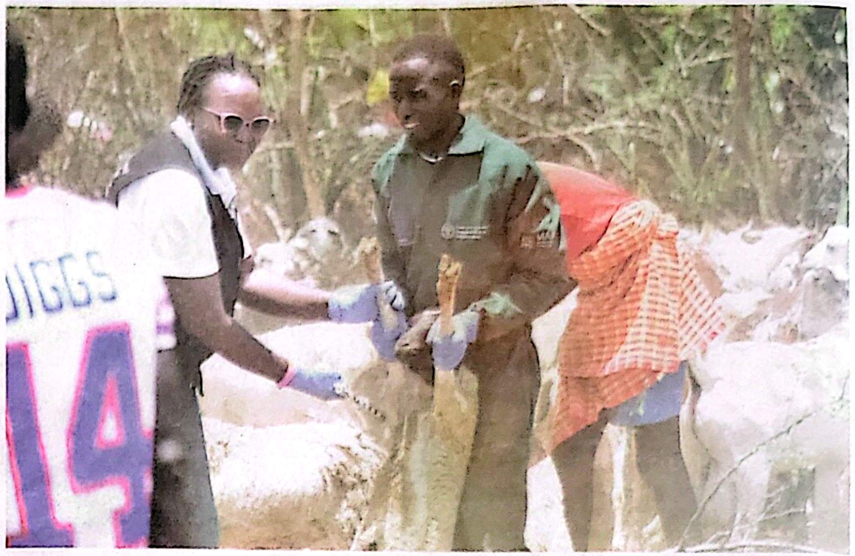
From surplus to security: Uganda's drive to boost farmer incomes



According to statistics, Uganda's agricultural sector has posted record growth, cementing its role as the backbone of the economy. Exports rose to $4.175 billion (Shs14.8 trillion) in FY2024/25, accounting for nearly 39 percent of the country's total exports.

BY RACHEAL NABISUBI

Uganda's agricultural transformation is entering a new phase, one that goes beyond boosting yields to ensuring that what is grown is protected, stored, and marketed effectively.

Maj. Gen. David Kasura Kyomukama, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF), says post-harvest handling is now at the heart of Uganda's agricultural strategy.

"Uganda loses up to 40 percent of its food through post-harvest loss. That is unacceptable. We must ensure that what farmers produce actually reaches the market and contributes to their prosperity," Gen. Kasura explains.

To tackle this, he notes that government and local researchers are rolling out innovations across the value chain.

Adding that cold chains, warehouse receipting systems, and modern silos are being introduced to reduce spoilage and give farmers financial leverage. "With warehouse receipting, farmers can borrow against their produce instead of selling it off cheaply after harvest. This keeps food safe, stabilises prices, and empowers farmers financially," Gen. Kasura notes.

Mechanisation centres are being revived, offering affordable tractor hire at between Shs50,000 and Shs80,000 per acre.

He notes that, combined with irrigation, these services help farmers produce consistently and reduce the risks of drought.

Fertiliser factories and vaccine production facilities are also being established, including Uganda's first anti-tick vaccine factory built and run entirely by Ugandans to protect livestock and reduce losses.

"Uganda loses approximately $1.1 billion each year due to ticks and tick-related diseases in cattle, with around 387 million dollars spent annually on importing a vaccine. This loss equates to over Shs 4 trillion due to ticks," he says.

According to Gen. Kasura, the use of ineffective mixtures to combat ticks has led to the issue of tick resistance.

Adding: "Our researchers, purely Ugandan, without any donor aid launched an anti-tick vaccine produced in a factory built and managed by Ugandans. This is a significant step towards enhancing productivity and reducing losses in the cattle keeping sector in Uganda."

Agriculture as a business

Gen. Kasura emphasises that post-harvest handling is not just about storage, it is about turning agriculture into a business.

"We want factories for juice, dried fruit, coffee, and avocado oil. Value addition increases demand for raw materials, raises farm-gate prices, and ensures farmers prosper," he says.

Adding that innovation is already reshaping productivity. Improved seed varieties and better genetics are enabling farmers to harvest up to 35 bags of maize per acre, compared to just 700 kilograms with traditional seed.

"With fertiliser and proper weeding, yields can double again, reaching nearly five

LOSSES

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tonnes per acre. In dairy, small demonstration farms are producing over 200 litres of milk daily from just 10 cows, while poultry enterprises are proving more profitable than salaried positions," he says.

Uganda's agricultural future, he insists, depends on protecting what is grown. "Innovation, research, and post-harvest handling are the pillars. When farmers prosper, Uganda prospers."

According to statistics, Uganda's agricultural sector has posted record growth, cementing its role as the backbone of the economy. Exports rose to $4.175 billion (Shs14.8 trillion) in FY2024/25, accounting for

try's total exports. This marks a dramatic leap from $1.66 billion (Shs5 trillion) in FY2020/21, underscoring agriculture's growing importance, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF).

The agriculture ministry reports that 73 percent of the 96 manifesto targets set in 2021 have already been achieved, with progress concentrated on areas that deliver the greatest impact on household incomes and export earnings. These include research and extension services, improved genetics, pest and disease control, mechanisation, irrigation, post-harvest handling, value addition, and expanded market access.

"These interventions are not only boosting productivity but also ensuring resilience against climate shocks and market fluctuations. By focusing on value addition and post-harvest handling, Uganda is moving beyond subsistence farming to a modern, export-driven agricultural economy," Gen. Kasura adds.

Vaccination of livestock is one of the interventions the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal, Industry and Fisheries is using to boost productivity. PHOTO/ TREVOR LUTALO