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Kenya Horticulture Development Program (KHDP)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE: MALINDI FARMERS COMMERCIALIZE VANILLA, 21ST FEBRUARY 2008

While farmers in other regions slash their vines, Malindi farmers will be making thousands in a few months.

Smallholders in Malindi will be earning thousands of shillings before the end of the year; thanks to the vanilla pods they have been pollinating the whole of this month, just in time for the long rains in March.

“We have planted vanilla since 2005 in this region and very soon we will be making money out of it, says Mr. Nathaniel Kubuni of Vitendo group, one of the more than 5,000 smallholders from the Coast receiving technical assistance from USAID - Kenya Horticultural Development Program.

USAID - KHDP and other partners introduced vanilla to the coast region 3 years ago in an effort to increase the incomes of smallholders who previously relied on subsistence production of maize and beans. The vanilla vines have now matured and will produce mature beans in the next 8 months.

In addition to vanilla the smallholders have also been introduced to other crops such as sweet potatoes and Mchicha which provide for their short term food requirements and a cash crop ABE Chilli for export. “We never miss some money for our daily requirements thanks to ABE Chilli and the sweet potatoes” says another smallholder, Rose Mwatela.

“KHDP wanted to introduce vanilla at the coastal region due to its favourable climatic condition but also wanted vanilla to fit within the smallholder’s lifestyle. Hence the introduction of short term crops that would earn the farmer some income as they wait for vanilla to mature”. Says Beatrice Gambo, KHDP Manager Coast region

Vanilla is a tropical crop that needs high night and day temperatures and rainfall. The best places to grow vanilla in Kenya are at the coast or in the

areas around Lake Victoria. Vanilla needs 50% shade to grow well and this shade can be provided from mature bananas or tall trees.

Since vanilla is a climbing plant which grows up the trunk of a tree, it is essential to have suitable support trees on the farm. This has made vanilla ideal for the coast whose weather supports growing of a wide range of trees such as the Neem, mango and Jatropha trees that provide both shade and support for the vine. It also discourages deforestation, since growers see the commercial sense to keep the trees.

“Vanilla failed in Central region due to unfavourable climatic conditions” says Mr. Umran Kaggwa a vanilla expert from Uganda. Mr. Kaggwa is asking farmers to be careful before planting vanilla because “vanilla has its high and low times. At market peaks farmers are able to make KShs. 4,000/kilo and at the low times farmers make as little as KShs. 150/kilo. Vanilla requires proper planning in order to maximize the profits. ”

The first vanilla harvest takes place after 3 years and on average a farmer can make 3 - 4kgs annually from a plant. Harvesting can continue for as long as 15 years with proper management.

There is a great demand for vanilla from local hotels and food companies. International markets area also available in the US and the Europe

KHDP and its partners are working with over 300 smallholders in Malindi assisting them with production of vanilla, ABE chilli and Sweet potatoes. Currently KHDP and its partners are exploring ways to add value to the vanilla pods before export.

KHDP is a USAID funded initiative that works with small holders to increase their incomes from horticulture.

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For more information or Vanilla photos or interviews with farmers and Vanilla experts, please contact Grace Nzou on 0721761764 or 0721154876 or ganzou@fintrac.com.

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