

Hot weather sweetens harvest for mango farmers

By [Caroline Wambui](#)

11 Sep 2017

MACHAKOS, Kenya - Ever hotter weather and more erratic rainfall has made growing many crops more difficult in Kenya's Machakos County, but one harvest is prospering: mangoes.



Meditations via [pixabay](#)

Between 2012 and 2016, mango production in Kenya rose by 47 percent, to more than 80,000 tonnes, said Geradine Nzioki, a spokeswoman for Best Tropical Fruits Company, a Kenyan fruit growing and processing firm. The selling price for processed mango also has increased by two-thirds since 2013, with overall revenue from mango sales hitting 400 million Kenyan shillings (\$3.9 million) by the end of 2016, Nzioki said.

"We use the hot sun as a blessing," said Meshaek Ikinya Mutera, who began farming mangoes in semi-arid Machakos County about seven years ago and has seen his harvest increase by more than 40 percent in the last five years.

The region is turning out "some of the sweetest mangoes in the world," said the farmer, who represents a group of mango growers and also has carried out research on mango farming in Kenya as part of a master's degree programme. Over the last three years, his area of Muthetheni has seen a 16 percent increase in mango production, he said, with new farmers moving into the crop.

Many of the county's mango farmers say they have received help from the Ministry of Agriculture in determining which soils work best for growing mangos, how to prune and fertilise trees effectively and when to water. The result has been rising quality, farmers say - and the crop is largely organic, the better to save costs on chemicals and to access a wider and steadier foreign market.

New jobs, markets

Picking the ripe fruit by hand also has created new jobs in the region in the last five years, with up to 300 additional jobs expected once a planned fruit processing plant is set up at Masii in Machakos County, Nzioki said.

Mango farmers say processing fruit - which can easily rot if not sold quickly - into more durable and valuable products such as dried mango, mango powder, mango juice and mango crisps is key to making the most of their harvests. Right now too much of the fragile harvest is lost as it's transported to market, they say - though they expect the new processing plant will help. "We don't have to bring our mangoes to Nairobi for processing. We can process them in Machakos and transport the finished product to other parts of the world," Nzioki said.

With increasing mango production, exports of Kenya's mangos and mango products are growing. In Machakos County organisations including the Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Kenya Chinese Chamber of Commerce have teamed up to facilitate the increased sales, Mutera said.

Mango farmers in Machakos County also have organised into groups to help share costs of transport, packaging, marketing and export licenses, he said. To be part of most of the groups, farmers must have a bank account, but gain benefits such as a certificate of origin for consignments of their crop, George Kiondo, agricultural chief executive officer for the Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

With the innovations, farmers in the county have cut their mango crop losses by about 40 percent since 2013, largely by using better storage facilities, including low-cost solar-powered cold storage, and better harvesting and packaging methods, officials said. Better fruit fly control, using traps, and the use of harvesting nets have also boosted crop production and income, they said.

(Reporting by Caroline Wambui, Editing by Laurie Goering. [Thomson Reuters Foundation](#), the charitable arm of Thomson Reuters, that covers humanitarian news, climate change, women's rights, trafficking, property rights, and resilience.)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>