

Organic Banana Farming in Taveta

Banana farming is a key economic activity in Taveta Sub-County, Taita Taveta County, where most farmers have long depended on conventional methods of banana farming using suckers from old banana plants and relying heavily on synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. Over the years, this approach led to reduced productivity, soil degradation, and low returns for smallholder farmers.



*Goodluck Mutambo, Vice Chairperson of the Lesuyai
Organic Farmers' Cooperative*

“We used to grow old banana varieties that gave us very small bunches. Sometimes we would borrow suckers from neighbours, and they would come with pests and diseases.”

The turning point came when the Micro-Enterprises Support Programme Trust (MESPT), through the DANIDA Market Development Partnerships (DMDP) Programme, introduced organic banana farming in Taveta. The programme sought to promote sustainable and regenerative farming practices ensure safe food, and improve farmers' livelihoods through environmentally friendly production.

MESPT also supported the establishment of two medium scale satellite farms, Kijani Farm one and Sauti Craffee Farm which planted 3,150 and 5,000 organic banana seedlings, respectively. The adopted banana variety was Grand Nain, preferred for its high quality, longer shelf life, and market demand.

“The training from MESPT helped us understand how to grow organic bananas using manure instead of chemicals. The bananas are safe for people and the environment,” says Goodluck. Through DMDP, MESPT also facilitated a marketing partnership between Lesuyai Organic Farmers Cooperative society Ltd and ORANA, a fruit processor and exporter. The farmers signed a sustainable, binding 10-year contract guaranteeing them a steady market for all their organic bananas and a premium price. *“MESPT facilitated our contract with ORANA, who buys our bananas and pays us within 24 hours after harvest. This has given us confidence and assurance that our bananas have a ready market.”*

Under the contract, ORANA buys organic bananas at KSh 21.60 per kilogram, compared to KSh 18.00 for conventional bananas, a 20% premium. This difference has significantly improved household incomes. *“The extra income has been good. I have been able to educate my children and even buy livestock,”* adds Goodluck.

To support sustainable production, MESPT supported the cooperative to put up three solar-powered irrigation systems that help farmers irrigate their farms affordably and in an eco-friendly manner. The introduction of solar-powered irrigation systems has not only reduced production costs but also promoted green energy use in farming.

“Before, we used to pump water using petrol machines, which were expensive and polluted the environment.”
–Goodluck Mutambo.



Solar-power Irrigation System

Through collaboration between MESPT, ORANA and the County Government of Taita Taveta, roads leading to banana farms have also been rehabilitated, reducing post-harvest losses and improving access to markets. Farmers who once struggled to transport their produce now move it with ease, ensuring timely delivery to the buyer.

One of the biggest achievements by the organic farmers has been the organic certification by ECOCERT, an international organic certification body. The organic certification has enabled the Taveta organic farmers to access international export market for their organic bananas. The organic banana production has also put Taveta subcounty and Taita Taveta county on the global export market.

Adoption of organic and tissue culture banana farming was not without challenges. Initially, many farmers were reluctant to abandon traditional practices and adopt new varieties such as Grand Nain. *“At first, farmers didn’t believe in tissue culture bananas. They were used to their old varieties,”* recalls Joseph Karani Nyange, MESPT Programme Officer in charge of Sustainable Agriculture and Organic Farming. *“But through the demonstration farms, we showed them the difference, bigger bunches, healthy plants, and better market prices, and they adopted.”*

The demonstration farms, such as MoonBerg Organic Farms, played a vital role in accelerating learning and encouraging adoption of organic farming and use of nature based solutions in pest, diseases and soil management. Farmers visiting these demonstration farms could see practically how organic farming techniques including, mulching, use of nature based solutions and proper spacing improve yields and soil health.

Over time, the benefits became visible: improved soil fertility, healthier banana plants, bigger banana bunches, and increased production and reliable market.

Collectively, the Cooperative and the satellite farms now produce over 60 tons in a period of 8 all sold to ORANA.

The DMDP intervention has transformed farming into a dignified and sustainable source of livelihood for many in Taveta. Beyond improved incomes, the project has encouraged youth participation in banana production, post-harvest handling, and transport, creating decent employment opportunities in rural areas. *“Organic farming is safe for us, safe for the soil, and safe for consumers. It has restored trust in farming as a dignified source of income,”* says Goodluck.

The journey has not been without lessons. MESPT, ORANA and the farmers have learned that consistent training, mentorship, and collective action are key to sustaining organic farming. Certification costs remain a challenge, but cooperative structures have made it more affordable for smallholders. The project has demonstrated that organic farming, when supported with market linkages and green technologies, can be both profitable and sustainable.

“Organic banana farming is a practical solution for smallholder farmers. It ensures safe food, decent incomes, and a greener future for Taveta.”



Joseph Karani Nyange, Programme Officer, Sustainable Agriculture and Organic Farming , MESPT

Today, the Taveta Organic farmers stand as pioneer models and the sole producers of organic bananas in Kenya, showing that responsible and sustainable regenerative farming practices can transform livelihoods while protecting the environment for generations to come.