

NEWS COUNTIES

BUMPER HARVEST

Tulimani farmers reap big from French beans farming

Training and Japanese support helped them change their fortunes

Bean farming in Tulimani, Mbooni, Makueni county /FILE



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At the heart of the arid Makueni county lies the dusty Tulimani ward in Mbooni subcounty.

For the longest time, the farmers here had not gotten much out of their farms for lack of skills coupled with lack of water.

They farm kales, spinach, French beans, tomatoes, capsicum and spinach.

However, their fortunes have changed after they got training from the county government and support

from the Japanese embassy.

Speaking to the Star during a media tour yesterday, their chairperson Benjamin Kyunguti recounted their journey.

"Initially, we had only 20 farmers who planted French beans with an average income of Sh32,000, but now we have 30 farmers with an income of Sh50,000, which is a plus to us," he said.

It all started in 2003, when a group of 33 farmers (14 women and 19 men) formed Kwekavi Horticultural Group with the aim of eradicating poverty.

In 2016, the group was taken through intensive training by support staff from the county government.

They were educated on project activities, data survey tools, market survey, crop selection and action plan preparation.

They also learned about gender mainstreaming and farm family budgeting, crop production and post-harvest management.

The group is now enjoying the benefits of their bumper harvest thanks to Shape Plus initiative from JICA Japan Embassy in Kenya that

has been supporting the vulnerable households.

Kyunguti told the Star that since the start of the training, the farmers have witnessed an increase in productivity and profitability.

Their livelihoods have also immensely improved, with some of the farmers opening other small businesses, such as boda bodas and kiosks.

However, food security has been maximally dealt with as Jerina Kivuku, a member of the group, illustrates.

"I have five children. My husband

died long ago, leaving me with the lastborn twins at pre-school," Jerina says.

"But I'm happy because farming together as a group has made things better, and now the two are in the last stages of their high school education."

Penina Kalulu, who is a member of the group, says her husband quit his job to join her in farming after she took him through the training.

Now money is available and they do not beg as usual.

"Our French beans and kales put food on the table," she says.

"We buy maize from the market and we never count losses. We used to labour while planting maize and could only harvest at most three bags of maize back then."

The group has been a serious supplier of fresh farm produce of kales, munafu and cabbages to the local markets at Kalawani, Tawa and even the neighbouring Machakos county.

Patrick Muendo, the secretary, says their sukuma was bought at a throwaway price before they embarked on profit farming, where a kilo of kales has raised value from Sh10 to Sh50 as per the market.

This has come as a result of a market survey before setting a step to the farm in that they know what type of kale is on demand, he said.

At the moment, there is a shortage of capsicum (pilipili hoho) in the market, whereby a piece of the yellow and red is going for Sh70, and the group is planning to meet the demand.

HOW THEY CAME TOGETHER, THRIVED

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