

The Omoro District agricultural officer acknowledges the outbreak of coffee leaf rust and coffee berry disease but blames farmers for failing to consult extension workers deployed at sub-counties across the district.

BY DANIEL OJARA

In the fertile pockets of Akidi Sub-county in the rural Omoro District, Mr Casar Oyaro hoped to secure a meaningful harvest for the second year since planting coffee five years ago.

Unfortunately, in mid-November 2025, three weeks after flowering, insects, whose name he does not know, attacked the three-acre plantation located at Tegot Parish. The entire plantation was destroyed.

"I planted three acres of Robusta coffee six years ago, in 2024 the first harvest came up, and last year, I hoped to get a bumper harvest, but we lost. The plantation was invaded by some flies that caused the leaves to develop powdery stuff and turn yellow before eventually the branches started to wither," Mr Oyaro explained.

He said his plants start flowering around November and December during the dry season, a period said to attract large numbers of insects.

He added that he does not know the right type or quantity of pesticide to apply when spraying the plantation.

"I don't understand the right quantity and the recommended pesticides. I should use it to combat such flies during the flowering season of coffee. Sometimes I don't want to use any pesticides for fear that I may use the wrong pesticides that might cause the plantation to dry up," Mr Oyaro stated.

#### Farmers embrace coffee growing

Between 2015 and 2018, supported by the then army-led Operation Wealth Creation (OWC), several farmers in Omoro took to coffee farming after it was identified as a key pillar in uplifting rural livelihoods because it is a perennial crop with a high market value.

However, several coffee farmers in the district are grappling with prevention or control of pests and diseases.

# Omoro farmers grapple with coffee diseases



Mr Peter Komakech inspects his coffee plantation, which has been affected by pests. PHOTO/DANIEL OJARA

1,471

The number of coffee farmers in Omoro District, according to official statistics. These farmers in 2023 produced 452 metric tonnes of coffee.

Besides Akidi Sub-county, farmers in Bobi, Lakwana, and Opit sub-counties have reported similar infestations, expressing fears that unless effective management and disease-resistant practices are adequately introduced among farmers, the surge in plant infections could spread further.

Mr Peter Komakech, another coffee grower from Parak Parish, Omoro, told the *Daily Monitor* that most of his plants got damaged a year ago and that he only remains with fewer than 400 plants out of the 1,500 trees he planted in 2019.

"In my first harvest in 2023, I got only half of a bag, which generated only Shs356,000. Second harvest last year, I got only one bag, and yet I was expecting to harvest two or three bags; it generated Shs572,000 only due to the impacted harvest," Mr Komakech said.

Another farmer, Mr Ivan Otika from Bobi Sub-county, said: "At the beginning, I was happy and expecting to generate good returns in the near future, but maintaining coffee is difficult during dry periods.

It was during the dry season of 2024

when I started discovering some tiny insects on the roots of the plants that made the trees dry off, while some flies were on leaves, causing the branches to turn yellow and dry off."

According to authorities, coffee leaf rust (CLR) and coffee berry disease (CBD) have been identified as the fungal-based diseases now drawing farmers into widespread losses due to diminishing bean quality and uncertainty.

#### Officials speak out

In an interview, Mr Ivan Oweka, the Omoro District agricultural officer, acknowledged the outbreak but blamed farmers for failure to consult with extension workers deployed at sub-counties across the district.

"The production department has staff at the sub-county level to support farmers in any technical advice on both coffee plantation and other crops, but [when] our farmers have problems, they don't contact such technical people," he said.

Mr Oweka added: "Coffee plantations were enrolled in Omoro District offi-

#### RESPONSE



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According to statistics, Omoro District has 1,471 coffee farmers, according to official statistics. These farmers in 2023 produced 452 metric tonnes of coffee.

The district has benefited from government initiatives, like Operation Wealth Creation, which distributed more than 500,000 coffee seedlings to farmers in the Acholi Sub-region, including Omoro District.

Some farmers in Omoro have expanded their farms, with one farmer growing coffee on about 10 acres.

Ongako Sub-county in Omoro is known for its coffee production. In 2023, Omoro District produced 452 metric tonnes of coffee from 1,471 farmers.

Bobi Sub-county, where farmers got 40,000 coffee seedlings and planted them on 40 acres, Lalogi Sub-county, where Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) handed over 20,000 Robusta RK coffee seedlings to farmers.

Ms Brenda Acan, a coffee extension service provider overseeing Acholi and Lango Sub-regions, said the technical challenge facing coffee growers in northern Uganda is that farmers are not utilising the services provided by extension workers and the coffee development authority.

"There are recommended pesticides that combat pests and diseases on coffee; the information can only be obtained from coffee extension workers or the production department in the district. No need for any farmers to buy unrecognised pesticides from open market shops, they must contact technical people before using any pesticides to avoid wasting money on fake inputs or causing damages on coffee," she said.

Ms Acan added: "But, many farmers are shifting to Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approaches, using cultural practices, biological controls, and resistant varieties due to a lack of technical knowledge, which is not yielding good productivity on coffee plantations."

In the Acholi Sub-region, Gulu, Omoro, and Amuru are emerging as key coffee-producing districts.

The sub-region is seeing increased investment in coffee farming, with government initiatives like Operation Wealth Creation and the Agriculture Cluster Development Project supporting farmers. Clonal Robusta varieties are being promoted for their resilience and high yields.

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