

Strange worms destroy potato gardens in Teso



Loss. A farmer weeds her potato garden that was ravaged by potato butterflies in Bukedea yesterday. PHOTO BY SIMON PETER EMWAMU

Disaster. They have since eaten up all the potato leaves and are now turning to the potato tubers

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BUKEDEA/KUMI. A swarm of strange green worms are ravaging hundreds of potato gardens in the districts of Bukedea and Kumi, leaving the sweet food crop with a bitter rather than its known sweet taste.

Farmers say they first saw the worms three weeks ago. They have since eaten up all the potato leaves and are now turning to the potato tubers in the areas of Kolir, Malera, Aloet, Kachumbala, Kidogole, Kamutur and Kanyum, Ongino, and Aterai in Kumi district.

Mr Jude Ongota, the Buke-

dea District agricultural officer, identified the worm as potato butterfly, which feeds heavily on the potato vines and can destroy an entire garden in a short time.

Ms Grace Amuria, a farmer in Aloet village, Bukedea whose entire garden has been ravaged by these worms, told *Daily Monitor* that they cannot eat the potatoes because the tubers are bitter.

"I can't even preserve them by drying because they are bitter and the effort we have invested in heaping the potatoes has all gone to waste," she said.

Ms Amuria said at this rate, securing potato vines for replanting next year would be costly since all the potato gardens are being reduced to

bare mounds by the swarm of worms.

Ms Irene Akiror, a farmer in Kachumbala Sub-county, said when she prepared a potato meal from her garden, the entire plateful of the potato meal was bitter.

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IRENE AKIROR, FARMER.

"I had banked my hopes on that garden to take me through this dry season, but that has now come to nothing," she said.

"We are appealing to the agri-

cultural department to come up with solutions to these worms," Ms Akiror added.

Mr Apedel Odea, the chairperson of Southern Division in Kumi Municipality, said the worms have also affected hundreds of gardens in Aterai, Oburur, leaving farmers in the areas desperate.

"It's a set-back and as we thought we were emerging from the previous food crisis, another disaster hits again," he said.

Mr Ongota urged the farmers whose potatoes have been affected to dig them out and dry in order to avoid total destruction.

"Those who can spray can try it out using rocket to safeguard the vines for future use," Mr Ongota said.