

KENYA NATIONAL FARMERS' FEDERATION

CONNECTING, TRANSFORMING AND SUSTAINING LIVELIHOODS

What keeps my 350 apple trees blooming

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Despite the demand for apples locally, in Kenya, its production is confined to a few scattered farmers in the highlands of Kiambu, Kitale and Nandi. One farmer who has tapped into this growing demand is George Karemu who has 350 apple trees. The retired teacher and his wife grow the apples on a one and a quarter acre orchard in Miugune village in Buuri District, Meru County. “I



settled on apples after a bad experience with potatoes, maize and fodder for dairy farming. I discovered that managed well, apples have better and more reliable returns. But as a back-up plan, I still grow the others but on small scale,” says Karemu. Karemu’s love affair with apples started in 1976 when a friend from Kibirichia gave him four apple shoots to try at his farm on the Northern slopes of Mt Kenya. Pruning is key. These four shoots have since grown into blooming trees bending under the weight of fruits. Having planted apples for more than 40 years, he has become an expert of sorts.

Karemu mainly grows Winter Banana variety of apples but he has been trying to graft his crop with Rome Beauty and Golden Gozet varieties. Though grafted trees are fast maturing and could yield fruits in three to four years, he says his experience is that they have limited production. The farmer admits that very few of his neighbours have ventured into this territory though he estimates the farm is earning him three times what he would be making if he was farming potatoes. But this September he plans to venture into production of seedlings for sale.

He says apples have two seasons; a main one between September and March and between June and August. According to Karemu, the tree has fruits throughout the year and peak harvesting is between February and April. To keep the fruits healthy and strong, the farmer uses six to seven bags of farmyard manure which he buys from neighbours. "The good thing is that it is affordable. A sack of manure costs Sh100. But we also need one 50 kilo bag of NPK 20.20.20 fertiliser and three litres of foliar feed for leaf-age development," he says. The farmer also cross plants beans on the section occupied by the less mature trees which are four years and below. Because of the availability of shoots which he sources from his oldest plantation, Karemu's garden is divided in four sections with the oldest trees planted in 2009, then younger batch planted in 2013. Typically, his trees take five to six years to start producing fruits with commercial value and the production increases as the tree gains more years. But with a spacing of seven feet between trees and nine feet between rows, the orchard gets to a level where no intercropping can take place after eight years. While this diminishes the weeding labour, it also increases the amount of pruning and chemicals required. One of the most tedious tasks for an apple garden is keeping the predator birds away when the fruits bloom. Despite that challenge, he says the venture is worth it if someone gets it right from the word go. Henry Murithi, a crop protection expert who is in tree seedling business explains that selection of root stock seedling is one of the most important aspects in establishing a thriving apple orchard. He explains that root stock can then be grafted with other varieties of choice once it has been established with a drought resistant tree. According to him, the best root stock varieties for East Africa are Batten Feilder, Marllieng Mutton 106 and Marllieng Mutton 107. Those could then be grafted with varieties such as Anna – an oval shaped red fruit with yellow stripes, Winter Banana which is a good pollinator and Golden Dolcet which is a red round fruit with yellow stripes. For soils, fertile and deep type are good for apple farming and recommends a spacing of one metre between trees and three metres between rows. He recommends nutrient replenishment through farm yard manure. Phyllis Mutungi, a government horticulturist working in Meru said a fertilizer application of 150 grams of CAN per year can help in nutrient replenishment increasing gradually to 1.5 kilogrammes per tree.

Kalro in new push to boost neglected crops

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Daily Nation

Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organisation (Kalro) has initiated a programme to promote the growing of indigenous fruit trees, vegetables and legumes. The crops include guavas, whose vitamin C content is higher than that of oranges, and is known to be medically helpful. Others are pomegranate, an antioxidant that reduces cancer causing elements, teff, aerial yams, jack fruits, fostail millet, moringa (rich in calcium) and gooseberry.

"Many of these crops existed in 60s, 70s and early 80s, but were abandoned due to 'civilization'. We want households to move their focus from reliance on maize and beans and start growing more nutritious and easily adaptable high nutrient and fibre-content foods crops," said Dr. Lusike Wasilwa. Dr. Wasilwa advised farmers to get assistance from the 52 Kalro centres in 37 counties on planting materials.

How technology can be used to leapfrog Africa's agriculture

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Standard Newspaper

Africa is at a crossroads on food security. The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (Agra) is reporting that close to 70 per cent of the population is involved in agriculture as smallholder farmers working on parcels of land that are, on average, less than 2 hectares. Given those statistics, the importance of agriculture at the heart of conversations on the journey of Africa economy cannot be over emphasized. The World Bank estimates that Africa's food market will be worth \$1 trillion (Sh100 trillion) by 2030 up from the current \$300 billion (Sh30 trillion). In addition, the continent's food import bill, the latest trends show, stands anywhere between \$30–50 billion. The statistics clearly show that food demand is a catalyst for thriving businesses across the continent waiting to be ignited to grow value for farmers, majority of whom are smallholders. In Kenya, agriculture is the largest employer accounting for about 60 per cent of Kenya's labour force. At 60 per cent, you would expect it to contribute more than the 30 per cent it does to Kenya's GDP. Yet, the country's largest employer faces many challenges that range from poor infrastructure, poor weather forecasting and climate change. Because of that, Kenyan farmers are at a distinct disadvantage compared to their counterparts in the Americas, Europe or Asia, despite enjoying some of the best climatic conditions and soils in the world. There is a ray of hope in the horizon that is promising to spread cheer across Africa's agriculture landscape that can light the right way. Today, 90 per cent of smallholder farmers own mobile phones.

The reach of humanity's most ubiquitous tool ever across Africa has offered an unprecedented opportunity to uplift the levels of knowledge in the agriculture sector. It means that smallholder farmers now have a real chance of becoming economically active and to contribute towards the long-term economic growth of our country. Globally, technology is playing a big role in developing the sector. However, technology is more than just being better and faster, it is also about sustainability. As part of Safaricom's adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, they have committed to deliver connectivity and innovative products and services that will provide unmatched solutions to meet the needs of Kenyans by enabling access through their technologies. If you look at Kenya's smallholder farmer segment, it consists of an estimated 7 million farmers, with each farming household consisting of 5 or 6 family members. Some quick math shows that Digifarm -- a one-stop service for Kenya's smallholder farmers that Safaricom launched last year, has the potential to transform the lives of around 42 million people.

With these initiatives we are confident that farmers will get adequate credit for input and maximize utilization of arable land and in turn increase their yields.

Nut farmers accuse leading processors of frustrating them in payment

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Chinese traders' offer found more appealing, but Government agency won't give the foreigners chance to buy from locals. Macadamia nut farmers have accused the Government of harassing Chinese buyers who have been offering better prices. The farmers singled out the Agriculture Food Authority (AFA), whose officials, they said, frustrated small-scale nut farmers in its

efforts to kick out Chinese buyers who it accuses of breaching the law in its dealings with farmers. The farmers spoke in a meeting held on Wednesday at Sagana, which was also attended by nut traders and processors drawn from Mount Kenya region. The members recounted how in January AFA imposed a ban on harvesting of nuts to edge out the Chinese buyers while allowing local nut processors to continue buying at lower prices. The Chinese pay up to Sh. 180 per kilogramme, while local processors pay as low as Sh. 130.

The farmers accused some traders of buying immature nuts and lowering the quality of the produce in the global market.

Lowest paid

"We want a kilogramme of nut to fetch above Sh. 200," said Johnson Kihara, chairman of Nut Traders Association (NTA). They demanded that AFA be devolved. "Many of the officers at the authority lack information on nut farming," said Ndirangu Nyorothea, a nut processor at Sagana. NTA secretary Nahason Mugi faulted the Government for failing to implement recommendations of the National Assembly on the nut sector. "The National Assembly called for licensing of more processors and support for the sector through the Commodities Fund," said Mr. Mugi. Contacted for comment, a Nut Processors Association official said all its members were registered and followed the law in their operations. He faulted some agents, saying they were politicising the sector. "There are avenues being explored by some agents to defeat justice," said Charles Muigai, the association's official. AFA, through its head of oil crop department Raymond Kahindi, said it would continue enforcing the law to defend nut quality.