

# Aldrine Nsubuga not cowed by the passion fruit virus

Woodiness virus will not halt Aldrine Nsubuga's new found passion for passion fruit farming, writes Denis Bbosa.

Until one month ago, renowned marketer and sports enthusiast Aldrine Nsubuga was making money from his two-acre passion fruit farm in Kiboga, only for the deadly woodiness virus to set in.

Nsubuga, the StarTimes marketing manager, ventured into passion fruit farming one and half years ago as part of his retirement plan.

He invested Shs25m at the start and hit the ground running with instant rewards.

"The investment was worth it. My colleagues have battled such diseases before and gone through them which gives me courage. The good thing with passion fruit, once the orchard is up, you start reaping for the next five years."

Nsubuga, 47, was inspired by the need to have a comfortable retirement by tapping into and the abundant demand for passion fruit in town.

"We do not look for alternative to life other than work. If you want to succeed in farming, you have to develop a passion for it. When I opened up my restaurant (Luwombo) two years ago, I wanted to supplement it by growing passion fruit for my customers and I embarked on the venture right away," he says.

After doing thorough research, attending workshops and visiting

successful farms, Nsubuga bought two acres of land in Kiboga Town Council and began planting the local breed passion fruit.

He chose Kiboga, located 122kms away from Kampala, due to its friendly environment - and the need to go away from the bustling Kampala life for once.

"I come here once a week. Such is my passion at farming that many still wonder how I could forsake Kampala for Kiboga," he says with a bout of laughter.

Once Nsubuga exchanges his neat weekend shoes for the garden gumboots, he looks every bit the farmer and the locals are now acquainted with him as one of their own.

### Marketable business

"Before the woodiness virus that have haunted us for the last four weeks, we have been harvesting handsomely for the last three or four months. We sell one bag at Shs250,000 when the market is flooded and at Shs600,000 when the demand is high," Nsubuga explains.

He makes about Shs1.5m per weekly harvest which makes it Shs6m a month in a particular season.

"We get seven bags a week on a good harvest but in bad times like now we can get only one," he adds. Yet the market has never been part of his problems.

Riding on his name, Nsubuga sells to various individual from his Luwombo restaurant store and at times



Nsubuga plucks the affected passion fruit. PHOTOS BY DENIS BBOSA

makes office deliveries to his loyal customers - the remainder is served as juice at his eatery.

### Counting the losses

Now that the virus is ravaging his farm, Nsubuga says he can potentially lose about Shs3m per week which infringes on his set target of reaping Shs10m weekly in the next one year.

"I am not fretting over the virus because I was prepared for it. I am ready to do whatever the experts tell me so that I can enjoy my gains again," he

**600,000**

AMOUNT OF MONEY ALDRINE NSUBUGA MAKES FROM EACH BAG OF PASSION FRUITS ON HIGH DEMAND

says. He has since joined a Kiboga Farmers WhatsApp group that gives a platform to seasoned farmers to share farming challenges and experiences with beginners like him. Having involved his children in the new found passion, Nsubuga wants

### Reasons for success

"I have a social life, play chess, I do not drink and I do not go to the bars I use consultants (Fred Mubiru, and Joshua Kaala who are experts in business and agriculture. You might be the one with the money but you need expert knowledge to succeed and make right business decisions to grow. I would not have succeeded here without them."

### Call to government

Nsubuga urges government to provide an agricultural official at every district and sub county level if programmes such as Naads are to succeed "Agricultural officials should be visible, no government official h



### Challenges

The biggest challenge for Nsubuga is connecting water up the hill but he insists he will get sprinklers soon. The nature of the new viruses and the task of handling passion fruit orchard also give him tremors.

### PREVENTING VIRUS

Presently, the only way to control the disease is by means of cultural practices. Once vines become infected there is no known control

1. Plant only virus-free plants and remove and replace severely infected vines. Obviously infected plants should be rouged out and destroyed.
2. The disease is transmitted by aphids therefore, where necessary aphids should be rigorously controlled.
3. Virus symptoms can be minimised by promoting vigorous vine growth through pruning back and applying manure.
4. Transmission is also possible also by the use of pruning tools; thus the need to disinfect pruning tools when working between vines.
5. Do not interplant passion fruit with leguminous species, which can harbour the virus.

to double his acreage in the next two years, target more lucrative markets such as hotels and also branch into rearing cattle and goats - another enviable thriving agribusiness in Kiboga.

He also wants to start growing beans and pepper but for now he is content with what he gets from passion fruit.

Interestingly, Nsubuga is not worried about thieves because the community in Kiboga treats everyone as a family member and has brotherhood watch.

### Advice to the aspiring

"They should not undermine farming, their wellbeing is from eating well, they should indulge in farming. I did not go for loans because, I do not believe in loan schemes and the high interests involved. You can start with what you have. If you are to take up a loan do it after the project has taken off because you now know the potential, how much and in what period you will pay back," advises the Nsubuga who has worked with various companies in Uganda.

"Corporates should get off their white horse, and tie jobs and come to farming. People should stay away from joining group influence businesses such as trading in China because in farming the risks are known and success stories are everywhere."

NGO (Lauma Christian training and teaching Company) has managed to visit us to offer advice and market.

Government should teach people that money is not only in businesses like trading, rentals but also in farming and should reconsider flexible loan interests and consider reduction on raw materials and pesticides costs," he notes.

Nsubuga has set his retirement age at 55, and by then he would have built a country home in Kiboga to be closer to his blossoming farm and becoming a major supplier in Uganda and beyond.