

Cameroon farmers turn to vigilantes and amulets to stop cocoa theft

Rising cocoa prices driven by global production shortfalls have led to increased thefts of the commodity in farms in Cameroon, farmers and authorities say, forcing farmers to turn to machete armed vigilantes, and amulets to stop thieves.

By [Amindeh Blaise Atabong](#) 2 Oct 2024



Source: Reuters

Price surges

The surge in prices in Cameroon, attributed to adverse weather conditions and plant diseases in top grow Ivory Coast and Ghana, has attracted thieves to the cocoa farms, escalating security challenges and farmers fearing for their safety.

While farmers in Ivory Coast and Ghana sell their beans at a fixed farmgate price regulated by authorities, farmers in Cameroon, where the market is liberalized, get a higher market-related price backed by global prices.

Data from Cameroon's cocoa regulator, the National Cocoa and Coffee Board, show that prices have sometimes tripled from 1,500 francs CFA (\$2.56) per kg, the floor price at the start of the 2023/24 season.

This has made cocoa a lucrative target for thieves, causing concern among farmers in the country's cocoa production basins.

Pascal Mani, who farms seven hectares in Endaba village near the town of Ntui in central Cameroon, patrols his farm armed with a machete every day intermittently and before going to bed.



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"In the night, when I hear an unusual sound, I wake up," Mani said, adding that fear of thieves visiting his farm keeps him and other farmers awake most nights.

To tackle the problem, some farm communities have formed vigilante groups armed with whistles, reflective jackets, bows and arrows, machetes and spears to keep watch and send out alerts.

Reuters reporter saw some farmers in another community resorting to unorthodox methods to protect their crops, including planting amulets in their farms, with the hope that it would trap thieves or cast a spell on them if they dare steal their cocoa.

The rise in thefts has led to violence.

Two cocoa farmers were killed and their beans stolen by their farm employees last season, a senior police officer in the town of Ntui told Reuters, requesting to remain anonymous because they were not authorized to speak about the case.

Ban

In response to the escalating theft, farmers, local authorities, and buyers are implementing measures to secure crops and supply chains including refusing to buy cocoa from unregistered farmers or children.

Administrative authorities in some areas have banned the sale of non-dried cocoa, a move Marriette Embolo, who farms 14 hectares in the area, hopes to see extended across the country.

Embolo said she surprised a thief once on her farm. The thief had just harvested fresh pods from her tree and stashed them in several bags.

"When I asked, he said he wanted to beg for cocoa seedlings. I wondered how we could both be in the same village but he never asked and preferred to go to the farm when I was not there," she said.