

How to earn Shs20m from an acre



A worker weeds his garden. Inset a farmer holds mature pumpkin. FILE PHOTOS

On just one acre, a farmer who takes into account proper agronomy practices will earn more than Shs20m from growing pumpkins, writes **Desire Mbabaali**

Pumpkins are very nutritious and have currently grown to become very profitable fruits. In this article, experts share on how farmers can grow pumpkins, best practices, and the market and how one can earn from growing pumpkins.

Planting

Using an acre of land as our baseline, one then prepares their garden for planting, doing the first and second ploughing. Dr Allan Ahimbisibwe, director Spark Agro initiatives Limited says, "After preparing your land well, dig up holes of 2ft wide and 2ft deep and 10ft X 10ft spacing. Then mix the top soil with well decomposed manure and put it back into the hole."

Maurine Lorothe, a researcher in pumpkin growing at the National

Semi Arid Resources Research Institute (NaSARRI) adds that the pumpkin thrives on an adequate supply of water thus one should consider planting during a rainy season.

"There is also a number of species which are usually categorised in regard to the different regions of Uganda where they come from. But the first way to secure a market before you even plant is to find out the variety popular to the region where one is located," she advises.

After making the holes, get hold of the pumpkin seeds and put two to three seeds per hole at 4-5inches deep, meaning one is able to plant in 450 holes in an acre if they maintain the 10ft X 10 spacing.

"Also ensure good drainage as water logged areas can't support pumpkins," Dr Ahimbisibwe

Best practices

Lorothe cautions farmers to take care and weed their pumpkin gardens early. As the fruits grow, some may be removed (thinning) to enable others grow bigger.

"Take care to remove all perennial weeds before planting. As the pumpkins grow, the tendrils cannot compete with weeds so hand weeding should be done," she says.

Furthermore, when the pumpkin fruits begin to grow bigger, Lorothe says that they should not seat on the ground.

"The farmer then gets dry grass and puts it beneath the pumpkin fruits to prevent them from the seating on the ground," she says.

She also notes that pumpkins

notes.

are not very susceptible to pests and diseases, though these may not be totally absent.

"Once in a while, it may be attacked by powdery mildew and viruses. The melon fly may also attack the pumpkins so traps and bait should be hung in the field; at least four traps per acre," Lorothe says.

If possible one ought to get a full training and good quality seeds before they can start growing pumpkins, says Dr Ahimbisibwe.

Harvesting

"After 90 days (two and a half - three months), one can start harvesting their pumpkin. The beauty with pumpkins is that they have a long shelf life of almost six months," Dr Ahimbisibwe says.

Lorothe also says that some of the telltale signs of maturity include paling of the pumpkin's colour to a dull one and the fruit's link to the plant becomes dry and shriveled.

Input

Dr Ahimbisibwe estimates the required inputs for one acre and their costs, though these may differ from one farm supplier to another.

- Land preparation including ploughing costs Shs250,000.
- Pumpkin seeds Shs50,000.
- Planting Shs100,000.
- Fertiliser Shs100,000.
- Pesticides Shs100,000.
- Weeding, pruning, thinning, spraying Shs150,000.
- Other costs Shs100,000.
- Total costs of Shs850,000.

Output

"Assuming that each plant gives you 15 fruits, and you have 450 holes with 3 plants in each, this will total up to 20,250 pumpkin fruits from one acre of land. And assuming that we sell each fruit at Shs1,000, one's output will be Shs20,250,000," Dr Ahimbisibwe calculates.

Marketing

Whereas one may choose to sell the pumpkin fruits fresh, they could also add value like making pumpkin porridge powder and pumpkin juice among others. However, marketing starts with awareness as Dr Ahimbisibwe says, "Let everyone around you know you have pumpkins." One can start with; neighbours, friends relatives, WhatsApp and Facebook friends.

850,000

AMOUNT OF MONEY YOU NEED TO INVEST IN AN ACRE OF PUMPKINS