

Abalo earns cash from white sorghum

White sorghum farming has brought good tidings to Jackie Abalo. Using the proceeds from sales, the single mother has managed to buy land and expand her farm, writes JULIUS OCUNGI



Jackie Abalo stands in her garden. The farmer is now reaping the fruits of better prices offered by a beer company. PHOTO BY JULIUS OCUNGI

When Jackie Abalo's husband passed on in 2008, her world turned upside down since she lost the only bread winner in the family.

The 30 year-old mother of two would later venture into vending second hand clothes to sustain the young family within Gulu Municipality.

"Life was hard at that time, with little capital I had left in the house; I decided to start selling second hand clothes at Owino market in Gulu Town, but the business did not boom," Abalo says.

Abalo noted that she struggled with the business for about seven years with little profit arising.

"My children were growing so fast yet my earning was not increasing, they needed good education but I did not see myself as a mother who would handle the responsibility of paying them. I kept tasking myself throughout the years to find out an alternative but it didn't work out," she said.

Olive branch

It was not until around September 2015 when a friend tipped Abalo of money making venture - white sorghum growing.

According to Abalo, her friend's proposals did not sound like an opportunity that would turn around her life. She noted that other people also warned her not to venture into growing sorghum since it has no market.

Abalo said her friend later connected her to Uganda Breweries Ltd [UBL] where she got supplied with Sila sorghum variety for distilling beer.

In October 2015, Abalo cleared an acre of their family land in Ayom Lony village, Jaka Parish Lalogi sub-county in Omoro District and planted the Sila sorghum variety.

Abalo said by early January 2016 she harvested 250 kilogrammes of sorghum which she sold directly to UBL agents at Shs300,000.

"I did not get a lot of money because I started growing very late. But that did not deter me because the crop matures very fast and the returns are instant since I do not look for the buyers," Abalo said.

Turn around

In 2016, Abalo thought of expanding production which compelled her to hire four hectares piece of land in Kintino Tima village, Paicho Sub-county, Gulu District.

With her savings from selling second hand clothes and small profit from sorghum growing, she injected Shs1m to open the land, buy two cartons of sorghum seeds from UBL and pay casual labourers.

Abalo said she planted sorghum in July when the rainfall was good and



Shs3.5m

MONEY JACKIE ABALO MADE LAST SEASON.

harvested the crops towards Novem

ber getting 4,800 kilogrammes which she sold at Shs3.5m.

"I could not believe that I was able to make such huge amount of money within a short period of time. I was excited," says Abalo.

Achievements

Abalo said with the profits she got, she was able to pay for her sons school fees who is in Senior Three at

ADVICE

Jackie Abalo advises farmers to apply correct amount of fertilisers before planting the grains. According to her grain sorghum is often-considered a low-maintenance crop, but it may require more nitrogen.

"We often hear from farmers who thought their sorghum should yield better, but they did not put on enough nitrogen," Abalo says.

Ideally, farmers should base fertiliser recommendations on soil test data. Failing that, research at NaSARRI shows that sorghum requires 1.6 grammes of nitrogen per heap of expected yield, assuming 2.0 per cent is organic matter.

Pope John Paul II College in Gulu and the daughter who is Gulu Primary School with ease.

She added that she also bought the land which she was hiring at Shs1m to other farmers adding that she in-

tends to buy more land to expand agricultural investment.

Abalo said she has never encountered any challenges with growing Sila ghum ever since she started farming adding that it doesn't require much weeding, they are less susceptible to pest and diseases and resistant to drought.

"In just two years, my life changed for better; I encourage other farmers to take on growing sorghum for beer industry," she said.

Selling sorghum

Abalo said the prices of sorghum ranges from Shs900 to Shs1,000 per kilogramme. She was linked to a market which is UBL. The balance is sold to middlemen.

Future plans

Abalo intends to grow white sorghum this planting season on two hectares piece of land.

Ready market

Paul Okello an agronomist says farmers should grow white sorghum because it has a ready market provided by beer companies UBL and other buyers. "This is a raw material needed by many companies," he said.

Sorghum varieties

Okello says farmers have to grow any of the local varieties were bred for the beer industry as SESO 1, SESO 2 and SILA.

He said a kilogramme of sorghum seeds are being sold at Shs5,000 adding that they are priced to make them affordable to rural farmers.