

BY ANTONIO KALYANGO

Masaka farmers decry low-quality coffee seedlings

MASAKA. Farmers in the Greater Masaka area have urged authorities to enhance scrutiny of coffee nurseries due to the increased supply of poor-quality seedlings on the market, which are causing losses to farmers.

Following a recent boom in coffee prices, several people who were previously engaged in other income generating activities rushed into coffee growing, causing an increment in demand for seedlings.

Additionally, the extensive campaign by the government and other institutions like the Buganda Kingdom that encouraged investment in coffee farming not only inspired coffee growers, but also investment in the entire coffee production and value chain, including the

production of planting materials.

Mr Ronald Musoke, a prominent coffee farmer in Lwankoni Sub-county in Kyotera District, said he has in the last three years experienced a surge in coffee nurseries that are not meeting the prerequisite requirements.

"Nurseries are sprouting everywhere, and they are established by people without any technical knowledge," he told *Daily Monitor* on Tuesday.

Mr Musoke added: "I planted two acres of coffee only to realise later that I got poor quality seedlings. It's painful to spend money on fake planting materials, look after them, and then realise two years later, when they start bearing berries, that it's not the variety you desired."

Ms Hasifah Nassanga of Kibinge Sub-county in Bukomansimbi, one of the top coffee-producing districts, revealed that several nursery operators lack mother gardens where they draw coffee buds for developing seedlings, yet it is one of the primary requirements for licensing a coffee nursery venture.

"You can see them drawing buds from every coffee garden without considering the history and quality of the parent plant. What matters to them is the quantity of seedlings, not the quality," she said. She added that this problem has mostly affected inexperienced farmers who lack the capacity to study seedlings before buying and who purchase from every nursery without con-

sidering the standards set by the regulating bodies. In 2024, the Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA), which has since been placed under the Ministry of Agriculture as a department, launched a crackdown on coffee nurseries that were below the required standards, but the Greater Masaka Coffee Nursery Operators' Association leadership contested the move and instead advocated for intensified sensitisation of operators by UCDA at the time.

Mr Fred Busuulwa, the chairperson of the association, called for improved regulation.

"Indeed, we are facing a regulatory crisis as a country, not only in the coffee sector. According to regulations, who-

ever intends to establish a nursery bed must have a mother garden established with coffee varieties from the National Coffee Research Institute (NaCORT) at Kituza in Mukono District, but it lacks the capacity to meet the growing demand countrywide because of underfunding," he said.

Maj Gen David Kyomukama, the permanent secretary of the ministry, said they have a robust licensing system for coffee nursery operators. However, he added that some errant individuals disregard the set guidelines.

He urged farmers to report people they suspect of operating coffee nursery beds illegally to the ministry through agricultural officers in their areas.