

'Everything changed when I learnt how to deal with fruit flies'



Anthony Mugeku
MANGO FARMER

A cool breeze rustles the leaves of the lush foliage as Anthony Mugeku walks through his farm inspecting the heavy-laden branches of mango trees. Each tree is burdened with the weight of plump green-and-red fruit that will soon be ready for harvest. His 250 mango trees sit on a three-acre piece of land he inherited from his father in Kasafari sub-location in Embu County, Eastern Kenya.

Popularly known as 'Captain' for his prowess in football in the 1990s, Anthony, 38, now has a new passion – mangoes. His interest in the crop began in 2003, when the Catholic Church ran a program to encourage farmers in the area to grow the fruit. The church paid farmers Ksh100 (US\$1) for each hole they dug, and gave them seedlings to plant. "I was young; I dug 100 holes and planted the trees but my only interest was in the money I would get for the holes." Seventeen years later the holes have born fruit-laden trees, and Anthony is an established mango farmer. "This is my lifeline. It is how I make my daily bread."

Anthony has come a long way since that first lot of trees. "I grafted my trees to increase my produce after seeing my neighbor's grafted trees. I have the Kent variety, which is very popular. But insects kept attacking my fruit and most

would rot even before I had a chance to harvest. I found that I was incurring losses and did not know what to do about it. Luckily, I was also farming maize and beans, which I would sell so I had a few shillings coming my way. When TechnoServe came and taught us how to deal with mango weevils and fruit flies, everything changed. I learnt



Fruitful field: By growing improved mango varieties and using better farming methods, Anthony Mugeku has dramatically increased the yield from his farm in Embu, Eastern Kenya.



Fruit fly-free: Use of simple traps has ensured that Anthony Mugeku's mangoes are free of infestation, making them more attractive for the market and greatly reducing spoilage and loss of fruit.

how to spray my trees and to use fruit fly traps. This has really helped to keep my fruit intact until it is ready for harvest, and as a result my income has greatly increased.”

The simple devices work by luring the male fruit flies into the trap, where they are killed by a pesticide. Anthony has six traps on his farm, which he replaces once full. Replacements are available from a local dealer in the nearby Karurumo shopping center. Additionally TechnoServe taught the farmers how to prune their trees to improve the quality of the fruit, and how to harvest the mangoes without damaging them. “Better quality means more money,” remarks Anthony with a smile.

Rockefeller Foundation's YieldWise initiative was launched in 2016 with the goal of reducing post-harvest loss in select countries and value chains by up to 50 percent. More than 40 percent of fruits and vegetables in developing regions spoil before they can be consumed.

Using a multi-pronged strategy, YieldWise sought to improve millions of rural lives by increasing incomes, increasing the availability of food and protecting finite environmental resources.

The initiative, targeted tomato and cassava production in Nigeria, mangoes in Kenya and maize in Tanzania.

YieldWise Initiative in the mango value chain in Kenya is implemented by Technoserve; an international nonprofit that promotes business solutions to poverty in the developing world by linking people to information, capital and markets.

“Now Farmers know how to improve and increase their yield,” he observes, “but the main problem is how to market their produce and get good prices for it.” Under the YieldWise initiative, aggregation centers were established to collect mangoes from farmers and negotiate with buyers for better prices than those offered by traders at the farm gate. The centers have cold storage facilities to preserve the fruit before it is bought, and some have begun to process it into juices, wines and dried snacks.

Although there is an aggregation center only a couple of kilometers from his farm, Anthony does not take his fruit there. “I harvest many mangoes. I prefer to sell them to traders because they come to my farm and take the mangoes away on their trucks and pay on the spot. If I was to take the mangoes to the aggregation center, I would have to transport them there myself and wait to be paid once they have been sold. That is why many farmers sell their mangoes to the traders.”

As a result of growing improved mangoes and better farming methods, Anthony earns Ksh100,000 (US\$1,000) per season, which he uses to pay school fees for his four children and cater for their needs. He is in the process of building a bigger house for his family than what they are currently living in. “I have also built a few rooms next to the road where I have set up a grocery shop, a gaming room with a pool table, and an mPesa mobile money business. This has all been made possible by mangoes.”