



GROUNDNUT TRADERS DEVELOP SELF-REGULATION FRAMEWORK IN RESPONSE TO PRESIDENTIAL AFLATOXIN CONCERNS IN UGANDA

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In January 2025, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda announced his intention to issue an executive order banning the sale of raw shelled groundnuts in the country, citing significant public health concerns. During his address ahead of the 39th Liberation Day celebrations in Mubende District, the President referenced scientific evidence linking aflatoxins found in improperly handled groundnuts to liver cancer in humans. *"I will sign an Executive Order forbidding the selling in Uganda of shelled ground-nuts. It is, apparently, these ground-nuts that produce the aflatoxins that cause liver cancer in humans,"* President Museveni stated during his national address.

Initial Reaction from the Groundnut Trading Community

Following the presidential announcement, groundnut traders across Kampala experienced immediate concern regarding the potential ban's impact on their economic stability. Within days of the President's address, the Kampala Groundnut Traders Association convened an emergency meeting to discuss the implications of the proposed ban. Recognizing that aflatoxin contamination represented a legitimate public health concern while also acknowledging that the proposed ban would devastate their livelihoods,

the association's leadership developed a two-pronged approach: seeking expert knowledge on aflatoxin prevention and developing a self-regulatory framework that could potentially convince authorities to reconsider the outright ban.

Proactive Capacity-Building Initiative

By early February 2025, the association had successfully mobilized over 200 groundnut traders from various markets across Kampala to participate in a comprehensive capacity-building workshop on aflatoxin prevention and control. The association strategically approached the Food Safety Coalition of Uganda (FoSCU), a multi-stakeholder coalition focused on sustainable access to safe food through research, awareness creation, knowledge transfer, and policy dialogue. The coalition, operating through its well-established governance structures, including a Steering Committee and Technical Working Groups, responded positively to the traders' request for technical support.

Expert Intervention and Knowledge Transfer

The FoSCU Steering Committee assigned Professor Archileo N. Kaaya, a distinguished food safety expert with more than 30 years of teaching and research experience in the Department of Food Technology and Nutrition at Makerere University, to lead the capacity-building session. Professor Kaaya, who holds a PhD in Food Science and Technology from Virginia Tech, USA/Makerere University and has published extensively on food safety issues, brought considerable expertise to the initiative. His experience working with urban and peri-urban communities on food security issues made him particularly well-suited to address the traders' concerns.



Comprehensive Training Program

Professor Kaaya conducted an intensive two-day training workshop for the groundnut traders, covering the entire groundnut value chain from production to consumption. The training systematically addressed critical aspects of aflatoxin management, including:

- The science behind aflatoxin contamination in groundnuts
- Health implications of aflatoxin exposure
- Proper harvesting techniques to minimize contamination
- Effective drying methods to prevent mold growth
- Safe storage practices to maintain product quality
- Processing standards that minimize aflatoxin development
- Quality control measures for groundnut products
- Transportation and distribution best practices

Participants engaged in practical demonstrations, case studies, and group discussions to reinforce their understanding of these concepts. Many traders expressed surprise at how specific handling practices they had previously considered harmless, such as drying groundnuts directly on uncovered ground, significantly increased aflatoxin risk.

Development of Self-Regulation Framework

Following the training, the association's leadership convened a follow-up session where participants unanimously agreed that developing self-regulatory mechanisms represented their best path forward. They recognized that such an approach would not only protect consumer health

but also preserve their economic interests. The traders formed a special task force comprising representatives from different market areas to spearhead the development of an industry-wide self-regulation ordinance.

Collaboration with Food Safety Experts

In mid-February 2025, the task force formally approached the FoSCU Steering Committee with a request for technical assistance in drafting a comprehensive groundnut self-regulation ordinance. The request aligned with FoSCU's mission of promoting safe food handling practices through multi-stakeholder engagement. The coalition responded by assembling a technical team from its secretariat and Steering Committee to collaborate with the traders' representatives.

Ordinance Development Process

The collaborative drafting process involved multiple stakeholder consultations over several weeks. The FoSCU technical team ensured the draft ordinance integrated relevant national standards established by the Uganda National Bureau of Standards, while also incorporating international best practices in food safety management. The ordinance development process drew inspiration from Uganda's recently launched Grain Industry Self-Regulation (ISR) guidelines, which had been introduced in February 2024 to enhance consumer confidence and improve the image of Uganda's grain industry.

Key Provisions of the Ordinance

The resulting draft ordinance included several key provisions:

- Mandatory training requirements for all groundnut handlers

- ➡ Specific guidelines for the proper drying, storage, and transportation of groundnuts
- ➡ Quality assurance protocols, including regular testing for aflatoxin levels
- ➡ A self-policing mechanism to identify and address non-compliance
- ➡ Sanctions for members who violated the established standards
- ➡ Consumer education and awareness initiatives
- ➡ Traceability systems to track groundnuts throughout the value chain
- ➡ Regular reporting and transparency requirements

The ordinance was deliberately aligned with findings from research indicating that good management practices and proper training significantly reduce aflatoxin levels in groundnut value chains. It incorporated evidence-based approaches showing that the combination of extension services and good management practices yielded the lowest average aflatoxin levels in groundnut production.

Stakeholder Engagement and Commitment

By the end of March 2025, the draft ordinance had been presented to the broader groundnut trading community for feedback. Following minor revisions, the Kampala Groundnut Traders Association formally adopted the self-regulation ordinance in a ceremony attended by representatives from relevant government ministries, food safety experts, and consumer protection organizations.

Implementation Strategy

In their implementation plan, the association established a phased approach for rolling out the ordinance across the country. The initial phase focused on traders within Kampala, with subsequent phases extending to other major urban centers and eventually to rural areas. The association also created a dedicated oversight committee responsible for monitoring compliance and reporting progress to both members and external stakeholders.

FoSCU's Ongoing Support Commitment

Throughout this process, FoSCU demonstrated its commitment to supporting sustainable food safety initiatives led by private sector actors. The coalition pledged continued technical assistance for the implementation of the ordinance, including providing expertise for training additional traders, assisting with monitoring and evaluation systems, and facilitating dialogue with regulatory authorities. This commitment aligns with FoSCU's broader mission of improving food safety through collaborative approaches involving multiple stakeholders.

Traders' Collective Commitment

In a formal statement released following the adoption of the ordinance, the Kampala Groundnut Traders Association expressed their collective commitment: *"We pledge to significantly improve food handling practices through rigorous self-regulation mechanisms. Our goal is not only to protect our businesses and livelihoods but, more importantly, to safeguard Ugandan consumers from foodborne illnesses associated with aflatoxin contamination in groundnuts."*

Conclusion

The case of Uganda's groundnut traders demonstrates how industry stakeholders can proactively respond to regulatory challenges through education, collaboration, and self-regulation. By seeking expert knowledge, developing comprehensive standards, and committing to implementation, the traders have created a potential alternative to an outright ban while addressing the legitimate public health concerns raised by President Museveni. This collaborative approach between private sector actors and food safety organizations offers valuable insights for addressing similar challenges in other food value chains, both within Uganda and across the region. As implementation progresses, the effectiveness of this self-regulation model will provide important lessons for the intersection of food safety, regulation, and economic sustainability.