

Luweero coffee farmers, dealers to enforce standards

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LUWEERO. Coffee farmers and dealers in Luweero District have resolved to support the crackdown by the Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA) on those trading in green substandard berries.

The group, through their umbrella association, Luweero Coffee Dealers and Farmers Association, want a revision of the penalties given to illegal coffee dealers and thieves.

They say the current penalties are not harsh since the offenders easily pay off the fines and engage in the same illegal deals, something which compromises coffee standards and fuels coffee theft.

"We have offenders who are fined Shs200,000 in Courts of law. We have also seen the authority confiscate green and substandard coffee beans, but there is no proper follow up on the offenders.

"We believe that a deterrent punishment which includes long prison sentence could be a good lesson. We are not safe as farmers because the thieves now go to the gardens at night and harvest the green berries, Mr Samuel Kabali," a

farmer from Kabakedi Village in Luweero Town Council said during a meeting in Luweero recently.

According to Mr Hillary Odoch, the commissioner Agriculture Police, the responsibility to protect coffee standards is not entirely on government agencies.

Shs1,700

Selling price. The amount of money that a kilogramme of raw coffee beans fetches on the market.

He said if dealers stop buying the unripe beans from suspected thieves and dishonest farmers, then the market will stabilise.

"This is what we must all do because we have equal roles to play. It is not true that the penalties set against those dealing in substandard coffee are weak," he said.

"We have also learnt about dealers that sign contracts with farmers who end up harvesting unripe berries because they

need the money. You need to be careful because if we get this coffee at your factory, you will go to prison and lose business," Mr Odoch told the members.

Currently, a kilo of unprocessed coffee is at Shs2,600 in parts of Luweero District while the processed one goes for Shs5,200 per kg.

According to the farmers and dealers association, unscrupulous dealers purchase a kilogramme of raw coffee beans at Shs1,700 from some of the farmers who end up selling them the green beans mixed with the ripe ones.

"Our problem calls for strict penalties. If we can have a coffee thief punished severely, then the cases of coffee theft will decrease. We need to see a thief losing a hand or leg to send a strong signal to the would be offenders," Mr Hussein Kamali, a farmer from Lusanja in Katikamu Sub-county said

Under the current penal code, any person dealing in unripe coffee beans to compromise the coffee standard is liable to a sentence of up to three months in jail. The farmers claim the penalty is weak because many do not serve the sentence but simply pay court fine.