ITALY'S IMPORTS FROM UGANDA AMOUNTED TO $431M IN 2024

ITALIAN TRADE AGENCY TO BOOST UGANDA'S AGRICULTURAL EXPORTS

By Juliet Kasirye

To enable Ugandan agricultural products to compete globally, the Italian Trade Agency (ITA), has started a programme that will equip companies operating in agribusiness as well as agri-food tech start-ups with skills and knowledge on how to tap into European markets.

Under the Lab Innova for Africa programme, the selected 64 agribusiness companies will receive skills and knowledge in negotiation, international marketing, competitive positioning in European markets, quality and export standards for agri-food products, agricultural technologies for international markets, and business development.

Lab Innova for Africa, also known as "Luca Attanasio," is a programme designed to support African companies and start-ups to access the European market, promote technology transfer and innovation through knowledge exchange and best practices.

The programme also fosters opportunities for technical and industrial partnerships with Italian companies, supporting local industry development, among others.

The ambassador of Italy to Uganda, Mauro Massoni, said last week that this training is not only about acquiring skills but also about building networks, learning from one another, and turning agricultural potential into tangible prosperity.

Since there is a great deal of untapped potential in Uganda's private sector, particularly in the agriculture sector, Massoni said this training will help exporters understand how to navigate the market, remain competitive, and ensure their fresh fruits meet international quality standards.

"Though agriculture has always been a cornerstone of Uganda's economy, today's rapidly changing world presents both challenges and opportunities, from climate resilience and sustainability to access to technology, markets, and finance," Massoni said.

This, he says, is where innovation and entrepreneurship make all the difference. With Italy's long agricultural tradition and expertise in agribusiness, food processing, and sustainable farming practices, Ugandans in the agribusiness value chain will greatly benefit from this partnership.

"This is reflected in the trade data between our two countries: in 2024, Italy's imports from Uganda amounted to approximately $431m, up from previous years, with coffee and cocoa products as the main items. In the same year, Italy's exports to Uganda were about $146m, largely constituting machinery and related industrial goods," Massoni said.

He made the remarks during the inauguration of the Lab Innova for Africa programme held at the Onomo Hotel in Nakasero last week.

Launched in 2019 and now in its eighth year, the Lab Innova for Africa programme has been implemented through 22 editions across 18 African countries and has supported more than 700 African companies, with a focus on sectors such as agribusiness, poultry, ICT and fashion.

According to the director of the ITA Office in Addis Ababa, Claudio Pasqualucci, the training will not only enhance the capabilities of the companies and start-ups to compete in the global market, but will also help exporters understand that quality standards, packaging and proper marketing are essential tools for remaining competitive.

Since Italy is primarily a manufacturing country, Pasqualucci said: "We need commodities from African countries such as coffee, tea, and fresh fruits. However, to ensure these products meet European standards, particularly those of Italy, exporters need to follow the proper procedures for conserving and preserving the freshness of fruits."

To be competitive globally, Pasqualucci also advised Ugandan companies to be deliberate and market the country as a whole.

Pasqualucci revealed that from the training, they would select about 10 companies to attend international trade fairs and interact with potential Italian partners face to face.

Italy's Macfrut 2026 trade fair is scheduled to take place from April 21 to 23. This trade expo is considered the leading international trade fair for the fruit and vegetable sector.

The event brings together global producers, exporters, buyers, and agribusiness innovators to showcase value chains, technologies, and market opportunities.

"We have a beautiful pavilion for many Ugandan start-ups where they can present themselves to Italian producers, distributors, and buyers," the envoy said.

PHOTO BY JULIET KASIRYE



Massoni (middle), Pasqualucci (fifth-right), with ministry officials and participants during the inauguration of the Lab Innova for Africa programme held at the Onomo Hotel in Nakasero, Kampala, on March 9

EXPORTERS SPEAK OUT

The director of business development services at the East Africa Entrepreneurs Association (EAEA), Tony Wamala, said although there are immense opportunities in agriculture, most entrepreneurs lack the expertise needed to access international markets.

To empower companies dealing in agricultural products, Wamala said they are partnering with the Italian Trade Agency, the Embassy of Italy, and other partners to build the capacities of their entrepreneurs so that they are able to trade across borders.

"We believe our agricultural products should not only be accepted in the East African market, but should be accepted across the entire global value chain," Wamala said. EAEA is an umbrella association for entrepreneurs and innovators in East Africa.

Given that Italy has some of the best machinery relevant to Ugandan exports, the director of Agric Youth Nexus Export, Lisa Atuhairwe, said the training will help Hass avocado exporters understand how to add value to their products.

"The challenge we face, primarily as exporters, is certification. Our fruits and vegetables are not adequately certified. There are so many certificates required. You find that you need a GAP certification and organic certification, both of which are very expensive," Atuhairwe said.

The chief executive officer of Uganda Agribusiness Alliance, Francis Kisirinya, said the training will help entrepreneurs understand the requirements for exporting to Italy, how to negotiate with partners and how to navigate intercultural communication, among other things.

"Since we operate largely within value chains that are not yet advanced, entrepreneurs need support before they export. For instance, we are promoting the avocado value chain, macadamia, and pumpkin. ITA will expose all these people not only to potential buyers but also to technology providers," Kisirinya said.

The chief executive officer of AGRITRADE Uganda, Grant Chiwera, said the training will build the capacity of their members to understand what is required in the global market.

"Ugandans need to understand that while we have excellent products such as coffee, pineapples, and cocoa that the world attests to, the challenge we face as a country is that we are not adequately prepared for the international market. The standards we use to process these products are lacking. The training will help exporters understand what is required internationally and how to align what we have here accordingly," Chiwera explained.



Massoni

REQUIREMENTS BEFORE EXPORTING

Representing the commissioner of agricultural investment and enterprise development, Samson Akankiza, the assistant commissioner in charge of agribusiness in the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, Yafesi Ogwang, said: "To ensure that what we are exporting is fit for consumption, the Government regulates the use of agricultural chemicals, veterinary drugs and other inputs."

Before exporting internationally, Ogwang advised start-ups to meet key requirements, including phytosanitary certificates for produce, veterinary certificates for animal products and adherence to EU organic regulations.

"If you are dealing in fruits and vegetables, you must meet general marketing standards. All food products must adhere to stringent hygiene standards, including Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point systems, for processing, storage and transport," Ogwang said.