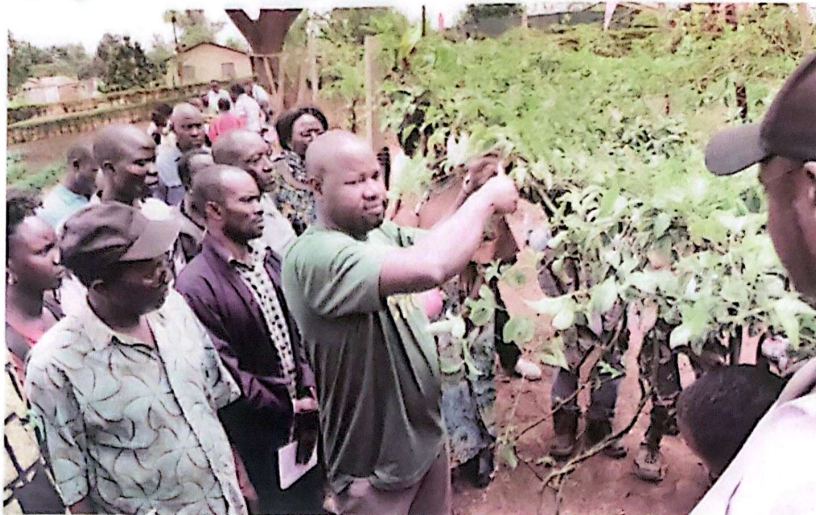


Squeezing money from passion fruits



Julius Ahagaana (in green) demonstrates to farmers how to prune passion fruits. PHOTO BY ALEX ESAGALA

There is a mad rush for passion fruit production as the market demand soars through the roof, writes **Denis Bbosa**

The ongoing dry season has continued to prove why passion fruit farming is almost a must to many farmers in Uganda. The reasons for growing passion fruit are numerous but the high market demand stands out.

Annet Nalubwama, a passion trader at Nakasero Market in Central Kampala says she purchases a bag at Shs600,000 from Mukono District and makes a turnover within 12 hours. Such is the high rate at which the price of passion fruit has skyrocketed.

According to Julius Ahagaana, the acting farm manager of Makerere University Agricultural Research Institute-Kabanyolo (Muarik), farmers country wide that invested in the enterprise are laughing their way to the bank at the moment.

"Passion fruit requires less space to have a reasonable investment. It does not require full land culti-

vation, so the cost of seed bed preparation is low," Ahagaana says.

The passion fruit expert says the crop grows faster and the returns are realised in a relatively short period of time. That is to say; flowering takes place in three months after transplanting.

With the insatiable local and international market, Ahagaana advises prospective farmers to grow the types that have a hard outer coat because of a relatively longer shelf life which makes marketing easier at distance and allows time before going bad.

More in value addition

Apart from being consumed as a beverage in homes, passion fruits rake in income through saving that would be made on purchases for home consumption.

That said, it is a medicine to over 64 diseases in humans, source of raw material for honey build up by the bees, for the case of bee keepers. Passion fruit can be grown at any time of the year and the flowering takes place throughout the year provided the light and water source is guaranteed.

600,000

THE COST OF A BAG OF PASSION FRUITS

How farmers can reap money from passion fruit

Apart from getting money from the sale of passion fruits, more money comes in from the processing of the pulp to add more value to it and preserve it for future time consumption.

It is more paying if the farmer grows the purple sweet variety that is more marketable.

The venture is more profitable if as much as possible the farmer strives to sell to the final consumer and reduce on the chain of the middle men.

Best time of planting

Passion fruits can be grown at any time of the year provided water supply is guaranteed.

However it is much easier at the

onset of the rains especially for the conventional farmers. According to Ahagaana, passion fruit is largely a biannual crop that will require irrigation to cross from one season to another. Simply put, cunning farmers should target to harvest in dry periods like now.

Exporting passion fruit

The market for passion fruit is far reaching and ranges from the local market to international.

However it is more paying to export to high paying companies or alternatively turn to passion fruit processing companies like "Jupeter Agro Consults Limited" that pay a little more and can purchase as much as the farmers may have.

They also do contract farming where they provide on-farm agronomic consultancy, approved seedlings and also assure the market for all the quality produce from their clients.

Choosing the best varieties

There is nothing like best types of passion fruit, the tastes and preferences of the customer or consumer dictate what the farmer should produce.

Farmers are encouraged to always carry out a serious market survey to establish what the customers will want most and pay for.

Challenges persist

There still exist quite a number of challenges that range from drought that can impair flowering and subsequent fruit formation.

Diseases traumatise the crops especially those that are viral.

Poor and low yielding types also affect the overall produce. Interestingly the high market demand also breeds theft of the crop on the farm.

Lest I forget, the pests especially insects can cause the crop to be retarded in growth in addition to spreading of the diseases like woodiness virus.

Lack of dependable managerial structure and agronomic knowledge and skills by the farmers also deters proper production.

Lastly, the fertility levels in most of the soils around is very low, so farmers have to do a great deal of fertilisation of gardens.

trending now> HOW TO STORE EGGS

We know a lot of people like to throw away the egg carton when they get home and store their eggs in the little egg containers that comes with your fridge or in a separate bowl.

This may look pretty, but we recommend always storing your eggs in their original carton. Why? Firstly, the carton protects the eggs and prevents them from absorbing strong odours and flavours of other foods in your fridge through the thousands of tiny pores in the egg shell.

Secondly, eggs should always be stored with the large end up, the same way they are packaged in the carton. This helps the yolk remain centered.

Other tips

- Eggs should not be stored on the refrigerator door, but in the main body of the refrigerator to ensure that they keep a consistent and cool temperature.
- Leftover raw egg whites and yolks should be put in airtight containers and stored in the refrigerator immediately. To prevent yolks from drying out, cover them with a little cold water. Drain the water

before using.

- When storing hard-cooked eggs, you may notice a "gassy" odour in your refrigerator. The odour is caused by hydrogen sulphide, which forms when eggs are cooked. It's harmless and usually dissipates in a few hours.
- If you are selling eggs, you are advised to have a cold room where the unsold eggs are stored to keep them fresh for another day.

How to tell if eggs are fresh

The easiest way to tell if your eggs

are fresh is by the Best Before Date on your egg carton, so it's best to always keep your eggs stored in their original carton. Here are a few more simple ways to determine the freshness of your eggs:

- Grade A eggs have a firm white, a small air cell at the wide end and a centered yolk.
- A fresh egg will sink in water while an older egg will float. As an egg ages, the size of the air cell inside increases, causing it to float.
- In a fresh egg, the yolk sits up high, and the white is thick and closely surrounds the yolk.

