Horticulture farmers in Nyandarua County are reaping the benefits of complying with food safety standards.

Nyandarua county is a predominantly horticultural zone which is a focus value chain for MESPT and DANIDA. DANIDA had been implementing a programme called The Strategic Sector Cooperation Programme that was championing food safety issues. This, therefore, made it strategic for MESPT to come in and build on the lessons of the pilot programme through the AgriFI Food Safety Programme.

MESPT continued with building the capacity of the value chain actors to realize food safety for the export vegetables grown within Nyandarua County. Working with farmer groups such as Kiambariki Cooperative in Kinangop, the farmers attribute their increased production volumes, access to export markets, and incomes to most of the productivity training they have been receiving from MESPT through the AgriFI programme. Value chain actors have been trained on food safety, sanitary, and phytosanitary (SPS) issues as well as good agricultural practices, markets, finance, and access to some of the premium markets.

Kiambariki Horticulture Cooperative was established by horticulture (sugar snaps and snow peas) farmers keen to farm for the export market. In 2019, small farmer groups came together and registered a cooperative with the aim of aggregating their produce for better marketing opportunities among other reasons. Currently, the cooperative has 60 active farmers, and they harvest between 5 to 6 tons per picking per month. The cooperative has eighteen empowered youths, 24 women and 18 men. They commenced partnering with the AgriFI food safety programme in 2021.

“The AgriFI project has enabled us to have more and better produce after learning better farming practices, food handling, and safety and we have seen tremendous improvement as a group.” Notes Jacob Munga Githongo – one of the farmers of Kiambariki horticulture.

“Before we used to use pesticides and other chemicals without really caring about their dangers to our health and on the crops, however, we now know how to better use them. Besides that, we also know how to protect ourselves better as we use chemicals. We use personal protective equipment so that we are not affected by pesticides unlike before when we used our ordinary clothes. We adhere to using the right and approved chemicals and ensure that we do not harvest our produce for sale or home consumption before the recommended duration after spraying lapses. We had a lot of challenges that we faced with various crop diseases but through what we have learned in the AgriFI programme training, we are able to control and manage some of them without thinking of chemicals as the only solution. Furthermore, some of us have gone to organic farming and we are producing healthy produce” Adds Jacob.

Through the productivity training, farmers were able to identify gaps that they had as individual farmers and collectively as a group. The Global GAP training played a big role in reducing produce rejects for Kiambariki Cooperative members. The farmers have adopted improved farming techniques and apply Integrated Pest Management as a preventive measure before deciding to use pesticides. Having the Global Gap certificate on the other hand opened the doors to access the international market.
Under the AgriFl programme, several youths were trained in spraying techniques. They are championing the cause within their home area and this way they earn extra income whenever they are contracted by other farmers to spray produce on their farms. The trained youths are referred to as ‘Spray Service Providers’ and they are the only ones allowed to carry out spraying activities within their localities. This became possible after the group embarked on creating awareness about the dangers of pesticides, proper spraying techniques, and the use of the right chemicals.

“The biggest challenge we had was on food productivity. Through the training, we identified many gaps which we have since fixed and we have seen incredibly positive results. I can say that we are a lot of happy smallholder farmers. We produce more and earn extra income. As a cooperative, we have also grown our savings and made our exporters happy as they are guaranteed of buying high-quality produce from our cooperative. The cooperative has a bright future as we are becoming more sustainable and soon, we shall be able to give advances to our farmers, and for me, that is significant growth.” Says Joseph Mbuthia, a farmer with the cooperative.