

Starting a New Enterprise: The Oyster Mushrooms Story in Hai, Tanzania

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Mushrooms a New Enterprise in Hai District

During the past three to four years there has been little rain in Hai. Despite this in Hai farmers have been able to increase their income by growing mushrooms. The farmers grow Oyster mushrooms inside their houses in bags either hang from the ceiling or on racks. Growing mushrooms has not reduced the production of other crops because anyone can grow them in an extra room at home. There is demand for mushrooms from neighbours and in the local markets, hotels and supermarkets. Hai farmers are producing for Shoprite in Arusha and other towns.

In Hai sixteen groups were trained how to grow mushrooms. TIRDO were brought in to provide the technical know-how. They also provided the spores and instruction. The farmers then took this further on their own initiative and trained other farmers, receiving payment from the farmers for this training. For example Mr. Omary from Magadini village is training others and gets money for that activity. One hundred and fifty farmers were trained at that time.

Growing Oyster Mushrooms at Home

The mushrooms are grown on crushed crop remains such as maize stalks, maize straws, beans, banana, paddy (rice) and millet straws. The crushed stalks/straws are steamed to pasteurize them and then the spores are put on. This growing medium is then placed in plastic bags and either hung from the ceiling or placed on racks. The mushrooms continue to grow for up to three months before new spores are needed. These have to be bought every three months from TIRDO at 1.000/- Tsh per bottle.



A harvest of mushrooms from the home

As the mushrooms are still being produced on a small scale it makes sense to dry them so they can be stored and then transported in bulk to Arusha. The farmers lack the technology for drying the mushrooms themselves but are using other solar driers for this. The solar drier in the picture is being used for drying bananas; the same drier can also be used for drying mushrooms. These solar driers are being borrowed from other farmers who are their friends.

Mushroom Marketing

Shoprite needs both dried and fresh mushrooms and provides the packaging material to the farmers. The mushrooms fetch 4,000 Tsh per kg from the market for the fresh and dried mushroom. Five kg of fresh mushrooms makes one kg of dried mushrooms. Shoprite agreed to buy from the farmers' fresh and dry mushroom for 3,000 Tsh per kg and they wanted 20 kg per week. Unfortunately farmers fail to supply the amount required by the Shoprite because they produced less than the demand.



Solar drying mushrooms at home

The challenge is to produce on a larger scale and market together but still grow them on an individual basis. Hai Core group are assisting farmers make a strong organization for collecting and marketing the mushrooms. There are already small organized groups emerging.

¹ Story based on an interview with Clarence Chitemi, Eva Mallya and Matilda Foi by Anne Dennig in August 2006

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