

# Agribiz

SMART WAY TO GROW MONEY

While hotels prefer making mushroom soup using dry powder, individuals are increasingly taking to enjoying the nutrient in their homes

## Growing number of vegetarians, hotels now a ready market for mushrooms

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Ken Paul Kisiangani graduated from Egerton University,

he never expected to live at home in Kakamega with his parents.

After earning a bachelor's degree in Horticultural Science, Paul had envisioned starting a career immediately in horticultural farms. Instead, he found himself at home, jobless, stressed and mailing lots of resumes. Indeed, joblessness is standard practice for most new Kenyan college graduates these days.

Four years of fruitless search led Paul nowhere, so he decided to venture into farming. He first tried mushroom farming in 2005. In 2006, several youth approached him to learn how to grow the "strange" crop for income generation, if only to earn a coin. They started a self-help group, which they named Galaxy United Youth Group and duly registered it with the social services department in Kakamega. "Most people we knew were

just growing whatever was popular during the season. We decided to conduct a market research instead of not just following the herd. We visited research institutions, supermarkets, wholesalers and nurseries and asked a lot of questions," he says.

Their efforts revealed that mushrooms available in Kenya were being imported, which gave them an opportunity to supply mushrooms locally. Capitalising on the fact that mushrooms are highly perishable, they found a few willing local buyers.

From their savings, the members contributed Sh12,000 and got Sh120,000 from an agricultural grant managed by the Ministry of Agriculture under the *Njaa Marufiku Kenya Project*. Then they established two small, mud-walled and grass-thatched mushroom structures.

The group also bought a refrigerator for preserving the fresh mushrooms, a cooler box for transporting the produce, an electrical sealing machine for sealing dry mushrooms packed in plastic papers and an electric blender for grinding mushrooms. Armed with the required



### DID YOU KNOW?

- Oyster mushrooms were first cultivated in Germany to help feed people during World War One.
- They are best consumed while still young as the ageing process creates bitter and tough mushroom.

- Researchers in Mexico have found that oyster mushrooms can help breakdown disposable diapers. They mostly grow on trees and feed on decaying matter.

- This fungus is rich in potassium, calcium, sodium, phosphorous as well as proteins.



equipment, the group planted its first crop and after a month, the mushroom was ready to harvest. Market reactions were slow for a start, but they kept selling aggressively because they knew the potential in the delicacy.

"We now grow oyster mushrooms three seasons per year since one cycle takes about four months. We have adopted a system that ensures continuous production throughout the year. It involves planting a new crop each month by utilising several production houses," says Paul.

Currently, the group, which has 15 committed members in Kakamega and another 20 farmers located across the county, has grown into a big network

**Emmanuel Wasike, a member of the Galaxy United Youth Group, sells packed mushrooms at the Nairobi International Trade Fair.**  
PHOTOS: WILLIAM MURIIGI

that trades over 500,000 kilograms of fresh mushrooms with estimated income of about Sh1 million per month.

### Vegetarians

"The market is expanding because the growing number of sworn vegetarians. I urge other youth to venture into such initiatives for them to become successful in future," he says.

Galaxy's success is due to the rising demand, quick maturity of the crop and the cheap requirements in production. "With growing awareness on the nutritional and medicinal benefits of mushrooms, demand from individuals in public offices and business premises is rising," he says.

Galaxy Mushrooms are mainly sold through contracts to supermarkets in western Kenya and other traders. "We are also keen to venture into export market like South Sudan," he says.

Galaxy also sells dry mushroom and mushroom powder. A kilogramme of dry mushroom is selling at Sh2,600 while a similar fresh amount fetches Sh300. The smallest package of powder, 50 grammes, fetches Sh150.

"Value addition is one way to increase farm productivity. Some hotels prefer making mushroom soup using dry powder since it is easier to store. Many people also want to enjoy mushroom soup in their homes," says Paul.



## Farmers in Nyanza benefit from improved livestock breeding project

By Noven Owiti  
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Livestock farmers in Nyanza region are benefiting from an accelerated breeding system dubbed *Fixed Time Artificial Insemination (FTAI)* being undertaken in the region courtesy of the US government-funded *Feed the Future Food Security Programme*.

The initiative, whose implementation is under the dairy component of the Accelerated Value Chain Development (AVCD) project, seeks to ensure healthier dairy cows, boosting milk production.

The project is being implemented by the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) after conducting a successful baseline survey on the viability of the new innovation. In the project, indigenous cows are inseminated with semen from bulls of improved dairy breeds. The process starts with selection of the cows then pregnancy

tests before the animals are inseminated with semen collected from proven bulls of improved breeds.

The programme, rolled out in Migori County in May this year, involves about 600 livestock farmers from three sub-counties (Ronggo, Awendo and Suna East, in Kisumu County, at least 400 farmers from Nyakach, Kajulu in Kisumu East constituency and Muhoroni areas have had their local zebu cows inseminated under the programme.

According to Dr James Rao, the AVCD dairy component coordinator, the project is targeting more farmers with a view to increasing animal productivity and ensuring food security, thus reducing poverty.

Stephen Owino, an AI specialist in Muhoroni who does the insemination, says on average it costs only Sh500 to inseminate each cow and the animals in turn produce quality calves. "I am looking forward to a double milk output," he says.

## Real estate company now ventures into agribusiness

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Optiven Limited, a real estate has launched its Kilimo Tulienga initiative that will see them partnering with green-house experts and a crop management company to give their client value for their money. Optiven CEO George Wachuri (*pictured*) says their clients will be able to earn more with little effort as they go about their daily work or even while out of the country. "The initiative will allow you to invest and go about your business, as you await returns from your investment. You do not have to be involved in the day-to-day running of farming," said Wachuri. He said that most people buy plots but in most instances these plots remain idle for a while as they look for money to construct homes. This delay has brought about the idea of plot owners utilising these plots profitably as they



wait to develop them in future. Once a customer buys a plot and he is not utilising it, green houses will be constructed and crops planted and managed by the company. The owner of the plot will be getting a certain amount of money after the harvest of the produce. "The role of agribusiness in Kenyan economy cannot be ignored. This initiative will offer more jobs to young people, support Vision 2030, contribute to wealth creation and contribute to gainful employment," he added.



ABOVE: Packed mushrooms ready for sale, a product of Galaxy United of Kakamega. ABOVE, RIGHT: A crop of mushrooms. PHOTOS: WILLIAM MURIIGI AND COURTESY