

New Kenya farmers market to connect producers and consumers

Farmers in Kenya will soon have their own market - the Nairobi Farmers Market - by which they will be able to sell their produce directly to consumers, cutting off the traditional value chain which comprises middlemen. The market, which is under construction in the Runda Estate, will contain 45 stalls that are exclusively operated by farmers.



An artist's impressions of the proposed Nairobi Farmers Market

The market, developed by local investor United Agromarts Limited, borrows from an international practice where most cities have farmers markets that supply produce directly from the farms to the consumers. While some provide temporary selling space for different farmers on a day-to-day basis, others lease out permanent shops that are operated by individual farmers who take the space on a long-term basis.

"We are essentially addressing the contradiction where farm-gate prices for cabbages, for example, are less than Sh10 a piece but the consumer pays Sh60. In-between numerous traders, brokers and county level collectors eat the sweat from the farmer and the savings from the consumer. We are creating a facility that will be a big help for both the farmer and the consumer," says Munene Mashine, United Agromarts Limited project manager.

He says the other concern the market will address will be traceability of produce and guarantee of good agricultural practices. All the farmers/shop owners will have to submit to regular inspections and certification similar to what is required of export produce.

Fresh produce features, sections

The proposed market, which is expected to open in July, will contain sections for fresh produce, beef, fish and poultry products, dairy produce and a grains section. The Mwea Rice Centre within the market, for example, promises to provide 'Mwea rice at Mwea prices' – a potentially revolutionary approach that will ensure great conveniences for Nairobi shoppers keen on the popular rice.

Market developers will encourage stall owners to contract and supervise small-scale growers to ensure sufficient supplies within the set quality guidelines while also spreading the benefits of the market to more farmers. By aggregating produce from the many farmers in the market, they hope to create a secondary outlet for supplying institutional customers such as hotels, restaurants, schools and hospitals.

Creating efficient roads to market

This will ensure an expansive market potential that can provide an outlet for thousands of farmers.

"We will encourage shop owners to sign up outgrowers across the country, and even to work with county governments where necessary. This way we can create an efficient road to market for the exceptional pineapple growers of Homa Bay, the sweet potato farmers in Kakamega and the honey producers in Barir and elsewhere. We are creating a platform that offers guarantees at both the supply and demand side of the equation and hopefully, we can provide some stability for everyone," says Mashine.

Globally, farmers' markets usually include an eating out section where freshly-prepared dishes are served. The markets, such as the Borough Market in London, La Boqueria in Barcelona and the Shongweni Farm Market in South Africa, are top tourist attractions as they provide a good perspective of what the country has to offer.

The developers say they want the market to be "fun for the shoppers because even though price advantage is important, it is not the only thing that matters to the modern shopper."

In order to also be in tune with modern shopping trends, the market plans to launch a home deliveries campaign driven through the Nairobi Farmers Market App.

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