

Why handling and transportation, matter for fresh farm produce

By Henry Owino

THE logistics of transporting fresh farm produce to any market may be very complex. Those in the supply chain must always work together seamlessly so that the produce can make it to the end users in good condition. To ensure this happens, they must take into account packaging, temperature, humidity, road network and other factors to ensure the produce stays fresh and intact.

The transportation is essential for the sustainability of agricultural production in sub-Saharan Africa as it impacts positively factors such as mobility, the adoption of high-yielding varieties, high productivity crops and bigger farm size.

In rural parts of Africa, transportation modes include animal traction, car, truck, train and other intermediary means of transport (IMT) such as motorcycle, bicycle, boat and canoe mostly adapted for local transport problems with low and medium loads.

Intermediary modes of transportation (IMT) are crucial to farmers' timely access to farm, markets and agro-services though the level of adoption may be unconnected with availability of quality road.

This waste of energy and time could affect their effective working time and productivity on the farm. It is believed that trekking shorter distances or using IMT would reduce food farmer's walking time and increase productivity.

While good packaging of fresh farm produce reduces losses even further, it makes handling and trading of the product easier and, for retail trading, improves the marketability of the product.

According to experts, selection of the right container and packaging materials by farmers, traders or manufacturers, protects against damage or contamination by micro-organisms, air, moisture and toxins.

Agricultural products cannot be stored indefinitely. The maximum storage duration (the shelf life) of agricultural products varies and can only be a few days for some fruits and vegetables, a couple of months for most tubers and bulbs, and over a year for dried food grains or other seeds, depending on the storage method.

In this edition, *PanAfrican Agriculture* pictorial depicts the transportation and handling approaches likely to lead to further loss of produce.



A trader selling bananas on a handcart at Gikomba Market.



Cattle roam in an urban centre as pasture shortage bites.



Farmers deliver raw milk at a collection point.



Collard greens (sukuma wiki) kept under shade before buyers come out.



A motorbike rider transports bags of mangoes to a local market.



Milk packed in jerrycans and transported on pick-up vehicles.



Fresh farm produce being ferried to the market on a pick-up truck.



A truck turned into a makeshift grocery at Nairobi's Toi Market.

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Hawkers carry around bananas in open baskets as they look for buyers.



Sugarcane and bananas sold by the roadside in Keumbu, Kisii.



Traders sell fresh produce at Nairobi's Wakulima Market.



A truck arrives with vegetables at Marikiti market.



Mangoes displayed for sale next to a garbage heap at Wakulima Market.



At Marikiti market vegetables are displayed for sale on handcarts.