



Restoring Potato Tuber in Kenya

With a growing interest on potato due to the realization by many that it can change their lives economically --- on its production commercially as a source of income; which is a godsend to feed the hunger stricken population. The tuber is remarkable for its ability to withstand harsh climatic conditions and can grow anywhere even in dry areas such as North Eastern.

Informed on the dangers of low food production and unpredictable weather patterns, the Kenyan and Dutch governments got into an agreement on the ways to improve food security in the country back in 2012. The Dutch embassy observed that potato was doing well both in Kenya and Netherlands, which led to the decision of bringing certified seed potatoes from Netherlands to Kenya. A Dutch potato growing and exporting cooperative called Agrico saw a business opportunity and set up a joint venture called Agrico East Africa Ltd.

According to the Managing Director Agrico East Africa Ltd Mr. Willem Dolleman during an interview with the Hortfresh Journal, the Company started by testing whether the Dutch seeds could do well in Kenya before embarking on a seed production program. "Having confirmed that the seeds were doing well we rolled up a plan of importing different varieties of

seeds from Netherlands to Kenya by Sea", Says Mr. Dolleman. "The type of seeds varieties that were brought in included; Ambition, Arizona, Arnova, Destiny, Faluka, Manitou, Markies, Rudolph, Saviola and Toluca. The local seeds currently yield 5 to 7 tonnes per hectare and with the new varieties this can go up by 8 times." He adds.

At the Initial stage, potato growing was a challenge because most farmers in the country did not practice crop rotation and therefore there were high infestations of diseases. However through several farmers educational programs the people started practicing crop rotation.

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Tips to achieving better potato yields

Agrico, a Holland Cooperative union formed back in 1973 markets 800,000 tonnes of potatoes annually across the world. The organization has an in-house breeding and research plant in Netherlands for developing new potato varieties. According to Dolleman, they have large trial fields where they develop new varieties. The Company operations are geared at helping the potato grower in breeding, growing, collecting, packaging and marketing of potatoes across the Globe. It is for this reason Agrico East Africa shares with us some of the tips that can be followed by a potato grower to achieve a better yield for the produce.

During planting, Dolleman insists that it is always good for the farmer to test the soil in order to know what nutrients are in the soil and those that are lacking so that he or she can add the appropriate nutrients. The farmer should ensure that the soil is minimally 15-20cm loose, then place the seed just on top of it and build a ridge above it. Ridging the potato helps in controlling weeds and gives the tubers space to grow without becoming green from light exposure. On the part of Irrigation; potatoes do not require a lot of water in the beginning but need more water during flowering and tuber filling. Farmers should be careful in

their source of water for irrigating the crop because open rivers are usually a host of many diseases.

On the part of Potato diseases, Agrico East Africa Ltd is offering solutions to farmers with the aim of preventing a host of diseases affecting the crop. Bacterial and fungi diseases are the ones adversely affecting potatoes in Kenya. Bacteria Wilt and Late Blight to be specific are the most common. Part of the organization's remedies to this is crop rotational methods to eradicate bacterial diseases and spraying of potatoes to eliminate fungal infections.

Mr Dolleman further indicates that for a better yield of Potatoes, farmers should always use certified seeds for a significant improvement of the crop. On the field, he says "A farmer should have a good crop-rotation procedure such as planting potatoes on the same field once every four years to prevent Bacterial Wilt". Mr. Dolleman further notes, "The farmer should also check whether the field is well drained to prevent rain or water damage."

In-depth plan for potato production

Agrico East Africa Ltd has an in-depth plan for potato production in Kenya. In a project supported by the Dutch government, the organization is doing multiplication of seeds in order to have varieties available that can grow in different climatic conditions. There

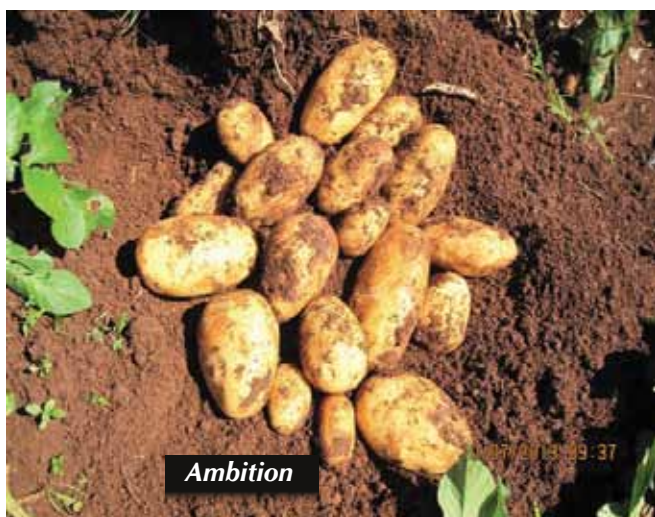


Why low production of potato this year

One of the challenges is that the disease Bacterial Wilt is becoming hard to prevent and treat and obviously contributing to a drop in potato production in the country.

Agrico is very much grateful to the Ministry of Agriculture for their unending support in their strive to increase potato production in Kenya. To sum up, Mr. Willem Dolleman says that Potato value chain is going to grow big very quickly and Kenya is going to be a great beneficiary of this. He concludes by saying 'Nutritional value of potato per litre of water used is better than any other crop in Kenya'.

is an ongoing training of farmers on how best to market and store their produce in way that they can stay longer without getting bad. With the aim of having challenges facing potato growers resolved, Agrico East Africa Ltd is advising them on the need to have a strong co-operative union to air out their grievances. In addition, the company is planning on improving potato production levels in the country by producing 12,000 tonnes of seed potatoes per year for the good of the potato grower as well as developing a curriculum for potato growing, production and care in the country.



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