



FOSCU AT HARVEST MONEY EXPO 2025: INSIGHTS FOR ENHANCED VALUE ADDITION AND FOOD SAFETY IN UGANDA

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The FoSCU Coordinator inspecting exhibition stalls and building capacity of the exhibitors on food safety principles

The Harvest Money Expo, a pivotal annual event organized by the Vision Group, serves as a dynamic platform for Uganda's agricultural community. The 2025 expo, held from February 14–16 at Mandela National Stadium, Nambole, drew thousands of stakeholders, including farmers, technologists, entrepreneurs, consumers, civil society organizations, development partners, donors, and government leaders. This year's theme, "Farming as a Business, Value Addition, and Cooperatives," was designed to empower farmers with practical knowledge through over 29 targeted training sessions.

Beyond the exhibitions, the expo facilitated numerous networking opportunities, workshops, and panel discussions. These sessions covered a wide array of topics, including climate-smart agriculture, access to finance, market linkages, and the role of technology in modern farming. Innovations in irrigation, post-harvest handling, and precision farming were also prominently featured, underscoring the potential for increased productivity and efficiency in the agricultural sector.

FoSCU's Engagements: A Deep Dive into Food Safety and Value Addition

The Food Safety Coalition of Uganda (FoSCU) actively participated in the three-day expo, emphasizing awareness and capacity building in food safety. FoSCU's activities were strategically aimed at food system actors across the value chain. Through public lectures, interactive exhibition stalls, and one-on-one consultations, FoSCU addressed critical food safety hazards: biological, physical, and chemical while also promoting value addition and the importance of certification for meeting national and international standards.

FoSCU also conducted demonstrations on simple food safety techniques that farmers and processors could implement at their facilities. These included proper handwashing practices, effective cleaning and sanitation protocols, and methods for preventing cross-contamination. Additionally, FoSCU provided informational materials on food safety regulations, labeling requirements, and certification processes, helping

attendees navigate the complex landscape of food safety compliance.

Key Observations from Stall Inspections

During thorough inspections of exhibition stalls, FoSCU identified several significant gaps affecting Uganda's agro-processing sector:

- **Suboptimal Value Addition:** Many entrepreneurs dealing with organic and agroecological products operate at basic value-addition levels. While their enthusiasm is commendable, they require support to scale up operations and enhance product offerings.
- **Certification Shortcomings:** A concerning number of locally processed foods fail to meet basic certification requirements. This is often due to packaging and labeling inconsistencies, misleading nutritional claims, and a general lack of adherence to established standards.
- **Inadequate Packaging:** The presentation of many food products is lacking, with some organic items packaged in unconventional containers like jerry cans or improperly filled bottles, deterring potential consumers.
- **Missing Essential Information:** A significant number of products do not include critical information such as expiry dates, manufacturing dates, batch numbers, or lot

numbers, raising concerns about traceability and consumer safety.

- **Inappropriate Packaging Materials:** The use of unsuitable packaging materials poses a risk of contamination, compromising product integrity and safety.
- **Insufficient Investment in Quality Control:** Many small-scale processors lacked the resources and expertise to implement robust quality control measures, leading to inconsistencies in product quality and safety.

Strategic Recommendations for Stakeholders

To address these challenges and elevate food safety and value addition practices, FoSCU proposes targeted interventions for different stakeholders:

For Government and Regulatory Bodies

1. **Enhance Research and Testing Infrastructure:** The government should invest in advanced research and laboratory facilities to ensure all market-ready food products are safe and nutritious. This includes routine testing for contaminants, pathogens, and other hazards.



2. **Strengthen Regulatory Frameworks:**

Update and enforce food safety regulations to align with international standards, ensuring comprehensive coverage of all stages of the food value chain.

3. **Streamline Certification Processes:**

Simplify the certification process for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to encourage compliance with food safety and quality standards.

4. **Promote Public Awareness:**

Launch nationwide campaigns to educate consumers about food safety, proper handling practices, and the importance of reading labels.

For Agro-Processors and Entrepreneurs

1. **Invest in Training and Capacity Building:**

Participate in training programs focused on value addition principles, proper labeling practices, effective packaging techniques, and product certification.

2. **Adopt Best Practices:**

Implement food safety management systems such as Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) to identify and control potential hazards.

3. **Improve Packaging and Presentation:**

Utilize appropriate packaging materials to maintain product integrity and appeal to consumers through attractive and informative labeling.

4. **Conduct Market Research:**

Engage in thorough market research to understand consumer preferences, identify market opportunities, and tailor product offerings accordingly.

For Consumers

1. **Demand Transparency:**

Support businesses that provide clear and accurate information about their products, including ingredients, nutritional content, and safety practices.

2. **Provide Feedback:**

Offer constructive feedback to food producers and retailers to help them improve product quality, safety, and presentation.

3. **Stay Informed:**

Educate yourselves about food safety risks, proper handling techniques, and the importance of making informed purchasing decisions.

For Development Partners and NGOs

1. **Support Capacity Building Initiatives:**

Fund and implement programs that provide training, technical assistance, and resources to small-scale farmers and processors.

2. **Promote Innovation and Technology Adoption:**

Encourage the use of innovative technologies and sustainable practices that enhance food safety, reduce waste, and improve efficiency.

3. **Facilitate Market Linkages:**

Connect local producers with regional and international markets, creating opportunities for increased sales and economic growth.

Conclusion

FoSCU's participation in the Harvest Money Expo 2025 underscored the critical need for enhanced food safety and value addition practices in Uganda's agricultural sector. The insights and recommendations provided offer a roadmap for stakeholders to work collaboratively towards a more sustainable, competitive, and safe food system. By prioritizing training, investing in research, strengthening regulatory frameworks, and engaging consumers, Uganda can unlock the full potential of its agricultural sector and ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all.