There is a lot we can get from banana

In Uganda, banana is mostly consumed as food but the whole plant can be a source of many more products. **Eseri Watsemwa** writes.

It is ironic that Uganda ranks second biggest producer of bananas and yet be in the 70th position among the exporters.

Statistics show that a consumption rate of one kilogramme of banana per person per day, which is incidentally the highest consumption rate of banana in the world.

This mismatch has pushed AfriBanana Products Ltd (ABP) to facilitating value addition so as to garner export earnings as well.

Kimani Muturi, a lecturer at Kyambogo University and ABP's director, says this is at the forefront of the banana value-addition revolution in the country.

During an interview at the ABP premises in Kampala, Muturi reveals that there is much more one can get from a banana beyond just consumption as part of diet.

"The banana plant as a whole is important," he says as he goes ahead to explain the various products that they make from banana.

Vacuum-sealed matooke

Since *matooke* is highly perishable, it is peeled and vacuum packed/vacuum sealed to give it a shelf life of four to six months when stored in a chilled condition.

Besides the small local market that comprises of schools and middle income shoppers, there are upcoming markets for these kind of bananas in Australia and Middle East.

A two-kilogramme packet of vacuum-sealed *matooke* goes for Shs 5,000.

"However, the challenge is the peeling culture of Ugandans bars some of them from purchasing the bananas. They would rather peel the matooke themselves," he notes.

Banana wine

Banana wine is widely produced in Uganda. It is made from ripe banana, which were initially thrown away.

TO NOTE

Since its inauguration in 2012, AfriBanana Products (ABP) has been able to commercialise over 12 innovations, including starting up new jobs. It also has a large base of service providers, consultants and support staff.

The wine is not any different from the ordinary wine on market since it undergoes the same processes.

In terms of value addition, one bunch of bananas weighing 25kg will give one around 30 litres of wine.

On the market, a 300ml bottle of wine costs Shs5,000 while a 700ml bottle costs Shs 15,000.

Therefore, one earns Shs600,000 from one bunch, giving him or her a profit of between Shs300,000 and 350,000.

There are a few more production costs such as water, yeast, sweeteners and other ingredients, but the profits are still huge.

"Producers take it upon themselves to change ingredients after mastering the process and we teach them how to brand their wine," says Muturi.

ABP has facilitated a number of people to produce banana wine.

"We get interested people and help them through technology transfer services, and offer them facilities that they do not have," he adds.

Banana juice

Banana juice does not reward a farmer as much as wine does as it provides $16 (Shs 57,920) from the same quantity.

However, he says, one of the largest producers, a beneficiary of ABP's Earn as You Learn programme produces 1,500 bottles per day.

Bags, mats, rugs

From banana fibre, there are a series of items such as biodegradable bags to replace the kaveera, and door mats and rugs.

Bio-degradable bags are supplied to companies that brand their packages such as Bella Wine Company.

Currently, Muturi, who is also a textiles expert, says ABP in collaboration with a university in Finland is exploring banana textile by developing 100 per cent banana mosquito net.

Briquettes and paper

These are made from banana waste such as dry matter, stems and leaves.

Biomass waste from fibre extraction and dried *matooke* peelings are dried, carbonised and pressed into briquettes, which are used for cooking.

According to Muturi, nothing should be wasted from a banana. The stems too are processed into fibre and used to produce different items such as lamp shades, sanitary towels and shoes, among others.

He also notes that results from research indicate that paper made from banana fibres is good for printing paper or bank notes.

In collaboration with the University of Finland, Muturi believes soon they will be able to produce hair braids for women.

"We also want to soften the banana fibre to the extent of cloth so it can be material for making cloths," he notes, nodding his head in approval.

Tissue culture seedlings

To get these tissue culture (TC) seedlings, a tissue is removed from a healthy stem and taken to the laboratory.

It is then coaxed, using laboratory methods, into developing into a disease-free and disease resistant crop while there.

TC banana protects farmers from losses due to diseases and there are no post-harvest losses. A seedling costs Shs4,000.

The other products that can be made from banana include the following; banana flavoured yoghurt, vinegar, banana flakes, candies, cosmetics and shoe polish, banana flour, used for baking bread and cake, jam for bread and well formulated animal



A chart illustrating the different products that can be made from a banana plant

The incubator



ABP is an agribusiness innovations incubator for banana value chain development. It aims at commercialising and upscaling innovations to improve entrepreneurial skills, marketing value chains and emphasises capacity building, for small and medium enterprises, among others.

The banana value chain agribusiness incubator support systems in Kampala and in Mbarara act as training centres and onsite business incubation facilities for anyone interested in banana production and value addition for their talents can be nurtured.

Additionally, ABP provides interested parties with equipment, links them to both local and international markets and manufacturing as well as provide them with capital.

"Our aim is to help small-scale entrepreneurs increase their earnings through value addition. Organisations such as Green Heat in Matugga, TexFad in Bweyogerere and Eco-Friendly Innovations in Kireka, support our incubation facilities in Kampala," Kimani Muturi, the ABP director, explains.

The business incubator has pushed a number of farmers into producing more banana, and expanding their plantations.

AfriBanana Products (ABP) works with organisations such as Africa Agribusiness Incubator Network (AAIN), Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (Fara), Uganda National Council for Science and Technology and National Agricultural Organisation (Naro), Curad and universities such as Kyambogo and Makerere, to achieve its goals.

expert's notes

The aim

We want to upscale what we are doing and to ensure that Uganda is widely known for exporting banana worldwide and place it where it is meant to be in value addition and other products.

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