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Tapping into the United Republic of Tanzania's "Green gold"

FAO helping the United Republic of Tanzania gain access to new international avocado markets.

While the export of horticultural produce from the United Republic of Tanzania to global and regional markets has grown in recent years, plant pests are damaging prospects for growth in avocado export and limiting income generation opportunities. Avocados are grown by many small-scale farmers in the United Republic of Tanzania, and trade offers opportunities to boost economic development and increase incomes. Under the EU-funded project "Support Towards the Operationalization of the SADC Regional Agricultural Policy" (STOSAR), access to international markets for avocado growers and exporters is set to improve through the development and implementation of pest management strategies, capacity development in phytosanitation, and the certification of horticultural produce to guarantee the absence of quarantine pests.

The target export destination countries for the United Republic of Tanzania's avocado include India, China, and the United States of America. Together, these three countries constitute an avocado market worth potentially over one billion US dollars annually. However, access to this critical market is limited or nearly impossible due to import bans. Phytosanitary measures are used to regulate imported avocado to combat the entry and establishment of foreign pests and must be respected by the exporting country. Before the project, the United Republic of Tanzania lacked an updated pest list and so was unable to engage with importing countries on this issue. Also, there was limited information on the management of quarantine pests of avocado in orchards across the country, product quality control, and traceability.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), with local partners, Sokoine University of Agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Tropical Pesticides Research Institute (TPRI), conducted an extensive pest survey and put together all the required information in a technical dossier: The Avocado Pest List. The pest list was shared with potential importing countries that raised concerns about avocado pests in the United Republic of Tanzania. The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), Gerald Kusaya, recently expressed his gratitude on behalf of the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania for the support FAO provided in developing the pest list.

The project has also provided pheromone traps to control the destructive oriental fruit fly detected in some avocado orchards. A tool for monitoring the dynamics of fruit fly populations has been developed. Because of the project, export profiles showing pest-free avocado production orchards will be available online to potential importing countries, making it easier for them to select certified avocado suppliers.

As a result of these efforts, the conversation for market access has begun. FAO has brought together producers and exporters to gauge their production capacities and the amounts they are willing to export. This information has been requested by importing companies' authorities, a most welcome light at the end of the tunnel.

The overall objective of the STOSAR project is to accelerate progress towards implementation of the SDAC regional integration, which focuses on: i. enhancing information on agricultural production, sustainability and competitiveness for evidence-based decision-making; and, ii. improving access to markets through implementation of plant and animal pest and disease control strategies at the regional level.

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