

OVER 75% OF CASSAVA GARDENS IN NGORA ARE BADLY AFFECTED



Oluka (left) explaining about the cassava brown streak disease on Saturday. Photo by Emmanuel Alomu

Experts confirm cassava brown streak disease

NGORA

By Emmanuel Alomu

An outbreak of cassava brown streak viral disease has been reported in the eastern district of Ngora in Teso sub-region. This has created a threat to food security among communities in the district because cassava is one of the staple food crops in the region.

The disease is transmitted through the use of already affected cultivar or cassava cuttings. The leaves start yellowing and streaks are formed around the stems.

The most affected sub-counties in the district are Kobuin, Kapir, Mukura and Ngora town councils.

The office of the District Agricultural Officer Ngora, has confirmed that over 75% of cassava gardens in the district are badly affected by the disease.

"Three-quarters is a big threat because this is our source of livelihood and food security for Teso and Ngora in particular," the district

agricultural officer, Jacob Oluka, said on Saturday after a field visit. It is reported that NASE 14 cassava variety whose cassava cuttings were distributed under the Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) programme and Migera/NASE 3 as well as NASE 14 and NASE 19 are the worst affected.

"The reports are coming to my office every day but the percentage will go beyond 75% because some farmers have not uprooted their cassava and identified the problem," Oluka said.

He said reports started trickling in from Kobuin sub-county last year when farmers started harvesting cassava.

When the problem intensified and more cases were reported around January, Oluka said his office wrote a report to the agriculture ministry for consideration in terms of cassava cuttings.

This is because the streak disease is a viral infection which is difficult to manage and control other than

destroying the affected cassava stems. Oluka said bread made from affected cassava flour is not safe for human consumption.

Precautionary measures Oluka encouraged farmers to uproot cassava that is not yet affected.

As farmers wait for the first season in March, they are discouraged from planting the already affected cassava cuttings.

Farmers whose cassava has been affected by the disease are also asked to destroy the stems and never to replant them. This now calls for support from the central government in terms of procuring cleaner cultivar.

There is also need to introduce new varieties of cassava such as NAROCAS 1 and 2 for the farmers in the next season or else there will be food insecurity in the district.

A few years ago, some districts in Uganda were affected by floods, the dry spell and armyworm, which all damaged the crops.

Ngora County MP David Abala said it is unfortunate that farmers who he encouraged to grow more cassava this time round have again lost out.

The farmers said 90% of cassava cuttings distributed under OWC are affected by the disease.

"Leaders in the district should ensure the cuttings are verified before distribution because it has come to our attention that some of them are infected," Abala said.

He added that with recent reports which indicated that 75% of the people in Teso are poor, poverty is likely to increase because residents can no longer sell cassava.

Abala asked the ministry to ensure that they respond to the outbreak immediately.

Brig. Stephen Oluka, a Uganda People's Defence Forces officer attached to the National Emergency Co-ordination and Operation Centre in the Prime Minister's office, said he will next week meet with district leaders in Teso to identify threats to food security.

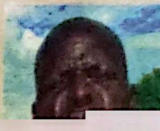
WHAT OTHERS SAY



Simon Oluka, defence secretary Kees village Leaders should come to our rescue



Stella Aguti, farmer I do not know how I will feed my 10 children because all...



George Omutoj, farmer My children are likely to return h...