

# Let KFC import; Kenya's potatoes are not for sale

The recent furore sparked by Kentucky Fried Chicken's (KFC) importation of potatoes offered us more lessons than we bargained for. It's beyond mere refusal to buy our local produce.

First, KFC is a foreign investor, fully licensed to operate in Kenya. We may not be privy to the fine print that approved its operations. But what is certain is that most foreign investors consider themselves as a godsend; hence, we are bound to cede more ground just to have them around. More intriguing is the fact that their business can be set up by local investors if they wanted to.

But let's be honest. Whereas we claim to patronise their joints, and therefore feel shortchanged upon the realisation that our potatoes are not on their menu, we ought to be certain of the kind of market they target. Obviously, it is an international market that is characterised by adherence to certain standards. By happenstance, we become part of that market owing to our mental alienation. We like the taste of the fried 'potatoes', never mind the process followed to realise the final dish. We feel good when we are seen in those joints. After all, it's our money.

Which brings me to the aspect of standardisation. It's common knowledge that foreign markets (yes, KFC is one) are quite picky when it comes to buying local produce. Those who have engaged in fresh produce exports can relate. Yes, we want our produce accepted by whichever entity. But we must equally assess our readiness to comply with their demands, much more the opportunity cost.

## Meet the standards

If KFC chose to buy our produce, they wouldn't do so indiscriminately. There are various strains of *waru* (potatoes), grown differently. Not many will meet the so-called standards that such retailers impose.

You've heard of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), which began as a voluntary self-audit only to be turned into a compliance mechanism. Consider the European market, which insists on tracing the produce right from the kind of soil on which it was cultivated, the pesticides used, the sanitation of both the handlers and their facilities. Many have incurred losses after exporting their crop only for it to

Since we insist on raw exports, we must fully subject ourselves to the oppressors' terms



**Wycliffe Osabwa | Agriculture**

be rejected with the cost of disposal on them.

But again, do we ever question the intention of some of these 'global standards'? When a hyena wants to eat its child, it first accuses it of smelling like a goat! As we talk about exports, we must teach our people about the strings that are always attached on such. County governments have a duty to enlighten farmers if they choose to venture into exports. Of utmost premium should be value addition.

But since we insist on raw exports, we must fully subject ourselves to the oppressors' terms. Unfortunately, this compliance may end up emasculating us once we realise that we have abandoned all that could have worked for us — our local produce and market — in favour of the new foreign establishments.

Mr Osabwa is a lecturer at Alupe University College, Busia. [wosabwa680@gmail.com](mailto:wosabwa680@gmail.com).



Irish Potatoes on sale in Nairobi.