

Dried fruits, vegetables can earn you money



Employees package dried pineapples. After drying the fruits and vegetables, you can package them in well-branded packs and sell in local supermarkets. PHOTO BY DOROTHY NAKAWEESI

To maintain availability of fruits and vegetables throughout the year, they are dried and packaged at a fee, Dorothy Nakaweesi writes.

Have you ever thought about the plentiful fruits and vegetables you throw during the peak season? These fruits can be dried to earn you an income.

This article shows how you can make money by drying fruits such as pineapples, apples, bananas, papaya and mangoes which are largely grown in Uganda.

These fruits are harvested seasonally resulting in some seasons of relative scarcity.

To maintain the availability of fruits and vegetables throughout the year, dehydration is undertaken. Dehydration is the process of losing or removing water or moisture.

After drying the fruits and vegetables in a hygienic condition, they can later be packaged in well branded packs and either sold in local supermarkets or exported.

Capital investment

What does it take to start this business? It is estimated that for one to start this business on a large scale would require capital investment worth \$5,150 (\$Shs18.5 million).

\$hs18m

ESTIMATED AMOUNT OF MONEY REQUIRED TO START A DRIED FRUIT BUSINESS ON LARGE SCALE



one is envisaged to make at least 100 kilogrammes of dried fruits and vegetables per day.

According to Uganda Investment Authority, the direct costs include: materials, supplies and all other costs incurred to produce the product.

"With 312 days of production in a year one will be assured of

an annual revenue worth \$40,560 (\$Shs146 million), with net profit of 38 per cent and a payback period of one year and three months," UIA investment records show.

Production process

Ideally, the process starts with major selection of the fruits and vegetables and washing them. They are peeled, shelled, sliced, blanched and dehydrated under controlled conditions.

Then the dehydrated fruits and vegetables are packed in suitable containers to avoid absorbing moisture.

Dehydration of fruits and

vegetables is usually done by various processes such as traditional sun drying, solar dryers, mechanical dryers, vacuum freeze drying, vacuum drying, Osmotic dehydration, dehydration through explosion puffing and microwave based technique.

Market

The market for fruits and vegetables exists all year round. Supply is bound to increase the returns to investment. Supply is recommended to supermarket chains, grocery shops, main markets, as they capture a portion of the market.

With an increased shelf life for the fruits and vegetables, the profit sales ratio is bound to increase.

Ms Brenda Opus, the senior marketing executive at the Uganda Export Promotion Board, says this business venture is lucrative locally and at the export market.

However: "Those who want to invest in this business should work on good packaging and branding the product to attract buyers," she says.

Ms Opus says manufacturers are expected to produce quality packages that meet the international standards.

Equipment

It can be locally made by Tonet Ltd, on Gayaza Road and many other producers or imported. Fruits and vegetables are readily available in the local market throughout the country depending on the season.

Advice

Predominantly, as part of your due diligence on opening a dried fruits business, it is a wise move to have a conversation with someone who is in the business.

Local competitors are not going to give you the time of day, mind you. The last thing they want to do is help you to be a better competitor.

Secondly, experts say in advance of opening a dried fruits business in your area, it is a good idea to see what the competition looks like.

Mr Newton Buteraba, the chief executive officer of House of Wealth, a local firm that offers business advisory services and motivational speaking in an interview *Prosper Magazine*, says: "Gain knowledge of how existing firms have positioned themselves in the marketplace, and then design your business in a way that sets you apart from the others."

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