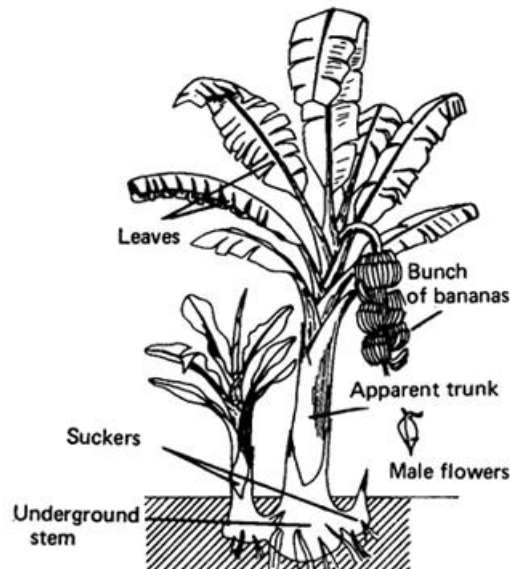


Banana Farming in Uganda:

Challenges and Business Opportunities



About Bananas

Bananas are grown in about countries providing a major source of carbohydrates, essential vitamins and minerals for over 40 million people in the tropics. Banana production is estimated at 140 million tonnes on 10 million hectares but only 14% of the total production is exported. This implies that most of the bananas produced are utilized as food by farming communities thus bananas are important for food security. The great lakes region of East Africa, and Uganda in particular, has the highest per capita consumption of banana in the world estimated between 200 to 250 kg per capita. In general, bananas provide 25% of carbohydrate intake and 10% daily calorie for banana farming communities in tropics and subtropics. Besides being a staple food, bananas also provide income for millions of farmers through local trade. Bananas include diverse types based on their use such as cooking (Matooke - East African Highland Bananas; EAHB), dessert (Yellow bananas), roasting (Gonja or Plantains) and beer (various types used for making juice) bananas. The EAHBs account for 78% of all the bananas grown in East Africa and 18% of total world banana production.

Production Challenges

Despite the importance of banana, there has been a decline in production and productivity in Uganda since the 1970s. The reduced banana productivity and plantation longevity have been associated with decline in soil fertility and poor knowledge of the appropriate agronomic and cultural practices, increased prevalence of pests and diseases, and lack of adequate quantities of quality planting materials (e.g. suckers, tissue culture

plantlets) in time for planting. The most important of biotic stresses include; the fungus black Sigatoka and Fusarium wilt, viruses, the banana weevil, a complex of nematodes and bacterial wilt.

Why the training

The aim of this training is to empower farmers (and potential farmers) with knowledge and skills in various aspects of banana production including varieties, agronomy, pests and diseases management as well as crop (mat) and plantation management practices.

Ten things you need to know in banana production

i) Site selection, ii) Land preparation and weed control, iii) Banana planting and early care, iv) Varieties and source of quality planting material, v) Soils and soil fertility management, vi) Mat and plantation management, vii) Weeds and weed control, viii) Control of run-off and water conservation, ix) Pests, diseases and their control, and x) Growing bananas as a business including farm records and benefit-cost analysis.

Plant tissue culture plantlets

Due to increased prevalence of pests diseases that could be spread through planting materials (traditional suckers), we recommend use of tissue culture (TC) derived banana plantlets especially when establishing new gardens. Plant TC technology allows rapid multiplication of plants in a relatively small space under environmentally controlled and aseptic conditions. Millions of plants can be produced at any given time using this technology that has no parallel in any of the traditional propagation methodologies. TC affords quick production of identical clones of the source plant in huge numbers.

Banana production as a business

Under the semi-intensive monocropping banana production system, the first ratoon (crop) plantation can have an average of 3 plants per mat or stool. This would translate into about a plant population of 1,200 plants per acre and hence 1,200 bunches per acre in every 12 months. With a farm gate price (2017) of Shs 10,000 per bunch, total annual sales of up to Shs 12,000,000 per acre per year can be realised. In fact, a benefit-cost ratio of 1.20 has been recorded meaning that one can profitably grow bananas as a viable business in Uganda. The recommendations suggested here and during the training are based on our previous research during the last 25 years and experience with banana growing of bananas in Uganda.

For more information

Dr Settumba Mukasa,
senai bioscience@gmail.com
sbmukasa@gmail.com.