

COTVET DIGEST



Supporting skills upgrading for efficient adoption of new crop varieties...

The story of Gold Coast Fruits Company Limited

The Skills Development Fund (SDF) is a five-year project initiated by the Government of Ghana in 2011 with funding from the World Bank (\$50 Million) and DANIDA (\$10m) to help address key skills and technology needs of businesses in the formal and informal sectors of the Ghanaian economy.

The fund is managed by the Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET). The SDF has since 2012 awarded over \$20 million worth of grants to about 246 businesses, trade associations and training institutions for various skills upgrading, innovative technology acquisition and the development of innovative training modules for industry.

The SDF has decided to introduce a weekly column dedicated to sharing key results and success stories of beneficiaries.

PINEAPPLE production has become a key source of economic growth in Ghana. Over the last two decades, the amount of land dedicated to cultivating the prickly fruit has increased by more than 30 per cent.

It is also estimated that the sector directly and indirectly provides 10,000 jobs and helps support 50,000 people. Among the many companies in the sector is Gold Coast Fruits Co. Ltd, located at Nsawam, in the Eastern Region.

Gold Coast Fruits Company

Gold Coast Fruits is a limited liability company involved in the growing and exporting of pineapples to Europe. The company has since 2006 been growing pineapples on a commercial scale. With a staff of over 300, the company is able to produce 3,000 tonnes of pineapples on a 940 acre farmland, with an annual turnover of GH¢3.5 million.

Challenges

In spite of its prospects, Gold Coast Fruits Company Limited faced the challenges of limited research and innovation in the Ghanaian pineapple industry.

The challenges were occasioned by the change in international consumption and demand for pineapple from the traditional smooth cayenne pineapples to the current MD2 variety in recent times.

Due to the switch in international taste from smooth cayenne to MD2, Ghana's share of the international pineapple export market plummeted to six per cent. This was due to the fact that, pineapple growers in Ghana, including Gold Coast Fruits, lacked the necessary skills and technology to grow MD2 on Ghanaian soil.

The major issue had to do with the land preparation methods for growing MD2 pineapple varieties.

In their bid to be innovative within their skills capacity, Gold Coast Fruits

managed to grow some MD2 pineapples but was not without challenges, dominant of which was the low yield of 20 tonnes per hectare instead of the average 80 tonnes. This led to a drastic reduction in the output of Gold Coast Fruits, increase in production cost and reduction in export volumes and earnings. The company was on the

verge of laying off about 100 planters.

Skills Development Fund

In 2012, Gold Coast Fruits applied to the Skills Development Fund (SDF) for funding to enable it to engage the services of an expert to train over 200 planters in agronomic practices necessary for the efficient cultivation of MD2 pineapples.

With an SDF grant of GH¢247,920, Gold Coast Fruits has been able to engage an MD2 expert to provide a yearlong training in soil preparation, nursing and key agronomic skills required in cultivating MD2 pineapples on Ghanaian soil.

With the newly acquired skills in the cultivation of the MD2 variety, the company has been able to harvest about 80 tonnes per hectare of MD2 cultivated, instead of the previous 20

tonnes. Samuel Borlu, General Manager of Gold Coast Fruits, reckons that this increased their export capacity to about 80,000 tonnes by the close of 2013. With the renewed confidence in their ability to supply more MD2 pineapples to Europe, the company intends to expand its farm capacity and engage 100 more planters by the end of 2014. This has been made possible by SDF.

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• A female planter cultivating MD2 pineapples at Gold Coast Fruits.