

Zambia diversifies and revives cashew production

By Jeff Kapembwa | 12 March 2024 | 8:50 am

Zambia's production of cashew nuts has stagnated since the early 1990s due to a lack of education, contact with extension officers and input costs such as fertiliser and pesticides.



The revival of the cashew nut subsector, planned for the next five years, is taking off through the Cashew Infrastructure Development Project.

A milestone for Zambia, it has been made possible through assistance from the African Development Bank and Tanzania.

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Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema has recognised the cashew subsector's potential and wants to promote production because of its market value.

Cashew nuts fetch an average price of US\$8 000/t (about R154 000/t), compared with Zambia's main export metal, copper, which fetches around US\$9 500/t (R183 000/t).

Cashew nut trees take three years to produce significant yields. As a result, farmers in the subsector are encouraged to maximise the potential of their trees, and to diversify where possible with other value-added crops.

Hichilema recently visited a cashew plantation owned by the Export Trading Group (ETG). He called for the advancement of cashew production in the Western Province, which shares its border with Angola.

The cashew nut sector has the potential to turn around the economy of the country, he said.

ETG programmes officer Nyambe Luhila commended the government for considering reviving the subsector and called for an improvement in technologies, including planting high-quality trees and seed that, when mature, can be exported.

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Meanwhile, cashew nuts agronomist Francis Boma cited pests as one of the concerns affecting production.

He said the ETG was undertaking disease control and management through the development of pesticides.

Former president Edgar Lungu had in 2021 set the tone for revamping cashew nut production, with the government investing millions in the industry, which once thrived in western Zambia but was overtaken by various factors, including diseases.

Under the relaunch, a total 1,7 million cashew nut trees were planted. There were plans to exceed six million trees to benefit the country, with anticipated export gains from the new cash crop.

The Cashew Infrastructure Development Project has targeted 60 000 smallholder farmers, half of them women, and 7 000 youths, each planting 1ha or around 100 cashew trees.

About 6 000 full-time jobs were expected to be created along the cashew value chain.

Lungu lauded former Tanzanian president John Magufuli for donating 25 million tons of cashew seedlings to Zambia, saying he envisaged this would help the country set a new destiny in agricultural development.