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MAIZE PRICES TAKE A NOSE-DIVE

Maize is a food crop grown in most parts of the country. last year its prices unusually shot up due to the crop failure after a long dry spell that ravaged Uganda. However, beginning last month, the prices of the grain took a significant nose-dive to record lows as Shs1,000 a kilogramme. **Tom Brian Angurini** writes.

Retail prices of maize have plummeted in several parts of the country, thanks to bumper harvest, which has flooded the market.

It should be noted that towards the final bend of last year, prices of maize and most of its products such as flour had more than doubled with the grain in particular hitting records highs in the history of Uganda to Shs2,500 per kilo.

The sharp increase in the prices was a result of the prolonged drought that brought about massive crop failures in the maize growing regions like Bunyoro and eastern Uganda.

However, a mini survey conducted by Seeds of Gold early this week at St Balikudembe market indicates the grain has had its price plummet to as low as Shs1,000 and Shs1,100 a kilogramme.

Just last year and early this year the same amount sold for a price between Shs2,000 and Shs2,500 of the same quantity and quality.

Maize harvested last season is no longer available on the markets implying retailers are now dealing in fresh harvests.

With a kilo falling sharply to Shs1,000 and Shs1,100 depending on variety, retail prices of bagfuls weighing 100kilos each have dropped from Shs250, 000 to between Shs100, 000 and Shs110, 000.

Monica Ajio, a maize crop dealer, who also owns a produce cubicle at St Balikudembe Market, said maize harvested from Masindi and eastern Uganda commands higher prices due to its quality. "Generally the prices have fallen due to the big harvest. The farmers from Masindi have one of the best varieties and we are buying from them at Shs1,100 a kilo," said Ajio who also operates a popular restaurant that deals in maize foods at Arua Park.

Ajio says a cross section of owners of small scale grinding millers in and around Kampala suburbs prefer maize from Masindi.

While acknowledging the abundant rains, Richard Musagazi, the managing director of pearl seeds says the bumper harvest in maize and other cereals is a demonstration the farmers planted the correct variety.

"Farmers got good seeds leading to good yields and they have been controlling the armyworm so most of what they planted was also harvested," he said.

South Sudan factor

According to Musagazi the volatile situation in South Sudan means a limitation in exports of the grain to the war torn country.

"South Sudan was consuming a lot of our maize and the market in that country was very good. With the uncertainties brought by unending war it means most of our maize will be sold locally," Musagazi says.

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THE CURRENT COST OF A KILO GRAMME OF MAIZE GRAIN IN BALIKUDEMBE MARKET



