

# Ghana's fresh produce hits the markets with increased volume, diversified and premium quality products.

Ghana has qualified to play at the next world cup in Germany 2006; with determination the Black Stars are expected to make a thrilling impact at the premier soccer competition. Whilst Ghana prepares for this soccer fiesta there is an unfolding occurrence which is also positioning Ghana in Germany, other European countries and beyond. This is the determination to increase the supply of horticultural products on the markets.

In the past ten years the Government has had a systematic strategy to promote performance in the non-traditional export sector. This has received positive response from the private sector with horticulture being one of the success stories. This sector has demonstrated local private sector initiative, successful public-private partnerships and strategic response to market demands. "Ghana's horticultural sector is poised to hit the markets with increased volume, diversified and premium quality products."

## Evolution in the horticulture industry

Mawuli Agboka of the Horticultural Export Industry Initiative at the Ministry of Food and Agriculture has stated that "The horticultural export industry in Ghana is one of Africa's success stories, growing at about 20% annually. Ghana ranks among the top six suppliers of horticultural produce to the European Union markets

### Performance

Figures from the Ghana Export Promotion Council suggest that horticultural exports have grown from 22,362MT, valued at \$9,306,000 in 1994 to 130,000 MT valued at \$60,500,00 in 2004. The growth has been driven by the exports of pineapple which accounted for about 40% of the total exports. It is anticipated that with the increased production of MD2 variety the leading role of pineapples in Ghana's export will continue. The varieties available are the smooth cayenne, MD2, Sugar Loaf and Queen Victoria. In recent times mango, papaya, banana and sweet oranges have featured strongly. Just like the fruit sub-sector, vegetable exports have grown dramatically from 886MT valued at \$436,000 in 1993 to 34,764 MT valued at \$7,700,000 in 2003. The vegetables exported include, chilli pepper, mini aubergine (ravaya), tinda, okra, cluster beans, yard long beans, green pepper and sponge gourds

In an interview with some members of Sea Freight Pineapple Exporters of Ghana (SPEG) on the interventions they had in place to increase the volume of their export they responded “*we are improving upon the quality of our produce through Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), Integrated Pest Management (IPM), improved packaging, and also expanding the production of MD2*”. The same can be said for the increasing fields of mango, papaya and vegetables.

### **Committed Industry Associations**

The industry associations have shown much commitment and made bold attempts at seeing to the adherence of their members to norms and standard practices to ensure the delivery of quality produce. Sea Freight Pineapple Exporters of Ghana (SPEG) and the Horticulturist Association of Ghana (HAG) , the Vegetable Producers and Exporters of Ghana (VEPEAG) have been a driving force in the development of the fruit and vegetable export. New producers associations are the Papaya and Mango Producers and Exporters Association of Ghana (PAMPEAG) and the Ghana Association of Vegetable Exporters (GAVEX). All of these associations are represented on the National Horticultural Task Force hosted by the Federation of Associations of Ghanaian Exporters (FAGE). The Task Force has created a forum for public-private partnerships in the development of standards, industry norms and the fostering an environment to take common actions. Through these actions industry is putting together quality standards to regulate horticultural exports. In addition the smallholder farmers are being supported to increase their expertise in the production of high quality produce.

### **Smallholder farmers**

The smallholder farmers supply about 40% of the smooth cayenne pineapple exported from Ghana. They have also been found to be critical in the production of mangoes and vegetables and are key to a sustained improvement in the production and distribution of fresh produce.

In the strategy to increase the acreage for MD2 pineapples it has been established that assistance to the smallholder farmers will be useful because of the high cost associated with MD2 production. Under a collaborative multiplication scheme, 140 smallholder farmers groups are to be supplied with more than 30 million MD2 plantlets in the next 18 months to boost the production of MD2. The groups are expected to provide land, labour and other inputs as their contribution to the collaboration. With the systematic diversification into the production of MD2 pineapple it is expected that Ghana will be a very important source for MD2 pineapple preferred by some consumers.

Associated with the increase in production is a strong recognition of the importance of delivering products of consistent quality and ensuring that each segment of the horticultural supply chain functions optimally. There are many contributory factors to these positive developments.

## **Traceability.**

A significant development in the Ghanaian horticulture industry is the acceptance of traceability as the norm. Industry is positioning itself to have a system that allows produce from Ghana to be traced from the farm to the importer. A “Farmer Geographic Information System” has been put in place. This will allow the industry to have accurate information on crop estimates and allow planned shipping volumes, times and modes of transport for efficiency. With this system the Ghana industry will have better information to allow production planning and promote market access.

This coupled with a bar code pallet tracking and tracing promoted by SPEG with donor support are to ensure that all farmers satisfy market requirements. As a starting point, fields of smallholder pineapple and mango farms have been mapped using Geographic Information System (GIS) technology. It is expected that the industry will have real time pallet tracking and tracing from field to reception by the importer. Through these activities Ghana produce can be part of the global integrated produce distribution network.

## **Investment in infrastructure**

Recognizing the importance of cold chain system for the delivery of good quality produce, the government of Ghana through the Horticultural Export Industry Initiative funded by the World Bank, is to construct a perishable fruit terminal at the Tema harbour for sea freighted produce; a perishable cargo centre at the airport and a number of on-field pack houses at various locations. Construction will commence in early 2006 and when completed will be major boost to the delivery of premium quality produce from Ghana.

Private sector investment in high technology tissue culture laboratories to produce the needed plantlets for the growing industry has been one of the highlights in the horticultural industry in Ghana. These laboratories are producing MD2 plantlets to meet the growing demand for planting materials.. Two companies are in full production and a third, developed as a public-private partnership, is to start operations soon. With these in place Ghana’s capacity to produce and supply high quality MD2 pineapples is on course.

## **Quality, Safety and GhanaGAP**

With increasing expectations for safe produce by consumers, the Ghanaian industry has developed programs to build local capacity in production and quality management to assure the delivery of safe produce. Challenging areas have been maximum residue

levels compliance and residue testing. The Ghana Standards Board has been supported with equipment and training of personnel to measure residue levels in produce.

EUREPGAP certification of farms has been on going in the Ghanaian industry. Over 60% of major exporters are currently EUREPGAP certified and many more are in the process of being certified. In order to increase the number of producers with EUREPGAP certification there is a strategic plan to assist smallholder farmers. Group certification is being pursued with training of about 20 groups to pre-certification level.

The industry has considered strategies for quality assurance and food safety as components in the normal operations of the actors. The concept of GhanaGAP is evolving towards a national quality management system. The approach taken is a gradual mainstreaming of best practices in Ghanaian horticulture and benchmarking with other protocols. It is expected to guide issues on quality ,safety and traceability. GhanaGAP is another public-private partnership to improve safety and quality of horticultural produce from Ghana.

### **The promise**

The horticultural industry in Ghana is bent on giving the markets the best service for the best produce at the best price. The industry is poised to meet an almost year-round supply of premium quality fruits and vegetables.

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