



Lydia Kiri, a nutritionist working in Kieni West, Muguda ward in Lamuria location together with Dr. Beatrice Kiage, a Nutrition Associate with the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN) during a farmers field day and teaching them on new bean recipes. Photo Credit: Marion Wagaki

Kenyans told to eat more beans rich in iron and zinc

By Marion Wagaki

A DIET lacking zinc and iron minerals is to blame for stunted growth, impaired physical and cognitive development and anaemia, among other infections affecting a section of the Kenyan population, experts warn.

Five organisations have partnered under the Ziron-Pulse programme to address food security and nutrition as well as push for the consumption of bean varieties rich in iron and zinc.

The project which is implemented in partnership with the James Hutton Institute, the University of

Birmingham, Kenya Agricultural Livestock Research Organization (KALRO) and the University of Nairobi has urged Kenyans to eat more beans rich in iron and zinc not only to address malnutrition but also encourage value-addition to make it attractive to the children.

Dr Beatrice Kiage, a nutrition associate at the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANERAN) said experts are concerned about the zinc and iron deficiency that is contributing to the high level of stunting in Kenya.

"We have produced more than 40 bean recipes to be able to reach more consumers, especially children and pregnant mothers who are affected by malnutrition", she said.

The latest Kenya Demographic and Health Survey shows that 26 per cent of children under the age of five are so malnourished that they have become stunted or too short for their age with the rate of stunting being as high as 46 per cent in some counties more than one in 10 children which is 11 per cent are underweight.



Beans on the farm, farmers have been encouraged to plant new bean varieties rich in iron and zinc. Photo Credit: Marion Wagaki.

According to Dr Kiage, introducing appealing bean recipes to entice children is one of the ways to boost the uptake of beans.

She said they carried out research in Kiambu, Meru and Nyeri counties to find out some of the barriers and gaps in bean consumption.

“Our research found out that one of the things that make consumers shun beans was because of flatulence, but also because it was becoming boring, especially for children as they either consumed *githeri* (Maize and beans) or just beans,” she said.

“One can make foods such as kebabs, doughnuts, cakes and biscuits out of beans and this will not only be embraced by children but will also ensure the adoption and consumption of beans. We are promoting these recipes among the rural population where the beans are normally consumed and also grown.”

Dr Kiage said their research shows that many people only know beans to be rich in protein but are not aware of other benefits.

She said the project is also introducing high-yielding varieties such as the nyota beans that are resistant to pests and mature within three months.

“We are killing many birds with one stone while addressing food insecurity and nutrition,” said Dr Kiage, adding that the national annual consumption of beans is at 700,000 metric tonnes against the production of 600,000 metric tonnes.

Globally, Kenya is the seventh-highest producer of beans and second in Africa after Rwanda.

Dr Kiage said the deficit of 100,000 metric tonnes could be bridged if people are encouraged to consume more beans, which will motivate farmers to increase production.

“These bean varieties are good for our health. By consuming beans, we will be able to address issues of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, obesity and overweight, which are big problems in the country. The beans have high fibre content and can lower cholesterol levels in our bodies,” she said.

Lydia Kirimi, a nutritionist working in Kieni West, said they have been training farmers on the new recipes, which the farmers are adopting and testing.

“We have today introduced nine different recipes, three types of chapatis, doughnuts, kebabs – all made from the high-yielding types of beans,” she said.

The farmers, Ms Kirimi said, had realised they could do a lot with the beans, and some even want to venture into business with the new recipes.

She said cooking using the various recipes is easy and it involves precooking the beans and drying them at home or milling on a larger scale by commercial processors.

Caroline Mwenze, an agronomist and the Kieni East sub-county agriculture officer, said the area receives low rainfall so they promote the cultivation of drought-tolerant crops like beans.

Ms Mwenze notes that farmers can harvest between six to eight 90-kg bags of beans per acre. The varieties are currently supported by KALRO.