Strategies to increase strawberry competitiveness among fruit growers, marketers and consumers in Kenya

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Abstract

In Kenya, the perception of strawberry as a high value crop has influenced initiatives to increase production, marketing and consumption. A recent study explored factors influencing competitiveness of strawberry among fruit farmers, marketers and consumers. The study was conducted in four key producing areas in Kenya that are located close to urban markets. Results show that strawberry production is dominated by small-scale growers with majority (>70%) owning less than 1/8 acre, the largest being 3/4 acre. Unlike other short cycle fruit crops where farmers are exiting after 2-3 seasons, strawberry growers are more tenacious, with >50% being in production for over 5 years. Compared to other fruits, berries are more attractive as they can be harvested up to thrice per week, providing more regular income. However, only about 28% of growers have access to refrigerated transport vans or cool boxes required to reduce fruit deterioration. Lack of production skills and cold storage facilities, and comparatively higher perishability of strawberries remain significant disincentives to growers. Among consumers, factors contributing to low strawberry uptake are low awareness (25%), inconsistent fruit quality (20%), high perishability (34%) and comparatively higher cost (20%). Further, knowledge of strawberry nutritional benefits is low among consumers, and there are no public information activities to increase awareness. Averaged across respondents, key competing fruits are banana (23%), mango (16%), apples (13%), water melon (7%), pineapples and passion fruit (6%). Importantly, consumers indicated familiarity and preference for value added strawberry products, e.g., yoghurt (37%), juice (17%), ice cream (12%), and jam. Interventions can emphasize resilience of strawberry, higher return per unit area and input, availing cold chain facilities, increased consumer awareness, and promoting strawberry value added products.

Keywords: strawberry, fruits, cold chain, consumer awareness, value addition