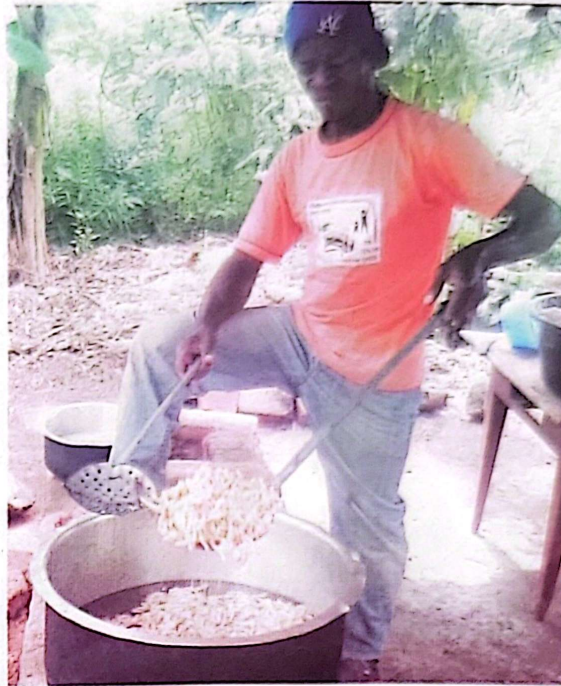
After harvesting sweet potatoes, Ntambazi, then mingles them, adds water before sieving to extract the real beverage which according to him is cholesterol free.

He adds sugar and 'jambula' leaves or lemon peelings to achieve a great aroma.

"The product gives a perfect aroma and besides, it acts as a preservative since I do not want to use chemicals," he explains.

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THE QUANTITY OF BEVERAGE THAT NTAMBAZI PACKS FOR SALE



Bashir Ntambazi boils sweet potatoes to make beverage and pasteries PHOTOS BY MOSES MUWULYA

Because of the natural preservatives he uses, Ntambazi notes that his beverage lasts for two to three weeks without going bad.

However, he says there is another less tiresome and quick method of making the beverage, which he cannot afford at the moment.

"I need a blending machine, but it's expensive and needs electricity which I don't have. Using it just needs to slice the pieces, put them in a blender and then add water, preservatives and sugar before boiling, he explains. He shares that a basin full of sweet

potatoes can produce three to four 20 litre jerry cans of juice each costing between Shs20,000 to Shs25,000.

He sells his beverage in retail shops and school canteens but wishes to put the product on standard market after improving the packaging materials and getting a certificate from the Uganda National bureau of standards (UNBS).

Besides beverage, Ntambazi also makes confectionary products like donuts, cakes, chapattis, and daddies which he supplies in schools and shops with in Masaka town.

PRODUCTS

Ntambazi says the chain of value addition rolls off on harvest of his orange-fleshed sweet potatoes.

Asked why he prefers this specie, Ntambazi explains that besides consuming it as food, the breed has multiple uses.

"From this type, I get flour and later use it for my baking business, where I make cakes, donuts and daddies using the potato flour, as a major input," he says. He as well makes a beverage from the same breed and all these products are supplied to schools in Masaka town. For cassava, the other crop that Ntambazi grows; he explains that he ceased selling

it in raw form but rather uses it as a raw material for his bagiya making business. All these products are sold to various schools in Masaka Town, super markets and several retail shops. Through a very complex and skillful process, Ntambazi explains how he turns the cassava into the delicious bagiya snack.

"The amount I would earn selling cassava in raw form would be very little compared to what I reap when I sell bagiya," he notes. He explains that a sack of cassava can go for as low as Shs40,000 depending on the supply on the market, but when he gets flour from cassava, and make bagiya, Ntambazi banks a cool Shs80,000 as profit after production costs.

Benefits of sweet potatoes

1. Sweet potatoes deliver life-saving nutrition. While the sweet potato comes in many colours, the orange ones are the most packed with vitamin A.
2. The sweet potato has been saving lives for years. It has kept millions from starvation in China and Uganda when various crops failed.
3. Sweet potatoes can even help fight poverty. Ninety-five percent of sweet potatoes are grown in developing countries, often by small-scale farmers and in home gardens. The extras that families do not eat, they can sell to boost their income.
4. Sweet potatoes are full of the A, B, C's - and E's! They are a valuable source of all these vitamins and even contain some iron and zinc.
5. Sweet potatoes are not just for humans - they make great food for animals too. Farmers who feed sweet potato vines to their chickens report that they produce more and better quality eggs.
6. Sweet potatoes are versatile. From Latin America to Africa and Asia to the White House garden, as long as the climate is hot sweet potatoes will thrive.
7. Sweet potatoes are true to their name: They're sweet, particularly the orange-fleshed varieties.
8. Sweet potatoes sweeten fields too! Because they come from a different genus than many other crops, farmers may plant them in between planting other crops to prevent pest build up.
9. Sweet potatoes support moms. In Sub-Saharan Africa, we have distributed orange-fleshed sweet potatoes to farming communities, particularly to women farmers.
10. Sweet potatoes are a stellar example of partnerships and innovation in action. Back in the early 1990s, the U.S. Agency for International Development (part of Feed the Future) helped launch a project to breed crops that were not just high yielding, but more nutritious too - a novel concept at the time.

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