

Post-harvest's very important

The ongoing campaign for increased agricultural production in Uganda has tended to overshadow the ever present and equally important post-harvest component.

If post-harvesting handling of cash crops like coffee, maize or beans is poor their quality deteriorates and they fetch less profit for the farmers.

A lot of our agricultural produce is spoilt and lost from the time the crops approach maturity in the fields, through harvesting, storage, transportation, and marketing.

Some crops are lost to rodents and birds in the fields due to harvest delays. Some wither and rot soon after harvest while others are spoiled by pests and rats during storage.

In other cases food is lost due to unhygienic handling which renders it unfit for human consumption.

According to Namutebi, Muyonga, and Tumuhimbise, (Food and Nutrition in Uganda) we lose between 35% and 100% of perishable crops like fruits and vegetables within a few days after harvest.

Other easily perishable crops include sweet potatoes, cassava, carrots, onions, and ginger. Farmers also worry about the loss of livestock products like milk, eggs, and meat.

If such losses could be halved, poverty and food insecurity could significantly decline. The campaign for increased agricultural production must therefore match the campaign to minimize food loss as we think about a future with a bigger population to feed.

Food loss, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), is due to poor infrastructure, low levels of technology, and insufficient investment in the food production systems of developing countries.

Our farmers will need practical and technical training in better crop preservation and storage practices. Often the crops take too long on the way from the farm to the market due to bad roads or inefficient transport vehicles.

Lack of reliable electric power and refrigeration facilities in rural areas force farmers to sell off their produce at low prices because they fear to lose them in case they get rotten.

Due to ignorance many farmers don't follow manufacturers' instructions in the application of pesticides which makes some harvested food crops poisonous. Physical damage to agricultural produce such as bananas often occurs during transportation.