

Commissioning of Smallholder Horticulture Aggregation and Processing Center



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On 27th March 2018, the First Smallholder Horticulture Aggregation and Processing Centre in Kenya was officially commissioned by the Embu Governor, Hon. Martin Wambora together with Ms Betty Kibaara, Associate Director, Rockefeller Foundation and Prof Gitahi Kiama, the Principal College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences. The center which is located in Karurumo, Embu County, was renovated and upgraded by the University of Nairobi Postharvest project team led by Dr. Jane Ambuko in collaboration with researchers from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology and Technoserve Kenya. The center becomes the first of its kind in Kenya and meant to show case and demonstrate postharvest technologies and innovations for postharvest handling of perishable horticultural commodities.

The center is equipped with facilities for both aggregation of fresh produce and small scale wet and dry processing. The installed facilities include evaporative cooling technologies (zero energy brick cooler and evaporative charcoal cooler). In addition, the center has a Coolbot cold room which is an innovative low-cost alternative to the conventional cold room and has capacity to cool produce to preset temperatures. Apart from aggregation and storage for fresh market destinations, fruits brought to the center can also be transformed into various wet-processed products including pulp, mango concentrate, ready to drink juice, jam, wine among others. Fruits (and vegetables) can also be dried using two modern tunnel solar dryers installed at the center. The two dryers have capacity to dry one ton of high quality dried fruit chips in one loading. Processing (wet and dry) can transform unsold fresh fruits into shelf-stable products to be sold later. The farmers already have experience in dry processing and have products such as butternut flour, mango flour, banana flour, pumpkin seed flour, moringa flour, mango crisps, and banana crisps. The project team will work with the farmers improve the processing standards and meet KEBS requirements.

Speaking during the launch, Governor Wambora welcomed the project and pledged the County's

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support in ensuring its growth through deploying agricultural extension support officers to the project, assisting the centre in obtaining a quality product certification from Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) and providing a 3-phase power supply for large-scale commercial processing.

“One thing about this noble project”, the Governor explained, “is that it is in line with the government’s big four agenda and more specifically, food security and manufacturing. I am a firm believer in manufacturing and value addition”.

On his part, Prof Kiama Gitahi, who was representing the University of Nairobi’s management concurred with the governor's sentiments and thanked the Rockefeller Foundation for their financial support. He further highlighted this initiative as one of the many that the University of Nairobi conducts to achieve focused outcomes that support and encourage engagement, economic, social and cultural prosperity.

Ms Betty Kibaara who was speaking on behalf of the Rockefeller Foundation congratulated the project team for actualizing the idea of aggregation centers supported by their Yieldwise initiative. She hoped that the center will serve as a one-stop center where farmers and other stakeholders can find technologies to help them in their efforts to reduce postharvest losses and access market for their produce as the center will help farmers attain quality, quantity and consistency required by traders.

The project team leader Dr. Jane Ambuko thanked the Rockefeller Foundation for their financial support that has enabled the team to bring the research outputs (technologies and innovation) to the end users - ‘lab to land’. She urged the County government to support the center and transform it into a model to be emulated by other Counties. She also hoped that the governor would replicate the initiative in other regions in Embu to help smallholder horticultural farmers.

Although the center belongs to the Karurumo Self-help Horticultural Farmers, it is expected to benefit the more than 4,000 horticultural farmers in the area.

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