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BUSINESS

New rules for chilli exports after pest attack

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IN SUMMARY

- Farmers blamed counterfeit pesticides, with exporters saying the country's fresh produce is often intercepted by EU health inspectors.
- The codling moth is a pest that lays its eggs on the fruit or leaves of the hot chilli trees, and the larvae burrow into the fruit.
- Ugandan chilli traders have not been following any guidelines, with some transporting their produce to the airport on motorcycles.

Uganda has introduced new rules for chilli exporters as it seeks to save the fresh produce sub-sector, now threatened by substandard inputs.

Authorities suspended exports of hot chilli to the European Union a fortnight ago following a widespread infestation of the crop by the codling moth.

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Okaasai Opolot, director for crop resources at the Ministry of Agriculture said that exporters are now required to register with both the Agriculture and Trade Ministries, to ensure good hygiene in their packing yards, and arrange for cold trucks for transportation of the produce.

"The exporters should also call agronomists and inspectors to their farms and packing yards to ensure that the produce meant for export meets the required phytosanitary standards," he said.

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Mr Opolot said chilli for export will no longer be inspected at the airport but at the exporter's packing yard and later verified at the country's exit points.

Farmers are also required to register with the two ministries to help establish the acreage under chilli in the country.

"Whoever fails to comply with these guidelines will not export chilli," Mr Opolot warned.

Ugandan chilli traders have not been following any guidelines, with some transporting their produce to the airport on motorcycles.

Before the suspension, Uganda's KK Foods and Icemark Africa Ltd were exporting a combined 32 tonnes of chilli per week to the EU and the Middle East, earning farmers Ush64 million (\$23,280) weekly, at the current market price of Ush2,000 (\$0.72) per kilogramme.

Currently, Uganda has 26 chilli exporting firms, with more than 1,000 farmers, according to the Agriculture Ministry. Data from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics indicates that the country's chilli exports have grown 26.6 per cent since 2009 to 405,000 tonnes in 2013.

Chilli export earnings have increased from \$617,000 in 2009 to \$1.71 million in 2013,

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driven by increased production and high demand in the European market.