

COFFEE FARMERS NOW GO ORGANIC

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In a bid to meet consumer demands abroad, coffee farmers in Kilimanjaro region have turned to growing of organic coffee for export.

The organic coffee project, which started in 2001, is being implemented by the Kilimanjaro Native Cooperative Union with support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

Gabriel G.I.S. Lyatuu, the manager of the Kilimanjaro Organic Coffee Project told The Citizen last week that so far 1,700 coffee farmers are involved in the project. The farmers have been picked from five primary cooperative societies with high coffee yields.

He named the societies as Mwika-Kinyamvuo, Mwika-Mrembouo, Marangu East, Kirua Vunjo East and Uru North. He said the project was initiated in 2001 to identify and sensitise farmers on benefits of organic farming and what they were required to do.

It was not until 2004/2005 farming season that the first organic coffee - coffee produced without the use of any type of chemicals - was harvested and sold to the targeted overseas markets.

According to him, some 57,450 kilogrammes (or 57 tonnes) of organic coffee were exported during

2004/2005 farming season.

This season (2005/2006) exports may drop to 30 tonnes because of persistent drought that has hit Kilimanjaro region.

Mr. Lyatuu said the main objective of the project is to meet the demand of coffee consumers abroad who are now demanding food produced without the application of chemicals.

These include coffee, which is largely grown in Tanzania for export. Only two per cent of coffee produced in the country is consumed locally and the rest is exported.

The project, says Mr. Lyatuu, is also intended to improve the livelihood of smallholder farmers in Kilimanjaro region.

Organic coffee fetches higher prices compared to traditional coffee grown with the use of chemicals.

Since no chemicals are being used in organic coffee farms, villages earmarked for the project should be those with high natural soil fertility and where there is evidence of good farm management on the part of the farmers. The project manager said no farmer is forced into the project although most of those in target villages are sensitized on the benefits of organic farming.

"Nobody is forced. But those willing are trained on organic farming

practices like how to improve the soil fertility through using compost manure and planting of leguminous crops" he said.

He added that coffee farmers registered in the project will have to practice "organic farming" for at least three years. Extension workers have been deployed to the project area where, they not only ensured the farmers complied with the requirements but also inspect their farms from time to time.

Before organic coffee is exported, it had to be certified by the Tanzania Organic Certification body (TanCert) and Naturland, an organic products certification body based in Germany.

Mr. Lyatuu said the project target is to reach between 5,000 to 10,000 coffee farmers.

Organic coffee is also grown in Mbeya region and Kagera, the latter for Robusta coffee.

The Kilimanjaro organic coffee has been realised through a programme called Export Promotion of Organic Products from Africa (EPOPA), which was created by SIDA in 1994.

The programme, which has projects in Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, aim at giving African smallholder farmers improved standards of living through developing the exports of organic products from Africa.