



MULTIPURPOSE CROP

Joel Ebuk a farmer from Eastern Uganda contends he grows the finger millet because of its resistance to drought.

"I grow it due to its numerous advantages from eating it as food, feeding my poultry, sometimes my wife uses it for making local brew and we sell some," he says.

According to Ebuk, despite the drought he has always earned something for the 18 years he has been growing finger millet.

Finger millet is a staple in many regions of Uganda, thus it is a lucrative enterprise to engage in. NET PHOTO

Finger millet knows no drought

Finger millet is one of the crops that can withstand harsh climatic conditions, writes **Tom Angurini**.

Very many crops waste away the moment harsh weather conditions strike unexpectedly, however one such crop that has resisted such conditions is finger millet. It is a staple across most regions in Uganda, with families enjoying its paste and brown local porridge (bushera) let alone the magic role it plays in turning local brew alcoholic.

Experts View

According to a research done by Alex Thomas Ijjo of Economic Policy Research Center Makerere University, in 2016 finger millet production was 277,000 metric tons from an estimated area of 250,000, with a national yield 1.1 metric tons per hectare.

The Eastern region is the largest producer followed by Northern and Western producing almost the same quantity.

Although Central region is the lowest producer, it is the highest yielding region at 2.4 metric tons per hectare. Tororo District is the largest producer followed by Soroti and Amuru in northern Uganda.

Best practices

According to Africa-Uganda-business trade guide some of the best

practices of growing finger millet are by winnowing the grains meant for planting in case one chooses home kept grains.

The other alternative would be washing the seeds in water and sieving off the floating seeds. Afterwards, ensure to dry them. Good finger millet production is dependent on fine seed beds, thus a farmer is advised to open up a shallow trench on a well prepared land to achieve results.

The trenches can be dusted with germinating inoculants or fertilisers, then spread the seeds thinly along the trench and cover the seeds with soils to protect them from the external surface.



Harvesting

Joel Ebuk, a farmer, says finger millet matures after three months of planting depending on the variety.

"Harvesting should be done when the grains are hard but before they dry so much. Delayed harvesting results in the shattering of the finger millet heads, and therefore a huge loss of grain," cautions Ebuk.

Marketing

Doreen Kansime, a produce trader in Bweyogerere, reveals she has been making a killing from millet with a kilogramme going for as high as Shs3, 600 meaning a 50 kilogramme bag fetches her Shs140, 000.

"Finger millet sells like a wildfire, customers are in hundreds and sometimes I cannot handle their demands," said Kansime.

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