

HOW THE RUSOKE FAMILY TURNED SOIL INTO A

By Umar Nsubuga

Taking a one-and-a-half-hour boda boda ride from Kyejojo town to Nyanzigi village, I met two young women with radiant smiles. Their warmth and humility immediately struck me, yet at first, I assumed they were just workers at the farm. Little did I know, these were the driving forces behind one of the region's most ambitious agricultural enterprises — Angel Rusoke, the managing director and Antoinette Rusoke, the director of product development — both daughters of Amb. Maj Gen (Rtd) Robert Rusoke.

Walking across the 1.5 square-mile Hass avocado model farm, which falls under Nijo Agro-Based Industries Uganda Limited, I observed a rhythm of purpose — workers moving with focus, machinery humming softly and the two sisters circulating to monitor every activity.

Their presence was not ceremonial, it is hands-on, every step deliberate. Here, agriculture is not merely a practice; it is a disciplined system of production, learning and wealth creation.

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN
Long before the first avocado took root, long before the processing machines were installed, there was simply land — quiet, undisturbed and waiting. The land had been acquired years earlier by Amb. Rusoke, initially intended for cattle keeping.

"We thought feeding cattle was simple, we did not understand the science behind pasture like Napier grass, its establishment and consumption rates," Angel recalls.

This early experiment, though modest, became a formative lesson. Instead of forcing a venture without sufficient knowledge, the family stepped back and embraced a research-driven approach.

Around 2018, Rusoke, while working on agricultural initiatives in western Uganda, noticed a recurring problem — farmers were producing raw agricultural products with little value added locally.

Trucks loaded with maize and sacks of avocados left the region for Nairobi, Kenya, offering minimal returns to the communities that had nurtured the crops.

"I saw people working hard, but the value was leaving the community. That is when I decided we needed to do something different, something sustainable that would benefit



Angel (centre) and Antoinette (right) with the farm administrator

Understanding the soil is everything, you cannot separate farming from the land.

not just our family, but the wider community," he explains.

A BOLD AND UNUSUAL START
Unlike typical farms, this enterprise began with processing, not planting. The Rusokes invested in machinery for value addition before establishing the orchard, a move they call "reverse engineering."

"We wanted to demonstrate that there is a market before asking people to grow," Angel says.

This strategic approach ensured that the farm's foundation was grounded in practicality and market demand.

THE BIRTH OF THE AVOCADO ORCHARD

In August 2020, amid the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, the first Hass avocado tree was planted. At the time, avocado farming in Uganda was largely experimental and skepticism was high. The family approached the challenge with diligence, traveling across Uganda and even to Kenya to



Antoinette and Angel produce oil from the Hass avocado

study orchards, nurseries and crop management practices.

Angel, a geologist by training, took charge of soil analysis.

"Understanding the soil is everything, you cannot separate farming from the land," she explains.

From the initial 100 acres,

LESSONS

Humility and adaptability have been vital lessons. "We started thinking we knew everything, but farming teaches you every day," Angel admits.

Research, patience and the courage to innovate have driven the farm's remarkable growth. "Our DNA is hard work, everyone must participate," he says.

Rusoke also says Angel and Antoinette were involved from the very start, learning through experience and contributing their expertise.

"They are not here by chance, they earned their place," he emphasises.

the orchard has steadily expanded to nearly a square mile, following a phased development model that balances growth with resource management.

"This year, we expanded our orchard by planting an additional 100 acres of Hass

avocado, strengthening our farm's growth," Angel says.

LIFE INSIDE THE FARM

A walk through the Rusoke farm reveals a highly-organised system rather than random plots. The Hass avocado orchard is meticulously maintained, with each tree carefully monitored from planting to harvest.

"Weekly scouting is critical. We inspect every tree for early signs of disease, ensuring interventions happen before problems escalate," explains Angel.

Pruning and proper spacing are also central practices, allowing sunlight to reach all branches and encouraging healthy growth. Controlled irrigation is another cornerstone.

GROWING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Community impact is central to the Rusokes' philosophy. Over 300 farmers work within the farm, benefiting from intercropping and technical guidance. One hundred ninety-eight out-growers receive continuous mentorship. Women and youths are deliberately targeted, providing employment, training and income stability.

Hellen Kyomuhangi says the farm's impact is clear, new businesses are emerging, household incomes have stabilised, school attendance has improved and modern farming skills are spreading widely across the region because of this transformative agricultural project.

"We wanted a farm that transforms lives, creates opportunities, empowers communities and builds a future where agriculture supports dignity and sustainable livelihoods," Angel Rusoke, the farm's managing director says.

"Avocado likes water, but it does not love water, you must give it just enough. Consistent moisture without waterlogging is key to high yields," Angel notes.

Orchard hygiene is strictly enforced, with fallen fruits and weeds removed promptly to prevent pests and fungal infections.

Kate Kirungi, who oversees daily farm operations, adds: "We avoid what we call telephone farming, leaving decisions to chance. At least one director is always present, supervising activities and ensuring standards are followed."

The farm follows high-standard stages for commercial Hass avocado production. It begins with site selection and soil preparation using well-circulated sandy loam with pH 6-6.5. Certified seedlings are planted 6-8 metres apart, with irrigation systems installed to support young trees. Vegetative growth involves pruning, canopy management and integrated pest management.

"We grow maize with a direct link to processing. After harvesting, we mill it into flour that is distributed across the Rukungiri region and out of the country. By processing locally, we ensure value remains within the community," she says.

Here, nothing is done carelessly. We use the right

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

MULTI-BILLION AGRICULTURAL LEGACY



Angel and Antoinette (right) inspecting the Hass avocado harvest



Angel says the farm has five tractors which simply farm work

LOOKING AHEAD

Amb. Rusoke explains that plans include expanding avocado acreage, developing the cocoa project, scaling value added products and accessing more international markets. Despite these ambitions, the farm remains true to its core mission, transforming lives and uplifting communities through agriculture.

Today, the farm is more than a production site; it is a learning centre, an employer and a symbol of what vision, discipline and determination can achieve.

"We are here because we never gave up. As we grow, we want our community to grow with us," Angel Rusoke, the farm's managing director reflects.

potassium and calcium. Fruits are thinned if necessary to improve size and quality. Harvesting is done at physiological maturity, avoiding damage, and fruits are promptly transported to the processing unit.

Value addition includes washing, grading, oil extraction and cosmetic product development.

"Every stage, from soil to oil, matters. Our goal is to turn raw avocados into high-value products while maintaining quality and sustainability," Angel says.

"It's a living system. Everyone works, learns and contributes, and that's why our farm produces consistently high-quality fruit," Kirungi says.

MAIZE PROJECT
Antoinette explains that maize farming is not just about growing a crop, but about building a complete value chain.

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Angel standing near the farm silos. She says every stage of production matters

machinery, certified seeds and trained labour. That is why our maize is reliable."

Antoinette adds that the farm also trains out-growers for free, helping them meet the same high standards.

According to Angel, the aim is to protect farmers from exploitation by middlemen and money lenders, while using maize bran to feed dairy cows, poultry and pigs, creating a complete and sustainable farming ecosystem within the

SEEDLING NURSERY

The nursery began modestly, with only 200 seedlings. It now produces up to 200,000 annually. Each seedling is

WHY THE FARM STANDS OUT

Several factors set the Rusoke farm apart. It integrates farming with processing, prioritises research and continuous learning, avoids absentee management and actively engages the community.

The farm is built on a strong long-term sustainability focus. Most importantly, agriculture here is treated as a serious business venture, not merely a subsistence activity, ensuring efficiency, profitability and lasting impact.

community.

COCOA PROJECT
A newer addition, cocoa farming covers 60 acres as a pilot. The goal is to tap into growing international demand, with expansion planned in phases.

AVOCADO OIL PROCESSING
Perhaps the most innovative aspect is the oil-processing plant. Certified edible avocado oil is produced and marketed, demonstrating the viability of value addition before harvest, a key confidence builder for local farmers.

COSMETIC PRODUCTS

The farm is venturing into cosmetics, producing hair and skin oils derived from avocado. Antoinette's engineering expertise has been crucial in designing machinery and optimising production systems.

BLACK SOLDIER FLIES

Antoinette explains that black soldier flies are an efficient and

sold at sh7,000, offering a sustainable revenue stream while helping other farmers establish their own orchards.

MANAGING PEOPLE AND PRODUCTION
The farm employs 60 permanent staff, supported by over 200 casual workers during peak seasons. On-job training is central.

"We train as we work," Angel explains, with regular workshops alongside agricultural institutions to continuously refresh skills and improve productivity.

EARNINGS AND SUSTAINABILITY

The farm is profitable, with a valuation exceeding sh2b. Multiple income streams, avocado fruits, seedlings, maize flour, avocado oil and cosmetic products ensure both stability and long-term sustainability.

BLACK SOLDIER FLIES

Antoinette explains that black soldier flies are an efficient and

sustainable way of producing high-quality organic manure. She notes that the process begins by collecting organic waste such as food leftovers, animal manure and crop residues, which are then fed to the larvae. The larvae break down this waste quickly, converting it into nutrient-rich compost.

Antoinette adds that the system operates best under controlled conditions with proper moisture and aeration. Within two to three weeks, the larvae mature and the residue left behind becomes organic manure suitable for crops.

She emphasises that this method reduces waste, lowers fertiliser costs and improves soil fertility, making it ideal for farmers seeking sustainable and affordable farming solutions.

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