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Vanilla garden. Mr Jackson Luzze, a farmer from Ssi Sub-county covers his vanilla garden recently. PHOTO BY DENNIS SSEBWAMI

Vanilla by-law attracts mixed reactions in Buikwe

Farmers. Buikwe District has an estimated 11,000 vanilla farmers.

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BUIKWE. Vanilla farmers in Buikwe District who have to protect their crop from thieves will have to hire security personnel vetted by the Uganda Police Force.

Further more, they will have to sell their vanilla at gazetted outlets that are yet to be established whereas the buyers will have to transport the crop during the day.

The three are proposals contained in a draft by-law by Buikwe District authorities.

The by-law will affect farmers in Ngowe, Ssi, Najja, Kawolo, Buikwe Rural, Najjembe Division and Buikwe Town Council sub-counties where vanilla is grown on large scale.

The by-law comes in the wake of reports of theft of vanilla pods from gardens and claims by farmers that the middlemen cheat them.

Buikwe District chairperson Mathias Kigongo says: "We are optimistic the proposed by-law will help us solve this problem [of stealing vanilla]."

He says some of the private security guards that farmers hire to guard their gardens are not trustworthy.

Such private guards, he says, connive with thieves to steal the farmers' crop.

"That is the reason why I want this by-law passed by the district council as soon as possible before the harvest season starts," Mr Kigongo says.

"The by-law is effective in the districts of Bundibugyo and Masindi. So we want to do the same in Buikwe so that the farmers can really benefit from their sweat," he says.

However, a section of farmers have opposed the proposed by-law, arguing that it is being hurriedly pushed before a wider consultation with the stakeholders.

KEY ISSUE

Concern. The by-law will affect farmers in Ngowe, Ssi, Najja, Kawolo, Buikwe Rural, Najjembe Division and Buikwe Town Council sub-counties where vanilla is grown on large scale.

The proposed by-law has raised concerns from a section of farmers who claim that there could be a calculated ploy to push a particular group of farmers out of business.

According to Mr Yunus Lubwama, the chairperson of Mukono Vanilla Association, many farmers cannot afford to hire security guards to protect their plantations.

"That is the reason why some farmers are harvesting and selling immature vanilla to avoid losing the crop to thieves," he said recently.

Mr Ignatius Bwojji, a councillor representing Nkokonjeru Town Council, said the by-law should not be passed by the district council before farmers are consulted.

"We cannot just pass a by-law that is going to affect farmers without consulting them. We do not want to face the same challenges as it is with the sugarcane growers," Mr Bwojji said in an interview.

Mr Dunstan Walumbe, a councillor representing Ngogwe sub-county, said: "We need to first meet farmers and interpret the law to them [and] then we pass the by-law after capturing their views," he says.

Vanilla is a source of livelihood for many farmers not only in Buikwe but also in Kayunga, Mukono, Mpigi, Jinja, Kamuli, Buikwe, Bundibugyo, Luweero and Kasese districts.

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