

How sunflower has lifted Mukose out of misery



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Vision Group, in partnership with dfcu Bank, the Netherlands Embassy in Uganda and KLM Airlines, is searching for Uganda's best farmers. Every Tuesday, we shall profile nominated farmers when a panel of judges shall select the best. Sh150m and a trip to the Netherlands await the best farmers to be announced soon.

By George Bitu

He marches majestically through his sprawling sunflower garden in Bulwama village, Bulange sub-county in Namutumba district.

The 60-year-old Gastafus Mukose cannot hold back a smile as he inspects his crop. Once in a while, he stops to inspect at a particular flower keenly before moving forward.

Clad in purple overalls, the farmer occasionally gives instructions to his helpers at the garden.

Starting point

Mukose was working as a security guard a local firm when he realised he would make more money from farming than from his job.

"I looked at the miserable money I was making, yet my family had land in Namutumba. I decided to relocate to the village and start farming," he explains. He started by planting 5kg of seeds of the Pana strain of seeds on an acre and harvested 1,000kg.

New type of sunflower

Mukose is grateful to the agriculture ministry and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)



Mukose (middle) makes about sh2.4m from growing sunflower. Photos by George Bitu

for offering him basic training in sunflower in 2015.

"Through Send a Cow, a local non-government organisation, I was made to appreciate sunflower. It has greatly improved output, especially in terms of the choice of seeds I use nowadays," he observes.

Mukose explains that sunflower takes three months to mature and does not need a lot of rainfall.

"From the information I was given at the training, I now prefer Agsun variety as it has a higher yield compared to Pana," he argues.

He adds that he does not require manure as his soil is still fertile, which further saves on the expenditure.

How Mukose plants sunflower

He clears his three-acre garden almost a month before planting the seeds.

"I open up the soil when the clouds begin to indicate the onset of the rainy season. It is a two-season per year crop. So I do that in March and in August," Mukose says.

He explains that the rigorous planting process is exhausting.

"We use strings to ensure straight planting lines with a spacing of approximately 50cm. Each hole takes three seeds and weeding must follow when seedlings are about a foot tall; almost four weeks later," he says.

Mukose adds that when the top of the shoot begins folding after six weeks, it signifies time for second weeding and then the sunflower does not need labour until harvesting.

Gerald Tayebwa, the Iyukula sub-county agriculture extension worker, adds that he often assists Mukose with vital advice on handling sunflower.

"I have, for example, introduced the idea of efficient post-harvest handling to him. The extraction of seeds and drying in sun is done on tarpaulin to achieve seed quality," Tayebwa says.

Post-harvest handling

According to Mukose, the yellow inflorescence at the tip has numerous seeds that are harvested by cutting off the shrivelling top.

WHAT OTHERS SAY



Jennifer Namalwa, farmer in Bulange parish

Mukose has shown many residents of Namutumba district that farming is a profitable venture. If he had stuck to his former job, he would be still living a miserable life.



Badru Mukasa, labourer

I am happy to work with Mukose. He is so dedicated to gardening and he has inspired many of his neighbours and relatives and I think in the near future he will be a very wealthy farmer.

Mukose was a security guard when he realised he would make more money from farming

Things to learn from Mukose

1 Training opportunities should be embraced whole heartedly. It is one way of improving on any farming venture

2 Look for the best farm inputs always and do not settle for what seems cheap as it may turn out to be expensive in the long run.

3 Show others, especially your family how to do what you are doing. This ensures a legacy of your undertaking.

"We then put the multiple fruit assembly on tarpaulins set on the ground. This ensures generation of clean factory-ready seeds," he says.

Mukose adds that one sure way of telling that the seeds are dry is by hitting the withered fruit with a big stick and seeds are released instantly.

Losses suffered

"The second planting season of last

year was a bad one for me. I barely got 500kg per acre, which is far below the anticipated yield of 1,000kg," he laments.

Marketing the produce

Sunflower is on demand at local vegetable oil mills, with mills

EXPENSES

Labourers vital

Since 1kg costs sh1,200, I managed to get 1.2m during the pioneer harvest. I was able to save about sh0.8m," Mukose recalls.

"Each acre needs about 2kg of seeds, so I use about sh600,000 on seeds for planting as a pack of 2kg costs sh200,000. On average I harvest about 1,000kg per acre, earning about sh3.6m per season," he says.

Mukose adds that his net income is about sh2.4m after taking into consideration what he spends on seeds and labour. David Kaziba, Mukose's son, explains that he assists his father on the farm, which reduces the money spent on paying labourers.

"The labourers are essential during the planting, harvesting, extraction of seeds and storing processes. Otherwise during the rest of the time, not much labour is involved," Kaziba asserts.

Challenges

He regrets starting farming late in life since a much younger age would have served well in handling the gardening process.

"My hearing is also not good due to old age. I only hear when someone shouts," Mukose says.

He says the sunflower prices are low with a kilo fetching sh1,200, yet the venture is labour-intensive from weeding to harvesting.

"A price tag of sh2,000 per kg would do just fine," he adds. Mukose lacks an irrigation system and suffers the consequences of any prolonged dry spells that come about. He says the upsurge in theft cases in the vicinity have also prompted him to install burglar-proof fabrications on the farm storeroom.

dispatching vehicles to purchase directly from the farm.

Pamela Ebanyat, the programme manager of Send a Cow, explains that they have helped link Mukose and other local farmers to such markets easily. "Mukose is currently linked to Universal Oil mill in Mayuge district. He could equally sell his sunflower seeds to Kamuli Oil Mill or even Bido, a multi-national oil firm," Ebanyat says. He supplies almost two tonnes (2,000kg) of sunflower seeds to the mill per harvest season.

Plans

Mukose wants to grow soya beans as it is another lucrative produce that generates vegetable seed oil. He also hopes to venture into dairy farming in future.

Uses of sunflower

Tayebwa explains that sunflower seeds are used in oil mills to make cooking oil. "It is also essential in the manufacture of beauty oil needed to keep the skin beautiful," he narrates.

Sunflower chips make a vital ingredient in the food ration of birds at most poultry farms.