

# New banana variety to enhance productivity

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Rwanda - A new variety of highly productive banana plants will be distributed to farmers starting next month in a bid to improve banana production and fight disease in one of the priority crops in the country. The move, under the government's seven-year programme which will come to an end in 2024, was announced last Friday by the Minister of State in charge of Agriculture Fulgence Nsengiyumva at the Ministry headquarters.



CIAT via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Nsengiyumva told The New Times that banana crop accounts for about 23% of the entire farmland in the country (estimated at 1.4 million hectares according to figures from MINAGRI), pointing out that apart from serving as a staple food crop for most, it also provides ripe bananas that he said can also be increased for export.

But, some farms in the country have old banana varieties that only produce about five or three kilogrammes per plant. Farmers and experts in agriculture sector say that the situation should change because it does not help a country with small land, but that technology and good agricultural practices should be enhanced so as to maximise yield per farmland.

"Given the importance of banana in the lives of Rwandans, as one of the main crops, we cannot overlook the issue of current seeds getting old and being prone to disease attacks such as the Banana Xanthomonas wilt (BXW), locally known as *Kirabiranya*," he said.

He said they were mapping banana sucker multipliers in districts and using a technology-based system to scale up their availability to farmers. That is by means of tissue culture - the cultivation of a plant through the use of a cutting or other plant tissue.

## Developing traditional banana variety

According to the president of an association of banana juice and makers of alcoholic beverages (APPROJUBAAR), Juvenal Ndayisenga, the traditional variety is ideal for the production of banana beverages and has a high level of sugar, which is good for making such drinks. He told The New Times that the improved banana varieties such as Fia, is ideal for the production of bread, biscuits, and vinegar, but not beer.

"The traditional banana variety can. What is important is to empower farmers in best farming practices such as applying manure and taking care of their crops, including replacing old plants when they have regressed in productivity," he said.

Nsengiyumva said that even the old banana variety that has been existing in Rwanda, can have some of its genes stored in a laboratory. "It might be a variety that is resistant to a disease. Therefore, you can take the resistant trait in that banana variety, and mix it with another variety which has a better yield. And, the resulting banana variety can be both productive and resistant to diseases which have prevalently attacked bananas," he said underscoring the importance of developing research for evidence-based actions.



New campaign launched to contain a major threat to banana production

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## Addressing BXW

Leonidas Harerimana, a farmer from Rwamagana District, planted bananas on about three hectares over three years ago. But, he told The New Times that his harvest has been adversely affected by banana wilt as the disease attacked about two hectares. He said that he has been growing newly improved banana varieties such as Fia and Poyo which had increased yield by about three times compared to the old banana variety.

"But the disease has shattered our hope of a good harvest," he said, wondering whether they could get a new variety that can resist such a disease.

Nsengiyumva said BXW cannot be eradicated apart from uprooting the affected banana plant and destroying it so that it does not affect safe plants, a task that he said calls for concerted efforts from various players.

Read the [original article](#) on [The New Times](#).

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