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Stakeholders want protection of lucrative avocado type

DEOGRATIAS MUSHI
DAR ES SALAAM

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AVOCADO fruit is highly valued worldwide for its abundant nutritional content and proven health benefits. Nutritional experts describe avocado as having high protein content compared to other fruits. It also provides fibre, potassium and vitamins while high in plant-based fat that is cholesterol



AVOCADO HAS BEEN NICK NAMED GREEN GOLD DUE TO ITS CURATIVENESS

Avocado has more potassium than many other fruits and is loaded with heart-healthy monounsaturated fatty omega -3 acids and generally a good source of vitamins C, E, K and B-6.

According to experts, this fruit now being produced in different parts of the country, including Rungwe district in Mbeya region, Njombe region and Moshi district in Kilimanjaro region, helps the body absorb fat-soluble nutrients.

But, it is Rungwe district that produces the most sought-after type of avocado in the international market—Hass. Rungwe district is also the only area in the country that produces avocado in a large commercial scale.



Agricultural experts as well as most farmers especially in Rungwe district emphasize that the government should start protecting and even forbid the export and sale of avocado seeds and seedlings outside the country until Tanzania becomes self sufficient and whereby farmers who intend to engage in avocado farming have enough seeds.

Most farmers in Rungwe point an accusing finger at companies that have been exporting millions of seeds and seedlings of Hass Avocado outside the country even as farmers in various parts of the country such as Njombe and Kagera regions cannot easily access the seeds.

The firms currently export the seeds mainly to South Africa and are known to be working on exports expansion to other parts of the world.

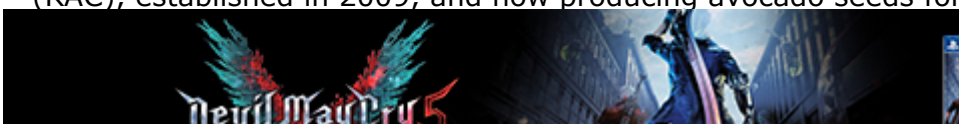
Nicholas Kyomo, the Secretary General of Rungwe avocado growers union, known in Kiswahili as *Umoja wa Wakulima Maparachichi Rungwe* (UWAMARU) accuses the firms of not being concerned with improving avocado farming in Tanzania but foreign countries.

Kyomo advises that the firms should stop the export of avocado seeds because once other neighbouring countries start producing the lucrative avocado type, the Tanzanian market may start facing tough competitive prices.

Kyomo advises authorities responsible for agricultural development to conduct a thorough study on avocado seed export business with the aim of protecting local production of the fruit which fetches good price internationally.

Kyomo is among thousands of smallholder farmers in Rungwe district who produce and sell high-quality avocados to large markets throughout Europe, thanks to cooperation from stakeholders.

He admits that this has been possible because of the support from Rungwe Avocado Company (RAC), established in 2009, and now producing avocado seeds for supply to local farmers in



AS quantities of avocados for export increased in 2015, says Rungwe, the programme expanded into local farmers' postharvest handling, procurement and logistics management.

According to Andre De Clerk, former RAC general manager who is now managing director of TATEPA, RAC's holding company, the increased demand has convinced his company to start engaging in the production of more avocado seeds.

"Avocado has given local people extra income from the sales of the fruit to RAC, it also provides food for the family," says Joseph Amos, who harvested 1000 kilogrammes from his small plot last year.

De Clerk says that RAC established its 100-hectare farm in the Southern Highlands in 2009 and within only two years it had a network of 2,000 smallholder farmers.

In 2014, Rungwe exported 200 tonnes from more than 3,000 smallholder farmers – a significant increase from the 12 tonnes shipped out in 2012.

One of Rungwe's out growers, John Mwaipopo, harvested 30 kilogrammes from the first tree he planted. In the past year, he expanded to 200 trees on two acres of land.

Along the way, RAC has established good agricultural practices and responsible governance structures through programmes such as GlobalGAP, which certifies the quality of products in the agriculture, aquaculture and livestock sectors.

Commercial avocado production in Tanzania has surged in recent years and is establishing an international reputation while increasing incomes for thousands of smallholder farmers.

De Clerk says the vast majority of Tanzania avocado exports are managed directly by two major



De Clerk says that Tanzania exports 90 per cent of its avocado produce to the EU markets especially in Italy, Germany, Greece, Belgium, Spain and Switzerland, bringing into the country foreign currency.

Strategic partnerships with other European companies through business-to-business are being sought to bring fresh, ripe avocados to the European and other export markets, he adds.

According to him, efforts are also under way to promote the From Field to Fork approach and its innovative cold chain management systems.

Globally, in the fruit sector, says De Clerk, avocado is the fifth most important traded product after banana (USD23 billion), grapes (USD17 billion), apples (USD15 billion) almonds (USD10 billion) and avocado (USD 9.1 billion), lending it a nick name of green gold.

In five years since 2012, the global market value of avocado increased more than twofold from about USD4.1 billion to about USD9.1 billion in 2016, while the quantity of traded avocado increased by about 70 per cent from 2.2 million tonnes to 3.8 million tonnes over the same period.

Despite the global increase in the cultivated area, global production of avocado has failed to keep pace with the rising demand, resulting in higher global prices of avocados.

As such, the avocado industry creates vast opportunities for countries with potential to upscale production, and indeed Tanzania should not miss this golden opportunity.

