

Horticulture gets Shs90bn boost

FLAVIA NALUBEGA

The European Union (EU) has extended 32.5m Euros (Shs91b) in training aid to 47 horticulture export firms. The money will be used to provide farmers with knowledge on how to ensure food safety and high quality produce that can be acceptable on the international market.

The funds are provided through the Pesticide Initiative Programme (PIP) in Uganda. They will also be used to provide pesticides.

PIP 2 was designed in October 2009 to help African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) producers and exporters of fresh fruits and vegetables overcome difficulties in accessing European markets.

"The budget for PIP 2 is 32.5m Euros. I am urging you to take advantage of this programme otherwise other countries will eagerly eat the whole pot," Ms Celin Madsen, the programme officer of the PIP programme said.

So how will local farmers benefit from this project?

PIP gets in partnership with exporting companies at the local level, trains farmers on how to improve the quality of their crops. Mr Unran Kagwa, PIP's chairperson in Uganda, said, "PIP's target is to train service providers who in turn train farmers of vegetables and fruits at the village levels. In the first phase, we helped Mubuku and Mashamba farmers' corporations to improve by training them and we hope that this second phase helps more farmers to have better produce."

The first phase of helping the farmers lasted from 2001 to 2009 and the quality of vegetable and fruit produce distributed to the market has improved. Small and medium companies dealing in horticulture produce like Bukungu Growers Scheme benefited from the last phase and are now thriving in exportation of fruits and vegetables.

Ms Madsen said, "PIP started in 2001

and it has worked in 28 countries and implemented a total of 450 individual and customised projects and 100,000 small holder family farms who have benefited directly or via their exporters."

She said this second phase that broke off in October 2009 will last five years and is open to all companies and producers that export fruit and vegetables to the EU market, smallholder support organisations, professional organisations, universities and training centres and public-private stakeholders platforms.

On Tuesday, the second phase of PIP was launched in Kampala by international PIP team which interacted with representatives of the Ugandan fruit and vegetable sector.

They encouraged farmers to apply to join this scheme so as to improve the quality of their produce that will find a bigger market at the international level.