

CURRENTLY, UGANDA PRODUCES MORE THAN FIVE METRIC TONNES OF CASSAVA ANNUALLY

By Agnes Nantambi.

Many cassava farmers and traders have been finding it difficult to engage in fresh cassava export because it is perishable. The cost of cold storage and transportation is high and out of reach.

This, however, has been answered by researchers from Namulonge Crop Research Institute, who have created wax which can keep cassava fresh for months.

Speaking during the visit of the officials from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, Dr Barbra Zawedde said cassava is one of the food crops with enough potential for export, but due to its perishability, its export in a fresh form had become very difficult.

Currently, Uganda produces more than five metric tonnes of cassava annually and this has been increasing over the years. Production in the last five years has increased from about three metric tonnes around 2011 and 2012 to about 5.2 metric tonnes at the moment.

"This has been due to the introduction of high yielding, disease resistant varieties and their adoption by farmers," Dr Ephraim Nuwamanya, a cassava researcher from the National Crops Resources Research Institute (NaCRRRI), explained.

He said cassava is an important source of food and income in Uganda and most developing countries at large, where by fresh cassava is widely consumed in both urban and rural areas as a snack and main meal.

Fresh cassava marketing has been growing and is currently an important source of income, the process of cassava waxing extends the shelf life of cassava allowing for extended marketing time.

He said the innovation

Cassava waxing solution to fresh exports dilemma



A team from the ministry of science touring a cassava garden in Namulonge. Photos by Agnes Nantambi

of cassava waxing was introduced under the Root, Tubers and Bananas (RTB)-ENDURE project with an aim of increasing the shelf life of such crops in Uganda.

"It is currently practiced in the western Uganda district of Kabarole and surrounding areas," Nuwamanya said.

How it works

He said the process involves the application of food grade wax also called edible paraffin wax on the cleaned and undamaged cassava roots and wax acts as a barrier between the root and the environment

CONSUMPTION

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hence cutting off all the factors that would lead to the deterioration of the root.

"With expected changes in technology, policy and prices,



Some of the waxed cassava and the wax being displayed

cassava could play an even greater role in improving the quality of urban diets by increasing supplies of a low cost staple food in easy-to-cook forms," he said.

He said waxing is meant to introduce cassava as a cheap source of calories to consumers

in fresh form, but also with ability to store for many days.

According to Nuwamanya, research indicates that waxed cassava can remain fresh for up to three weeks (21 days). However, the highest quality is assured within 14 to 21 days. "Despite the opportunity

that cassava presents, its full potential in terms of contributing to food security and income generation, this has not yet been fully realised.

This is due to a number of challenges including its bulkiness, high perishability, poor postharvest management and high postharvest losses.

He explained that one of the major challenges facing cassava marketing is its rapid Postharvest Physiological Deterioration (PPD), which reduces its shelf-life to two to three days after harvest. It is also responsible for initial high prices that retailers charge in order to cater for subsequent expected losses.

"This results into short marketing channels, less utilisation, price discounts, lower incomes to growers and traders," he said.

High prices lead to lower than potential utilisation, low demand, low sales, low income and hence a vicious cycle of underdevelopment of the cassava fresh root value chain. Moreover, due to quick deterioration retailers usually procure low volumes which they can sell in a short period.

Currently, East and Northern Uganda are the leading producers of cassava in Uganda with a total production of 60%. However, it has also been adopted both in western, south western and central regions for commercial purposes in response to the country market demand.

In Africa, Nigeria is the leading producer of cassava, Uganda is ranked seventh. World over, Africa is the highest producer followed by Latin America and Asia.

The ministry of science, permanent secretary, David Obong encouraged the researchers to be more innovative in order to benefit from his ministry.