

Sweet money from drying apple bananas

After adding value, Fauza Naluyange earns more than 100 per cent than previous to the apple bananas, writes **FRED MUZAALE**.

Apple banana, locally known as *ndizzi*, is a popular delicacy. It is, however, also eaten by some people exclusively, when they are hungry.

A cluster of the apple bananas goes for between Shs1,000 and Shs4,000, depending on its size and where you buy it.

Because the fruit is highly perishable, traders often sell them at giveaway prices as they hurriedly sell them, for fear of going bad.

However, Fauza Naluyange, a resident of Kitabaazi village in Kangulumira Sub-county, Kayunga District three years ago found out that she could earn more by adding value to the apple bananas.

How she started

Naluyange says she started drying apple bananas in 2015. As a farmer, Naluyange says, she owns a plantation with several varieties of bananas.

She says, previously she used to sell the apple bananas to traders, who paid her Shs2,000, for a bunch.

"I discovered the middleman was raking a lot of money from my sweat because they would sell at Shs7,000 a bunch bought at a farm gate price of Shs2,000," Naluyange says and adds, "I got angry when I discovered the traders were earning more than myself in just a few hours yet I spend a lot of time looking after the plantation."

She adds that, in the neighborhood of Kisega village, there were two farmers, who were carrying out solar drying of pineapples. They encouraged her to dry the bananas because their clients wanted them.

To kick off the project, Naluyange used her savings of Shs350,000, to make solar driers, trays and to pay for the labour.

She then harvested 15 mature bunches of apple bananas from her garden.



Workers place apple banana on a raised rack for drying PHOTO BY FRED MUZAALE

Naluyange says she then kept them in a dry and clean store, to ripen.

Naluyange has since been overwhelmed and today she buys extra bananas from neighbouring plantations to regularly sustain her project.

She says she buys a bunch at between Shs7,000 and Shs8,000 from Nakifuma farmers. From a bunch, Naluyange gets two kilogrammes of dried fruit.

She sells a kilogramme of the dried bananas at Shs12,000. That means from one bunch she gets Shs24,000 and when she deducts

the Shs8,000 which is the cost of one bunch, she gets Shs16,000 as profits.

Market

In a week, Naluyange says, she sells 200 kilogrammes of the dried fruit to the Source of the Nile (FON) and Jakana Foods plus super markets in Jinja, Kampala and Mukono.

FON is her biggest market. This means in one week she earns Shs2,400,000 and when she deducts all the expenses, she says she remains with Shs1,500,000 per week in profits.

The process

Naluyange says only mature bananas should be harvested and stored in a clean and dry store.

She says it is however, good to harvest mature but not ripe sweet bananas because if they all get ripe at the same time, she cannot dry all

of them at once.

Besides all this, high levels of proper sanitation and hygiene should be observed in order to produce high quality produce.

Challenges

The biggest challenge Naluyange faces is the limited supply of the apple bananas on the market. This, she says, is because the banana wilt disease has wiped out most of the sweet banana plants in the area.

Also, she competes in terms of prices with traders, who export the bananas to South Sudan, as these ones hike the prices.

"Because of this, I have to pay higher prices to get the bananas," she says.

Secondly, the cost of solar driers is high with a drier going for Shs500,000. This is because she has to dig deep into her pockets to buy a new one every eight months. This is so because the materials are highly eroded by the high temperatures.

Achievements

Naluyange has been able to buy more pieces of land using proceeds from the venture. She has planted more bananas on the land to expand her banana plantation and also grow other crops.

Future plans

Naluyange is targeting to expand her market by exporting to Europe and North Africa.

STEPS IN DRYING SWEET BANANAS



The mature apple banana is harvested and stored in a dry and clean store to ripen. When they ripen after four days, the skin is removed and the flesh sliced into equal pieces using a knife, which are then placed on clean trays. The trays containing the sliced bananas are then placed in solar driers, which are then closed. After two to three days they are dry and ready for packing.

shs 1.5m

AMOUNT OF MONEY NALUYANGE MAKES AS PROFITS PER WEEK

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