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Demand for Horticultural Crops in Tanzania is Growing Dramatically

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Introduction

Fruits and vegetables are rich sources of vitamins, minerals and fiber and their intake significantly increases health and vitality. It is estimated that 5.2 million people died in 2013 due to low intake of fruit and vegetables in the world (WHO 2016). The World Health Organization (WHO) ranks low fruit and vegetable intake as the sixth leading cause of death worldwide [1,2]. The mortality rate due to low fruit and vegetable intake in sub-Saharan Africa is higher since the region has the lowest per capita intake of fruit and vegetables. For example, average per capita annual consumption of fruit and vegetables in Tanzania in the past 10 years was only 56kg, a level which is only 40% of the WHO recommended adult intake of 146kg/per year (Figure 1).

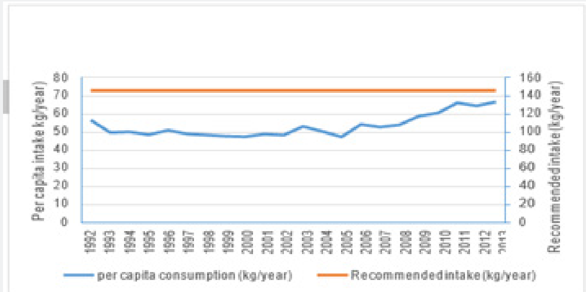

Figure 1: Per capita intake of fruit and vegetable in Tanzania(kg/Year).
Sources: Intake: FAO statistics; Recommended intake, WHO.

The good news is, intake of fruit and vegetables is increasing (Figure 1), a pattern consistent with global upward trends of consumption of healthier foods as income and urbanization increase. In the past decade, fruit and vegetable intake increased by 15% compared to its average in 1992-2002 (Figure 1). The urban population accounts for the largest share of the increasing fruit and vegetable consumption. The increase in fruit and vegetables intake in rural population, which accounts for 80% of the 12 million poor and extreme poor - remains negligible [3].

How is the Tanzanian market responding to increasing demand for fruit & vegetables?

The market has responded to the increasing intake of fruit and vegetables by increasing supply of high quality and well-packaged fresh fruit and vegetables. Accordingly, the number of supermarkets in the country have been increasing fast in the last two decades [4]. The major challenges the smallholder farmers face in conducting business with supermarkets and grocery stores is the small quantities they produce, and the higher quality standards required, which smallholder farmers fail to comply with. Consequently, the supermarkets and big hotels have resorted to importation of fresh fruits and vegetables. As shown in (Figure 2), importation of fresh fruit and vegetables have been increasing fast since 1997 (Figure 2).

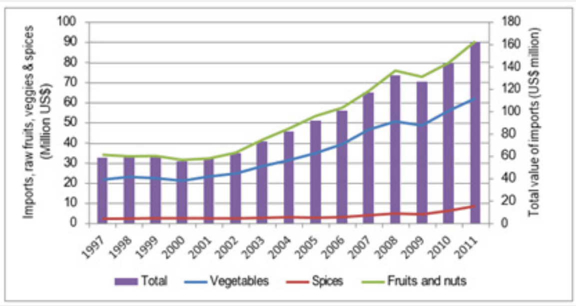

Figure 2: Value of Fresh fruit and vegetables importation in Tanzania.
Source: UNCTAD data.

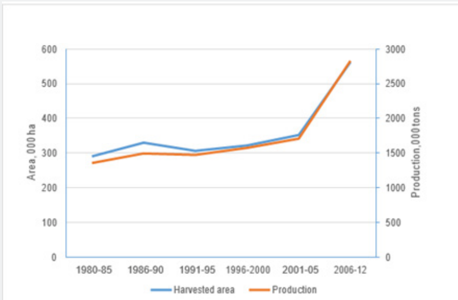

Figure 3: Production and area under fruit and vegetables, Tanzania.
Sources: FAOSTAT raw data.

On the production side, the farmers have also been increasing production of fruit and vegetables. The area under fresh fruit and vegetables increased by about 83% in 2005-12 compared to its average in1990-95. In comparison, cropland increased by about only 50% from about 10 million hectares in 1991-96 to about 16 million hectares in 2006-12 (Figure 3).

What could be done to exploit the opportunities and address the challenges of small scale horticultural farmers?

The increasing demand for fruit and vegetables in Tanzania, which is arising from increasing income and urbanization provide big opportunities for improving rural and urban health of consumers and increasing household income of producers. The challenges are the diseconomies of scale of smallholder who cannot provide the large quantities and high quality and well-packaged produce required by the high-end supermarkets and hotels. The high perishability of fruit and vegetables also is a big challenge that needs to be addressed by well-organized farmer groups and storage and transportation facilities. It is time to revive the old cooperative marketing arrangement that provided efficient rural services to support export crop production, processing and transportation services in the 1940s to 1980s. Group production and marketing could address the diseconomies of scale that farmers face. Collective marketing could also increase the farmers bargaining skills and allow them to capture the prime markets. This is where TAHA could provide a leading role in helping farmers to capture the prime markets, who offer much greater prices than roadside or open marketing points.

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