



USAID's, Kenya Crops and Dairy Market Systems (KCDMS) lead Dr. Robert Mwadime, PS livestock Harry Kimutai handing over Belmont Farm of Beyond Fruits Limited their standards certification. On the left is FPC CEO Okisegere Ojepat. Photo Credit: Marion Wagaki.

Kenya sets higher quality standards for fruits, vegetables

By Marion Wagaki

KENYA has taken its food quality regulation a notch higher with the introduction of a certification standard that requires safety and traceability for horticultural produce consumed locally.

The KS1758 standard, launched by the Ministry of Agriculture in July, stipulates the hygienic and safety requirements during the production, handling and marketing of fruits, vegetables, herbs and spices.

"The KS1758 is a very important mark developed to ensure our produce meets local and international

standards and I want to urge farmers to partner with other offtakers so that they are able to produce their food in accordance and this will not only see them fetch better price for their produce but lead to better income for returns and investment," said State Department of Livestock Principal Secretary (PS) Harry Kimutai.

"We want all our food in terms of produce be safe from farm to fork, thus handled safely until it reaches the tables of the consumers and this is how critical the government policy and legal frameworks have been produced to support the private sector as they engage farmers to apply the mark of KS1758."

The standard applies to all operators in the horticulture value chain including breeders, producers, traders, shippers, and cargo handlers for local, regional and international markets.

Fresh Produce Consortium of Kenya (FPC Kenya) has been facilitating local producers to obtain the KS1758 certification and appealing to stores to stock certified products and consumers to demand certified products with the KS1758 mark.

Certification, says the fresh producers lobby, is expected to trigger higher demand for fresh produce in the city suburbs as well as growing urban centres.

"We expect high demand for food especially in the upmarket areas as food companies seek compliance with safety standards. The trend is equally being dictated by the changing food styles following emergence of chronic diseases," said FPC Kenya Chief Executive Officer Okisegere Ojepat.

Local consumption of fresh produce currently stands at 96 percent against four percent exports, mainly to the European Union and other developed markets.

"We expect that exports are going to increase to 12 percent from four percent and this will in turn increase revenue as international markets get more products from us due to compliance in the domestic market," Ojepat said.

In addition to producers, FPC Kenya is also targeting compliance by organised groceries, hotels and big traders' markets like Kongowea in Mombasa, which receives food from other counties.

Belmont Farm of Beyond Fruits Limited in July became the first producer to be KS1758 certified in the country after successfully implementing the safety measures from farm to fork.

Beyond Fruits was supported by a five year USAID's Kenya Crops and Dairy Market System Activity (KCDMS) through FPC Kenya to implement the KS1758 standard on its 12-acre farm (Belmont Farm) in Limuru as well as its farm to market logistics.

USAID, Kenya Crops and Dairy Market Systems (KCDMS) Lead Dr Robert Mwadime said it was necessary to address food safety issues considering the prevalence and increase of diseases such as cancer and others that relate to either food poisoning and food safety.

"It should be of great concern what we are feeding our people and what we choose to eat. As USAID we are going to increasingly get involved and invest in ensuring that what we eat is safe," said Dr Mwadime.

Speaking during the issuance of the certificate to the company, Mr Kimutai challenged other horticulture industry players to comply.

"Belmont Farm took the risk to support farmers to produce crops in a way that is acceptable and this is the way to go. We need others to emulate them and ensure that we have suppliers producing in accordance and as a country we will be proud to say we are producing safe food," the PS noted.

Ali Noor, the sales and marketing manager, Eastern Africa for the testing, inspection and certification firm Bureau Veritas, said that produce supplied and managed by the Beyond Fruits Limited-Belmont Farm can now be sold in any local outlet or retail store with confidence that tenets of food safety and traceability are embraced by the farmers from farm to fork.

Mr Noor noted that as farmers become more and more exposed to requirements from multisectoral stakeholders, the three triplets of food security, food safety and sustainability are always a permanent fixture in the current business environment.

"This is the beginning of a journey that has no end. Stakeholders will expect more in terms of food security, food safety and sustainability when engaging," he said.



Tomatoes at one of the fruit outlets, that has been certified and have the standard mark of Ks1758. Photo Credit: Marion Wagaki.