

CAC
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DAX
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Govt urged to fund silk farming to boost exports

By Francis Emorut

The Government has been asked to fund entomology scientists to teach farmers to increase silk farming production and boost its export.

The silk industry has been posting dismal performance with the last financial year fetching only about \$12,000 (about sh43m) from silk yarn only \$4,506 (about sh16m) from finished silk scarves, said Henry Lule, senior entomologist at the agriculture ministry said.

This was during training for members of Kawanda Silk Crafts Association as well as Wakiso district women councillors, at the Kawanda Agricultural Research Institute on Monday.

Lule said there is need to increase the mulberry trees, which are essential in silk products, by sensitising people to take on the project. Silk trees are grown in less than 10 districts of Uganda. With most silk worms being reared by women in small farmer groups.

Lule said other than silk worms, the mulberry tree has



Luyimbazi (in neck tie) and other officials examine silk cloth at the research centre in Kawanda on Monday. Photo by Francis Emorut

other benefits such as mulberry fruits, mulberry tea, vegetables from its leaves, generation of biogas for energy and livestock feeds.

According to the principal entomologist at the agriculture ministry, Christine Asaba, silk growing is predominant in the districts of Kiruhura, Bushenyi, Kabarole, Kanungu, Kamuli, Iganga, Luwero, Mubende and Wakiso.

Asaba said of 2,300 targeted farmers only 350 are engaged in silk production. She

attributed the low production to lack of silk worm rearing houses, inadequate funding and equipment. She said the market for silk products is available in Japan, US, China, Hong Kong, South Africa and Egypt. Its products include silk clothes, scarfs and handbags.

Frederick Luyimbazi, the commissioner for entomology at the agriculture ministry, urged district officials to support the training of silk farmers to boost incomes and increase exports. He said his

department will offer a two-week training programme during field visits in different parts of the country.

According to Luyimbazi, there is lack of follow-up by district authorities to encourage people to grow silk.

He stressed that community sensitisation and mobilisation is critical to create awareness on the value of silk production. Silk is a natural protein fibre woven after a silkworm cocoon is spun, and then carefully woven into textile.