

The agriculture we want by 2040

By Joshua Kato

...ating will never stop! In the next 20 years, however, the kind of agriculture that the world will be practising will depend on the level of research that scientists will put in the sector.

Research includes working to further reduce the length of production of each crop or livestock. A mini survey carried out by *Harvest Money* shows that although commercial farmers will be happily and quickly cashing in, consumers are wary of the quality of the food they will be eating.

The survey further revealed that farmers wish for a sector that will be fully automated across the value chain, hence easing the cost of production.

Starting June 1, Vision Group will publish detailed stories about Uganda's drive towards achieving Vision 2040. The two-week long series will kick off with agriculture.

Food production

Looking back 20 years ago, a lot has changed in the sector. Research is making producing food faster. For example, there are vegetables, including tomatoes, that grow in 80 or less days from the previous 100-120 days.

Chicken such as broilers take five weeks to gain 1.5kg, compared to 8-10 weeks 30 years ago. In the next 20 years, agriculture science is looking at further shortening the production period.

But then, like most people, Sebastian Odong, a social commentator, thinks that this has compromised the quality of food that the world population is feeding on.

"We shall be eating chicks, instead of chicken in 20 years' time," he says. This is in reference to eating chicken



Broilers; Ugandans are scared that these will be maturing in less than four weeks because of genetic modification, which will reduce their nutritional value

Mechanisation and automation

Given the trend in the last 20 years, mechanisation of farms and automation should have increased in Uganda by 2040.

"We need farms where everything is automated. I, for example, keep layers, but I expect to have automatic egg collecting machines on the farm, automatic feeders and vaccinators," says Moses Mutebi, who maintains 15,000 layers on his farm in Luwero. Indeed, his dream is not far-fetched because what he aspires to have is already being used by farmers in the developed farming world. In countries such as Netherlands, farm automation is over 50% at the moment.

Other farmers dream of an improved ability to add value and export foods. "I dream of a sector that will be at the same level as the developed countries are now.

We should be producing safe food both for home consumption and export," says Rachel Amol, an organic farmer in Gayaza, Kampala.

Julius Bigabwa, another organic farmer in Fort Portal, also wants to triple his production. "I would like to see our agriculture products ruling the world supermarket shelves. I expect every farming household to have something to sell," he says.

Overall, farmers want better extension services, better markets, good infrastructure to move produce, improved abilities to add value, remedies to the many diseases and pests, a production land tenure system etc. But to achieve these dreams, funding to the sector should have improved too.

that may be less than four weeks old.

Immy Giwu Peny Yoba is equally not amused. "We will be eating tasteless foods that

have fabricated nutrients and if seeds to plant run out of stock, the seeds from those foods will not be planted because they do not have the

natural ability," Yoba predicts. She adds: "It would be fine if we stuck to natural ways such as sunshine, but farmers are using real fire heat to dry

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up foods." Her fear is that by 2040, the country will be completely under Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO). She, therefore, offered advice: "We need to have two sets of farmers: one for GMOs and one for indigenous organic foods," she says.

Jerome Mukasa is also sceptical about the nutritional value of food that people will be consuming in future. "I did research a few years ago and was saddened to learn that the reduction in

the time it takes crops to grow is driven by the desire to make quick money as well as control hunger. I was shocked to learn that in cereals, there is a protein which is removed to enable them grow faster," he says. He was, however, surprised when the same scientists came up with another term called 'fortification' to enrich the food.

"It is simply restoring the protein which could even be artificial. The result could be eradicating hunger, but not necessarily overcoming malnutrition since most farmers do not have a clue to what their produce lacks. Their produce is not fortified," he laments.

Detailed stories about agriculture in 2040 will be published in *Harvest Money* on June 1.



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