

Factors influencing production of Horticulture crops in Kenya: a case of Avocado fruit in Nyeri District

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Abstract:

Avocado fruit (*Persea americana* Mill.) is an important multipurpose tree crop in tropical and subtropical areas. Because of increases in global population and need for food security, world agriculture must strive to produce a greater yield per unit area than before. The proportion of the world population living in the cities is increasing. This calls for innovative ways of producing food and delivering it either processed or in its raw form. It is no doubt that food agribusiness has emerged as the largest business in the world. The study investigated the factors which influence production of horticulture crops in Kenya with particular emphasis to avocado fruit farming in Nyeri District. This finding will improve growing of avocado fruits in Nyeri District and lead to increase in consumption of avocado fruits leading to improved health status. In addition the findings will form the basis for any strategic plan for developing avocado fruit farming in Nyeri District. Data was collected using questionnaires from a random sample of 138 avocado fruit fanners from Nyeri District, one avocado fruit processor and five Agricultural Extension Officers were also interviewed. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented using frequency Tables. Regression analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists in order to determine the relationship between the amounts of avocado fruit produced, marketing knowledge, agronomic practices and socio economic factors. Results indicated that 82% of avocado fruit produced could be explained mainly by marketing knowledge, agronomic practices and socio economic factors. Further results revealed that majority of the farmers have minimal marketing knowledge and only 14.5% control pests and diseases while majority (87%) of the farms are managed by women. The research concluded that the amounts of avocado fruits produced is greatly influenced by marketing knowledge of the avocado fruits, agronomic practices carried by farmers and socio economic factors of the farmers like farm size, gender and the extension services provided. The study recommended that the Government and other stakeholders in avocado fruits farming should put more effort towards organizing the avocado fruits marketing through formation of fanners Growers and Marketing associations. Secondly, the Government should spearhead value addition of the avocado fruits and link farmers to the market. It also recommended the promotion of the nutritive value of avocado fruit to stimulate local demand of this fruit. In addition, capacity building of avocado fruit growers, through enhanced extension services on marketing knowledge and agronomic practices like controlling pests and diseases and application of fertilizer and manure was also recommended.