

Growing French beans



Mr. Nicholas Ambanya
East Africa Growers General
Manager

French beans (fine and extra-fine) are one of the major vegetable export crops for East Africa, which has propelled Kenya to the pinnacle of greatness as a horticulture nation. East African Growers is listed among the largest growers and exporters of these beans, exporting up to 75 tonnes on a weekly basis.

According to Mr. Nicholas Ambanya, East African Growers General Manager, French beans are a large proportion of the company's export portfolio in line with the demand from the major markets of; United Kingdom, Europe as well as the Middle East. East African Growers Ltd has thus made substantial investment towards the production of this crop.

The production of good quality, fine and extra fine green ponds, fit for the export market is dependent on various factors including high adherence to International Food Safety Standards (IFSS).

Responding to the question 'how they manage to comply with stringent Food Safety Standards', "we have subscribed to and operationalized these international standards that include Global GAP, Tesco Nature Choice, British Retail Consortium, and Ethical Trade Initiatives among others. "We have strived to attain these standards because we want our crops to be of highest standards and at the same time our overall operations should impact positively on our staff and the community as at large", Mr Ambanya said.

They have laid great emphasis on safety of environment in their farms and packing houses; among other activities they see to it that they dispose empty chemical containers and other wastes safely in line with the provisions of the standards that they have

subscribed to. They take care of operators among other things providing them with adequate personal protective clothing and training. They take care of the consumer's safety and satisfaction by being committed to continuously meeting food safety & quality standards, and high ethical, social and environmental responsibility.

EAG crops are grown under an integrated crop management system which incorporates eco friendly agricultural practices. In use are most affordable and proactive methods. "By identifying diseases and pests in time, we are able to take care of the crop without having to use excessive pesticides. In all our growing sites, trained technical staff are present to continuously access the pest and disease counts and trends to ensure prompt action ", Nicholas said.

As part of sustainable farming practices they carry out intensive research and development in organic methods of Pest management by the rearing and introduction of beneficial insects in addition to the use of Bio Pesticide plant extracts.

In spite of the unique nature of their farms with a diversified operation and substantial work force, East African Growers has managed to maintain highest hygiene standards. In the farms, they provide Toilets, hand washing facilities, and in some cases showers. In their pack-houses, it is mandatory for the workers or anybody entering in, to accurately report about their health status, remove all jewellery, and switch off mobile phone, put on the appropriate PPE (personal protective Equipment provided and to thoroughly wash hands now and then.

EAG guarantees customers 100% traceability on all products. They provide a comprehensive system of traceability where products are traced all the way through the growing process to the harvesting, sorting, processing packing and temporary storage. A fleet of refrigerated trucks maintain the cold chain from farm to aircraft via consolidation at the airport warehouse.

French beans do well in an altitude 0-1800 Meters above sea level, warm temperatures between 12-34 degrees; temperatures below 12 encourage frost which is harmful to the crop while that above 34 will result to flower abortion. Rain must be well distributed throughout the year, i.e 600-1500 mm. The soil should be well drained; a waterlogged





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soil will increase risk of root and collar rot, seed asphyxia at the germination stage while saline soils should be avoided since the beans are sensitive to salinity. Fertilizer applications must be split up and applied in several installments to avoid excess doses of salts.

Before planting French bean on your farm, it is important to consider which preceding crops were on the field. Some crops share the same diseases with French bean therefore if planted immediately there will be a buildup of pests and diseases. Other crops Have a huge toll on the soil in terms of exploiting the nutrient resources therefore it may be necessary to supply additional nutrients to the soil. Beans, peas, potato, eggplant, melon cucumber, zucchini, water melon, lettuce and okra are to be avoided (where possible) as preceding crops. Recommended as proceeding crop includes cereals (baby corn), cabbage, beetroot, sweet potato, strawberry while groundnut, pepper, carrot and onion are not useful as preceding crop.

The most important thing to consider during sowing is the depth. Research has demonstrated that the most optimal depth is 3-5 cm for sandy soils, while for heavy soils a depth of 2 cm is sufficient.

Another important thing is to time the market, plant the crop when you expect to get the best prices. It may be necessary to grow a variety of crops to diversify your source of income.

The date of seedling emergence depends on the variety of bean, the soil condition, and the altitude. It is expected that emergence will occur within 4-10 days. Flowering will commence after 28-35 days. Newly introduced varieties include Amy, Teresa, Samantha, Julia, Pualista, Vernando, Tokai and Bakara. The varieties for fresh market include Amy, Pekara, Teresa, Paulista, Rexas, Samantha and Cupvert. Processing varieties are mainly Julia, Vernandon and Sasa.

The major disease of beans is rust caused by a fungus known as uromyces appendiculatus that is effectively controlled by Dithane M45 and Anvil. To reduce the incidence of this disease, it is recommended to avoid sprinkler irrigation that is responsible for wetting the leaves creating a favorable condition for rust.

In areas where furrow irrigation is practiced there is a high incidence of wilt due to a fungus known as fusarium oxysporum and nematode attacks.

