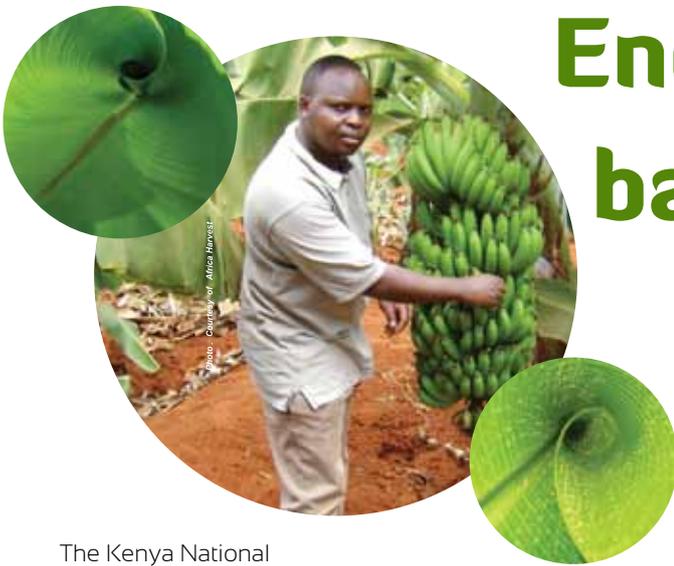


# Energizing Kenya banana industry



The Kenya National Banana Development Strategy (2013-2016) is trying to make the industry vibrant, innovative, commercially-oriented and globally-competitive.

According to the National Horticulture Policy released in June 2012, banana is third among the five fruits with the highest value of enterprise per unit area. Others are: pineapples, avocados, pawpaw and mangoes.

Leonard Maina Ndirangu; Senior Assistant Director of Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries told Hortfresh Journal that bananas marshals 30-40% of all the fruit revenue generated in the country.

Although promising, the growth of the banana industry in Kenya is, it is hampered by the following 9 problems, which the National Banana Strategy seeks to address:

## Wrought of a Regulatory Framework for Banana Industry Growth:

The National Banana Strategy aims developing a code of practice for the banana industry; develop products standard; additionally to the integration of

the banana strategy into the National Horticulture Policy.

**Provision of high quality Materials:** Farmers lack access to key input e.g. quality planting materials, fertilizers, pesticides, farm machinery and implements among others. Thus, this strategy targets increasing players involved in advance and supply of tissue culture banana at lower cost for farmers.

By harnessing the forces and fostering collaboration of all the stakeholders involved, the banana strategy aspires to avail at the village level; low cost tissues culture banana plantlets.

**Revamping Crop Yields:** It is a common practice for a farmer to obtain suckers from a friend's orchard and plant on their own. This poor agronomy has

greatly contributed to the spread of pests and diseases. More, farmers lack knowledge on the best variety to choose. Most opt for the big ones which demand more water and may not do well in some areas

Organized irrigation, high quality varieties, good drainage, application of fertilizers, insecticides, pesticides, nematicides in due time; protection from strong winds, harvesting at proper stage of maturity, utilizing best methods of handling, storage, packaging and transport are all essential factors to obtain good quality bananas.

To move banana production from the current average of 20 tons/ha to the

targeted for this strategy of 40/ha; the National Banana Strategy for 2013-2016 tries to enhance extension service delivery.

**Controlling High Prevalence of Pest, Diseases:** Pests are not a great threat to bananas as diseases notes Maina. Pests such as nematodes, fruit fly, banana weevils, thrips, moles; and diseases like sigatoka, fusarium wilt (panama), rust, cigar end rot and xanthomonas wilt have contributed to considerable banana crop loss.

Introduction, development, and promotion of disease and pest banana resistant varieties; use of IPM technologies; training banana growers on the use of pest and disease control methods; carrying out periodic surveillance of pests and diseases as well as conducting audits on compliance of code of practice for safe use of pesticides are being advocated



Photo Courtesy of Africa Harvest

Good practices soil conservation by use of an intercrop

for by the strategy to mitigate the effects of pests and diseases.

### **Increasing Value Addition:**

The government has set up a banana value addition factory in Kisii that is processing 270 tons of bananas daily. Value addition increases shelf life of bananas, thus giving farmers a better bargain and a prospect to earn more, observes Leonard Maina. Banana can be used to make: puree, figs, flakes, wine, jam, powder and beverages. If turned into flour and used for fortification, banana can contribute to food security.

In promoting value addition technologies and activities, the National Banana Strategy; 2013-2016 targets enhancing promoting value addition technologies; creating awareness on appropriate technologies; building the capacity of stakeholders on value addition standards; generating awareness on intellectual property rights; promoting consumption of banana value-added products; facilitating linkages to financial institutions and establishing a centre of excellence on banana value-added products.

### **Product Development, Market accessibility:**

Poor product development locks out farmers from some markets. Kenya banana farmers, according to the Senior Assistant Director of Agriculture still depend on low quality banana varieties that cannot be exported; despite there being a potential for markets in Holland, UK, Germany, actually the entire European Union, as well as the Gulf.

Besides, many people produce bananas for household use, and a few for the domestic market. Local markets are characterized by a legion of problems: the main being flooded by Machiavellian middlemen.

Addressing these issues, the national banana strategy is encouraging formation of strong farmer based marketing organization and enhancing promotion of banana trade to satiate export and local markets.

### **Establishing Suitability Map, Improving Land Use:**

Development and promotion of apposite banana farming system and emergent of a banana suitability map will be catered for to ensure sufficient spreading of information on different varieties specific to regions. Creation of a banana suitability map will aid farmers to know where banana do well and where they do not, so that they avoid planting bananas in areas where they can't fair well.

### **Strengthening, activating farmers' organizations:**

By making operational the National Banana Growers Association in all banana growing areas and enhancing formation of farmer groups and enterprises; integration and strengthening of the farmers' organizations will be fostered.

For instance by coming together farmers can be able to import fertilizers directly through their organizations, which is cheaper says Leonard Maina, and is happening with some farmers' groups.

Besides, this can help in eliminating middlemen and endows farmers with a bargaining power for better farm gate prices. It is also easier for farmers to access credit from financial institutions this way.

Leonard Maina notes that the National Banana Growers Association is envisioned to a shape similar to that of Kenya Flower Council (KFC). Through KFC, private floricultural enterprises exercise self regulation and this body has steered the Kenya floriculture

industry to enviable success worldwide.

By working closer with KEPHIS and HCDA the aim of the National Banana Commission is to raise the standard of Kenya banana farmers to build their capacity to access banana export markets.

### **Development of adequate financial services:**

The government of Kenya is working with several NGO's and local banks through Public Private Partnerships to offer loans to farmers.

For instance in the Kilimo Biashara loan, Equity Bank is used by the government to advance loans to farmers in the form of seeds, fertilizer and other inputs and implements. The government insures the loans on behalf of the farmers. The most important aspect of this innovation is that it creates a revolving fund that aids farmers. The government through the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries is aspiring for more of these partnerships not only to improve the banana sub-sector, but also other agricultural sub-sectors.



Training farmers