Adaptable ideas
By Christopher Bendana

He has been a banana researcher for 25 years. He is the head of the National Banana Programme (NBP) at National Agricultural Research Laboratories-Kawanda, an affiliate of National Agricultural Research organisation (NARO). He plans for the future of banana production in the country.

He successfully handled banana bacteria with a source that had ravaged banana production in central and western Uganda between 2011 and 2014. Now he believes bananas can be one of the catalysts to help Uganda achieve Vision 2040, only if it adopts the growing of desert bananas mainly bogoya and apple banana.

Dr Jerome Kubiriba, the head of the NBP-Kawanda, says adopting desert growing will help the country tap in the $11b (about shs43 trillion) global market currently dominated by Ecuador, Costa Rica and Columbia.

According to Food Agriculture Organisation, India produced 70 million tonnes on average between 2010 and 2013, China had an average of 111 million tonnes and 9 million tonnes for the Philippines.

The fact sheet says Ecuador was the leading exporter of bananas in 2013 earning a tune of $26bn in 2015, Philippines followed with banana exports worth $436m, making it the second main export, Costa Rica ranked third, earning $778m from the banana exports, its second-leading export.

The fact sheet argues that some countries in East Africa like Uganda and Rwanda, produce and consume a lot in excess of 200kg per person although farmers are hard to get because much of the crop is grown on small scale.

Sufficient use of manure and soil also known as the East Africa Highlands banana, is mainly in Uganda and a few cities in East Africa like Nairobi and Kigali.

The two cities host many Ugandans that still prefer manure to any other food. On the other hand, desserts which are eaten at fruit are eaten globally, especially in European countries where they attract premium prices.

Also, it should be noted that much of Uganda’s banana is consumed at the subsistence family household.

According to Kubiriba, Kampala, the largest market, consumes three million tonnes annually of the average 12m tonnes produced countrywide.

He adds that small portions are consumed in Kabale, Kampala, Mubende and South Sudan where many Ugandans stay. The current production caters for this demand.

However, Kubiriba argues that manure production ought to increase for food security. He cites current low productivity of an average of 12 tonnes per hectare per annum compared to 120 tonnes/ha in India and China.

Kubiriba argues that the world is growing fast and the adoption of growing banana desserts is beneficial. They believe it is the future of the banana.

Dr Andrew Kigo, another large scale banana farmer in Nakasongola, Mbarara district, says the adoption of growing banana desserts is beneficial. He believes it is the future of the banana.

And he has experience working with banana farmers having grown as an agricultural officer at Busiteme sub-county and a member of the task force fighting banana bacteria with from 2011-2014, explains that the adoption of growing dessert bananas face challenges of their long maturity compared to potatoes and their susceptibility to bacterial wilt.

He said “bogoya takes 24-26 months to mature compared to 18 months for potatoes. A recent field visit to banana plantations in Kasese and Rwamagana counties in Mbarara district (bogoya) revealed that desserts, especially ‘bogoya’ are grown on the peripheries of plantations.

Peter Kibanda, another large scale banana farmer in Mbarara district, says the adoption of growing dessert bananas is beneficial. He believes it is the future of the banana.

“Where is the market? Do we have specialists in harvesting and handling as it is done in the Caribbean? If we are looking at the export market?”

Charles Kagomé, another large scale banana farmer in Nakasongola, Mbarara district, says the adoption of growing dessert bananas is beneficial. He believes it is the future of the banana.

“Almost everyone is going to eat bogoya. It is not food, I can
to eat, to work, to live, to breathe, to survive, to enjoy, to be happy. People grow what they can but then sell the surplus,” he said.

Kagomé added that the dessert plants are prone to diseases.

Banaana agronomy
Dr Prive Nagantana, a banana breeder and geneticist, says the spacing should be 3x3 metres apart. Pits where to plant the plants should be 25 wide and 20 deep. Loam soils mixed with mature should be used to fill the pits.

She said planting can be done any time and the plants should be well irrigated.