

Grow your money on pine trees



A tree farmer checks his young pine trees FILE PHOTO.

For many Ugandans, tree growing especially the pines is becoming the real deal as farmers regard it a long term investment, writes **Desire Mbabaali**.

The current deforestation challenges that Uganda faces is among the reasons Synergy Partners Uganda ventured into the tree growing business in Nakasongola.

At their Amaya tree estate that seats on 1,000 acres with 10,000 pine trees, James Otimong, the plantation supervisor takes us through the pine growing process from plantation to harvesting.

Why pine trees

Otimong explains that pine trees were chosen because Nakasongola is an arid area, yet pine survives better in such conditions because it is an adoptive species.

He also adds that for better establishment of the trees, it is always best to plant in the first season of the year – which normally

200,000

AMOUNT OF MONEY SYNERGY PARTNERS UGANDA MAKES SELLING EACH PINE TREE

runs from February – May. "This is favourable because trees utilise the rain in these months and the rains in the second season in the year from August-October because pine is water dependent," said Otimong.

Tree management

Tree management is a crucial aspect in tree growing as the plantation supervisor urges, in the three year period from planting. "After pruning – at three years, you are now waiting for harvesting – which is done after eight years, but even at six years, one can start harvesting, because there is also what we call thinning. Some trees are removed, so that the remaining ones grow bigger," he says.

Risks, pests and diseases

Some of the risks of tree growing

PLANTING

Initially we do bush clearing followed by lining out. The lining out is done using a calibrated line. For pine, the planting is three meters by three, so the lining out is done to help show where you will dig the pits," James Otimong says.

The pits are dug not too deep and not too shallow, because when it is too shallow, the top soil gets dry and the seedling will die.

Deep holes help the trees to penetrate deeper.

The hole should be 30-40 inches down and then the seedlings are planted.

Care for the seedling is paramount – just like a baby who needs to be taken well care of, one ought to consider that they keep the seedlings free of weed because when the weeds grow nearer them, they compete for nutrients with the weeds.

are wild fires especially during the dry season.

"These are normally caused by smokers or other people who make fires in plantations. To guard against that, we create fire lines on the forest – which are unoccupied spaces between the forest and our neighbour's boundaries," Otimong says.

Pine trees are also normally attacked by Ringbark disease which attacks them right from the nursery.

The plant starts to dry from the tip to the bottom or colouring from green to yellow and eventually dies.

This however is controlled by spraying chemicals such as Nimrod.

"The pests include mole rats – which excavate the ground down the pine tree for housing. So they cut the roots making the tree wither and die," he says.

Nakasongola is also disturbed by termites, but the advantage of pine is that it is not susceptible to termites as long as it is alive, save when it has been cut down.

Financial benefits

"Growing pine is really profitable. It is an investment where you keep your money growing on trees, and after a period of at least six years, a single tree can fetch you about Shs200,000 – Shs250,000 since large timber of 6X2 or 12X1 inches can be got from the pole," Otimong says. Jaffar Tonda, the team leader at the tree estate also hopes that they will eventually establish a factory on the plantation to process the trees to timber, and to add value to the product increasing profitability.

NOTE

- About 400 seedlings of pine are recommended on every acre of land.

- Each seedling costs about Shs500.

- Cost of clearing an acre of land is about Shs200,000.

- Cost of planting seedlings on an acre is about Shs80,000.

trending now> ONION FARMERS FORM COOPERATIVE FOR MARKETING

BY TOBBIAS JOLLY OWINY

Onion farmers in Kigezi region have formed a cooperative society to address onion marketing and pricing challenges the region has faced for decades.

Kayonza Onion Growers and Traders Cooperative Society Limited headquartered at Rwahi trading Centre in Rukiga District, was certified last month and has already started giving farmers trainings on onion production, marketing and post-harvest management.

Fred Tukundane, the society secretary told Daily Monitor that they had previously been losing millions of



shillings to middlemen who offer very low prices for their onions because of low bargaining powers.

"We are happy that the society

will empower us to have a voice to influence the market pricing and get great gains for our onions as well as afford transport means to take our onions to better markets," Tukundane said.

The society now brings together 210 onion farmers from Kabale, Rukiga, Ntungamo, Kisoro, Kanungu and Rukungiri districts.

"Marketing centres in those districts will be under our influence and we shall sell our onions in a uniform price because we have been losing thousands of tons of onions in irregular deals from middlemen and buyers who cheat us terribly," Tukundane added.

Through the membership

contributions, farmers will be able to borrow money and buy chemicals to spray their crops as well as hire vehicles to transport onions to better markets according to him.

Meanwhile Elvis Namanya a farmer said forming the society was after months of mobilization and trainings by House of Seeds Uganda, a local organisation promoting onion growing in the region.

"They (House of Seeds) trained us and financed us to mobilise ourselves and form the society. With the society we can now hire a vehicle to transport our onion produce to the market, bargain better and also sell at a uniform price," Namanya said.