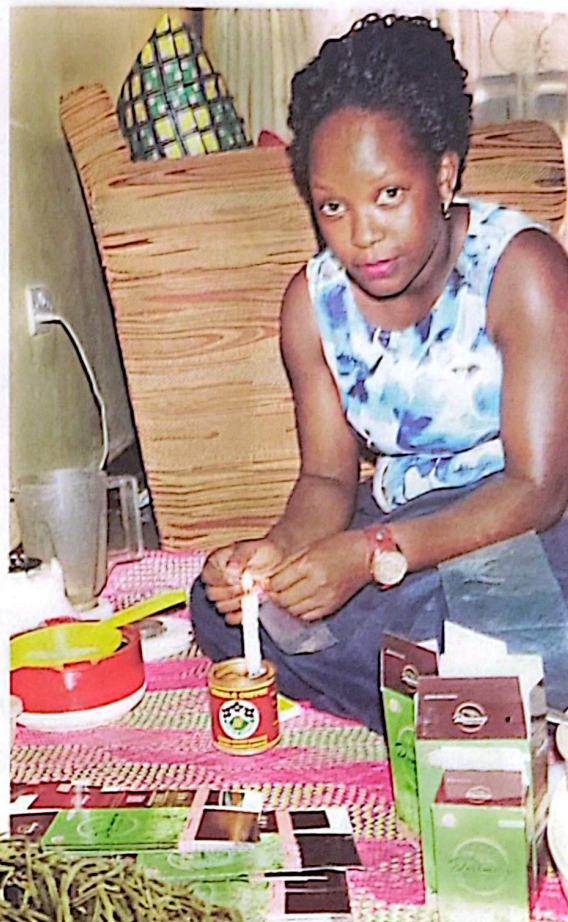




Zawedde checks the soil levels of the rosemary growing in a vase PHOTOS BY GODFREY LUGAJU



# When herbs become your source of cash

Rosemary Zawedde took to herbs farming in 2015. Two years later, the youthful accountant who has never looked back is raking in profits. She is now saving to buy land and a processing machine, writes **Godfrey Lugaaju**.

**A** rich and pleasant smell welcomes you at Rosemary Zawedde's herbal farm in Busiika, Wakiso District.

Zawedde, like any other smallholder farmer could only think of rearing pigs, planting bananas and other horticulture crops such as tomatoes, green pepper and onions on her two-acre piece of land.

However a visit to a friend's herb garden in Matugga changed her perception of farming making her realise the untapped potential of herb plants such as rosemary and the fortunes that lay in adding value to them.

"This is not just farming. I have been growing rosemary since 2015. This is what pays my bills and I am saving money to buy a bigger piece of land and grow more herbs, this is why I direct all my energies to it," says Zawedde as she takes this reporter to a guided tour of her herbal farm.

### Starting

"My land was hardly enough to

rear pigs, horticulture crops and bananas, so I sought alternatives to reap maximum benefits from the farm," Zawedde reveals "My friend encouraged me to plant the herb. I took the advice seriously. I went further and added value," she says.

### Home consumption

She started by growing the rosemary at her backyard garden. "I started with growing rosemary that was given to me by my friend. It was one seedling. It grew very fast. At first, the rosemary was for home consumption. I used it as a spice while preparing fish, beef and chicken stews," she says.

It was not until 2016 that she started commercial farming and value addition. "I met the officials at Kawanda Agricultural Research Station who encouraged me to buy the seedlings and embark on commercial farming. I bought each seedling at Shs3,000, from Kawanda," Zawedde recalls.

### Planting

Zawedde who has started producing seedlings for sale says rosemary is easy to manage after planting. The rosemary herb takes five months to reach maturity. Upon maturity, a farmer can continue to harvest every after one week and for the rest of the year.

### Value addition

I was advised by agriculture officials from Kawanda against selling the rosemary in raw form. "There is a lot of literature on value addition at Kawanda Agricultural



**400,000**

AMOUNT OF MONEY ZAWEDDE MAKES FROM THE SALES OF HER ROSEMARY POWDER IN A MONTH

Research Station. I am one of the beneficiaries," she says.

### Process

After drying the leaves for a week, Zawedde crushes them in a blender

and sieves them to collect the fine particles which she packs.

"I do not leave out the branches since they too are rich in flavor, I dry them too and take them to St Balikudembe market where they are pound into fine particles since they are too hard to be crushed by the blender," she says. She uses a blender, candle, sieve and a polythene bag in the production process.

"Since I do not add any ingredients to the mixture, I only have to buy packs which I use for packaging at Shs3,000 and a roll of

polythene at Shs2,500. Packaging is expensive but quality is worth it," she explains

Zawedde employs one man in the packaging which is one of the tedious processes in the whole production cycle.

"I have two people that help me in the business, one in the farm and the other with packaging. I pay them Shs100,000 per month," she says.

### Quantity

After grading, on average, Zawedde packs about 100 packets of powder rosemary. "This is the moment I look at my products and thank God for this innovation," she says.

### CHALLENGES

The herbs are attacked by diseases such as root rot and bacteria wilt. She is forced to spend extra money buying the organic pesticides which effectively control pests.

The market keeps fluctuating according to Zawedde. She says, "If there were good markets I would be making more money. We receive very few farm gate orders."

Thieves who keep harvesting what they did not sow at her Busiika based farm is another challenge. The itchy fingered goons are attracted to her farm by the rich aroma the rosemary oozes.

### MARKET

Zawedde packages her products in two packs of 100grammes and 140grammes which she sells at Shs6,000 and Shs10,000 respectively.

"My first customers were friends and work mates before I ventured deeper in the market. I move with it in conferences and everywhere I go and people end up buying. I supply a chain of Kampala restaurants, banks and travel companies," she explains.

Aside from moving with the product in her car, she also uses social media platforms to market the product which earns her Shs400,000 a

month after production costs.

Besides the rosemary herb, Zawedde's farm focuses on horticulture crops such as tomatoes, cabbages, green pepper, banana, maize and piggyery.

### FUTURE PLANS

She plans to use part of her savings to buy processing machines to boost her value addition dream which is still very small. "Right now I am rudimentary, but I intend to grow this dream. Next year I want to have a processing machine at my farm," she reveals.