Banana cakes, biscuits hit the market

Adoptable ideas

By Joshua Kato

"We are now exporting *tooke* flour," Martin Ssali, the marketing officer, Presidential Initiative on Banana Development (PIBID), said during, the recent farmers show in Jinja. The initiative was started by President Yoweri Museveni in 2005, to add value to bananas, especially *matooke*. For over 10 years now, the team has been carrying out research about bananas and products. At Jinja, there were biscuits and cakes too, processed from bananas. Other products include porridge flour, flakes, bread, instant *tooke* foods and soups made from *matooke*.



Ssali from PIBID displays some of the products during at the Jinja agricultural show

About the banana

Banana is a tropical fruit with a pleasant taste, which is widely consumed worldwide. Bananas have wide acceptance due to their attractive flavour and nutritional value.

Ugandans consume the highest amount of bananas per capita in the world and are the second biggest producer after India. According to the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Africans annually consume 21kg of banana and plantain per capita, but Ugandans consume 250kg per year or more than half of one kg per day. In fact, Ugandans use the same word for food as the name of the local banana dish *matooke*. Dr Florence Muranga, the head of the PIBID, explains further: "Bananas for food are harvested between 17 21 weeks while those for juice will be harvested from 21 weeks and above as they ripen onwards. Bananas for processing into starch are harvested from 9 to 15 weeks because in this maturity range, the quantity and quality of starch is highest," she says.

Banana products

Banana products include porridge flour, flakes, cakes, bread, instant *tooke* foods and soups made from *matooke*



Processing banana flour

PIBID has got the most ambitious project of processing flour from bananas, with their *Tooke* brand of products. According to Dr Muranga, PIBID has now commercialised the flour and other products, at their plant in Bushenyi. This, she says will help absorb large tonnes of bananas from the market. Ssali, a marketing officer at PIBID said at full capacity the factory consumes 32 tonnes of fresh bananas per month. According to Ssali, to produce the plant needs 332 tonnes of bananas. "We are producing 10 tonnes at the moment," he said.

"The bananas are taken through an elaborate drying process, before the flour is packed," Ssali says.

Farmers to benefit

The factory buys banana from farmers in kilogrammes through the co-operatives at sh600 per kilogramme of fresh *matooke*, which according to him is a better price than the one on the open market prices. Since the average weight of a bunch is 30kg, this means that the farmer gets about sh18,000 per bunch. In an area where prices average sh12,000, the farmer makes more money. According to Ssali, they are currently buying bananas from six co-operatives in Bushenyi and areas, such as Mbarara.

"Now that we are now producing banana products commercially, we are going to expand production and then increase the amount of bananas we buy from people," he said. Farmers have equally welcomed the commercialisation of the research. "It has taken quite a long time that some of us had given up. But now we can sell our bananas to a steady market," observed Steven Natukunda, a farmer n Ishaka.

Exported and sold locally

According to Ssali, while the biscuits and cookies are sold in local supermarkets, the *tooke* flour is exported to countries in Asia and Europe.

"We export one to two tonnes per month," he said. The flour for export is packed in 10kg and 25kg bags, with each kilogramme sold at US$6 or sh22,000. It is expensive compared to other flours because it is a versatile, gluten free flours on the international market," Ssali says. Gluten is a plant protein, found in mainly grains, that most people have no trouble digesting. However, in people who are gluten-intolerant or suffer from coeliac disease, gluten causes inflammation in the small intestines. Following a gluten-free diet is the only way for these people to eliminate their symptoms, which may include chronic diarrhoea, vomiting, weight loss, fatigue and delayed growth. Banana flour can certainly off this alternative.

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