

# UPDATE ON KENYAN HORTICULTURE

*Brought to you by the Kenya Horticultural Development Program (KHDP) — a USAID-funded project to increase incomes through smallholder production and employment in the horticulture industry. KHDP works with public and private sector agencies to provide technical and marketing assistance to growers throughout Kenya. KHDP's main agribusiness partners include grower associations, input suppliers, processors, exporters, research institutions and trade associations.*

***“Mapato zaidi kupitia kilimo bora”***

- **Hon William Ruto appointed new Minister of Agriculture**
- **HCDCA launches Customer Service Charter**
- **Bumper mango season starts with big interest from processors**
- **Buyers say 2008 cashew crop hits five-year high of 10,000 tons**
- **Tomato prices reach all time high at 3,600/- a crate**
- **Vermicompost initiative uses worms to reduce fertiliser costs**
- **New tomato and cabbage production manuals on sale**

Congratulations to Hon, William Ruto on his appointment as Minister for Agriculture. The Minister has already initiated strong measures to mitigate the negative effects of high fertiliser prices on smallholder farmers. This move will be welcomed by the horticulture export industry which depends upon vegetables and fruits produced competitively by thousands of smallholder families across the country. It should also contribute to food price stabilization on the local market and keep vegetables affordable to low income consumers whose staple diet includes kale (*sukuma*), cabbage and tomatoes.

Congratulations also to Dr Romano Kiome for retaining his position as Permanent Secretary. Dr Kiome's in-depth knowledge of horticulture and research experience is widely appreciated throughout the industry.

## **NATIONAL TASK FORCE ON HORTICULTURE**

The Taskforce continued its coordination of major issues facing the industry, with funding support from KEPHIS. Current issues include:

- The cross-cutting report on validation of national horticulture data

## **Passion farmers' reap fruits of hard work**



Petronilla Wangila of Namikhelo group in Bungoma, western Kenya, enjoys the fruits of her labour - literally. KHDP and One Acre Fund introduced passion fruit farming in the region 3 years ago. Today, the region is known both for its fruit and for producing reliable, grafted passion fruit seedlings.

- The CABHORT (Netherlands-funded) and HORTICAP (EU-funded) projects for strengthening industry capacity
- Impact on the industry of new labour laws and health regulations

Members of the Taskforce represented Kenya at the regional Conference on Making Sustainability Standards Work for Small-scale Farmers, held between 7- 9<sup>th</sup> April in Arusha.

## **KENYA HORTICULTURE COUNCIL – KHC**

The Fresh Produce Association of Kenya (FPEAK) held its Central Kenya Hortifair at Kiganjo, Nyeri during the last week of April. The theme for the Hortifair was **“Farming as a business”**. The event attracted 36 exhibitors from public and private sectors and over 1,800 farmers from Central, South Rift Valley and Eastern Provinces.

The Guest of Honour, Hon. Gideon Ndambuki, the Assistant Minister for Agriculture, told the large crowd that he was “impressed with the public-private sector partnership geared towards helping the farmers”.

This was the first Hortifair for the year. FPEAK is in constant dialogue with all stakeholders, particularly international customers, farmers, input suppliers and

other service providers, to promote the continued growth of the industry. The next Hortifair will take place in Western Kenya.

### MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE

Following formation of the coalition government, Hon. William Ruto was appointed as the new Minister for Agriculture. The Minister also has two new Assistant Ministers - Hon. Japhet Mbiuki and Hon. Gideon Ndambuki. The Permanent Secretary, Dr Romano Kiome, retains his position. Hon. Ruto has already signaled that he will give priority to matters of food security and availability of affordable farm inputs to smallholder farmers. We wish them all great success in their leadership roles.

### HCDA

The Horticultural Crops Development Authority (HCDA) launched its first customer service charter on April 18<sup>th</sup>. The charter is aimed at increasing public awareness on horticultural production and marketing services offered by HCDA, and ensuring that stakeholders horticulture industry receive adequate and prompt services. Strengthening linkages with private sector companies and farmer associations will receive high priority during 2008.

### USAID KHDP NEWS

#### Smallholder flowers

KHDP and the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute Thika (KARI) have started a new project to diversify the range of flowers that can be grown by smallholders. Research will initially focus on Dahlia and Ranunculus varieties for the US market. Technical support will continue for smallholders in Central and Eastern Provinces growing Arabicum, Tagetes, Zinnia, Gomphrena, Mobydick, Stachys, Statice and other varieties for local and export markets. KHDP-assisted growers sold over 720,000 flower and foliage stems to exporters in April, valued at more than Ksh2.2 million.

#### Local market fruit and vegetables

Local technical services company KENGAP Horticulture, assisted by KHDP, and with advertising support and sponsorship from many other industry stakeholders, have produced two new technical manuals for farmers:

- Cabbages – Farming Handbook
- Tomatoes – Farming Handbook

The guides contain excellent practical information on varieties and technologies currently being used in Kenya. They are available at KENGAP and KHDP offices and will also be available for purchase at agricultural exhibitions and shows.

Growers in Central Kenya were able to cash in on high prices for tomato, onion, kale and indigenous vegetables this month. Tomato prices made the highest increase, selling for up to Ksh3, 600 for a 60kg

crate in the Nairobi wholesale markets. With rains restricting production and distribution, the prices of most local market vegetables will continue to increase for the next few months.



Farmers in Rumuruti , Laikipia region are planting Aloe to meet a growing demand for aloe extracts in medications and cosmetics.

#### Aloe

Aloe is a “xerophytic” crop which means it can survive long periods of drought. The well-known variety *Aloe vera* , an ingredient in many soaps, cosmetics and health drinks is now being planted commercially in coastal areas. Another variety, *Aloe secundiflora*, grows wild in many ASAL (arid and semi-arid) areas of Kenya and has traditionally been collected and processed in the bush to produce “aloe bitters”. The bitters are used as ingredients for traditional medicines. However, since *Aloe secundiflora* is a protected plant, growers must plant as much as they harvest to ensure sustainability.

Although drought resistance ensures survival, it does not provide a marketable yield without a minimum amount of soil nutrients and water. KHDP is working with conservation groups and growers in ASAL areas to demonstrate the use of fertiliser (cattle and goat manure is usually available) and water conservation (mulching with natural vegetation and rocks) to grow aloe commercially.

#### Passion fruit

The planting of yellow passion fruit at the coast has accelerated with the onset of the rains. KHDP-assisted farmers in Kilifi and Malindi have germinated 698,000 seedlings so far from seed provided by Premier Foods. More than 72,000 have been potted into bags for

“growing on” before transplanting. Many more will be planted directly from nursery to field if the good rains continue. With a guaranteed market for their fruit, the farmers are now hopeful that they will obtain credit to finance the poles and wires needed to support the passion fruit vines as they grow.

### Mango

KHDP has been working with Tana River growers for over three years to try and increase the prices and income they receive for their excellent *Ngowe* mangoes. Collection centres in Wema and other locations on the Tana delta are being improved for the coming mango season. This season a new technique of semi-processing in Malindi will be tested by KHDP partner Renaldo Retief, and fruit processing expert Jolly Thomas.

Fruit will be de-stoned and pulped at source, then frozen before delivery to processors in Mtwapa, Mombasa and Nairobi. This is necessary because the continued neglect of the roads to the Tana production areas is making it impossible to transport whole fruit without massive wastage and loss of income. Early season trials have been successful, producing delicious samples. Since semi-processing avoids the expensive stages of pasteurization and evaporation, the long-term objective is to install similar low-cost systems along the Tana River. Success will depend on food safety criteria being met along the whole post-harvest chain from grower to final processor.

### Cashew

Some cashew is still being picked, but traders and processors contacted by KHDP say that the current crop will be the best for several years, and will exceed 10,000 tons. Growers assisted by KARI and the MOA, with support from KHDP, are achieving yields of up to 40kgs per tree. Good quality raw nuts are achieving farm gate prices of Ksh30/kg. This has created a demand for cashew seedlings to replace old, low-yielding trees.

### Fertiliser from Worms

With the dramatic rise in fertiliser costs, growers everywhere are looking for lower cost alternatives. **Vermicomposting** (or worm farming) is being pioneered by KHDP partner Real IPM as an alternative source of crop nutrients. Worms have three potential benefits: they consume organic waste material; they produce a liquid *leachate* high in nutrients; and generate rich compost from the worm casts which are left when all food material has been consumed.

A vermicompost unit is just a container (bed) full of worms and organic waste materials. The worms rapidly multiply and eat through the waste material. Beds should not be too deep, or the system becomes anaerobic. The bed is watered daily and must be sloped to ensure that the leachate drains down to a simple gutter and collection tank. The worm currently being used in Kenya is *Lumbricus rebellus* (the red



A vermicompost unit at Real IPM in Thika. The company is producing leachate and compost to use as a low-cost supplement which reduces the need for expensive fertilisers and improves soil structure.

worm). Worms particularly like fruit waste that contains some sugar such as coffee pulp, mango and avocado. Small amounts of animal manure are good to increase the nitrogen content of the leachate. Beds must be protected from direct sunshine, heavy rainfall and birds.

The leachate is high in potassium and micronutrients which makes it particularly good for flowering plants and fruit production. It only contains moderate amounts of phosphate and nitrogen so must be supplemented with P and N for green vegetables. The leachate can be applied as a drench, through the drip line or as a foliar spray. The waste worm casts can also be applied to soil as mulch. Seven large flower farms and coffee farms in Kenya are already using vermicompost on their crops. However, the technique has great potential for smallholder farmers. For more information, contact KHDP or [info@realipm.com](mailto:info@realipm.com)

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