

## Coolers hitch bars avocado farmers from China exports

Small-scale avocado farmers are likely to miss out on the China market following last month's export deal between Nairobi and Beijing due to stringent entry rules including freezing the fruits.

Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (Kephis), which will oversee the export of avocados, said the conditions China set might limit small-scale farmers from accessing the market.

Farmers will be required to install machines and coolers for peeling and freezing of the fruit ahead of export.

China wants Kenyan farmers and traders to freeze the fruits to negative 30 degree Celsius after peeling off the skin and chill further to negative 18 degrees while in transit to the destination, meaning that farmers have to invest heavily in cold rooms to meet the requirement.

"Most small-scale farmers cannot afford to sell their avocados to China but they can still sell it locally to other established firms that make avocado products," said Kephis managing director Esther Kimani.

The agency will be required to monitor the peeling and cooling process to ensure Kenya exporters meet the standards.

"If we do not comply, China will suspend the exports, however, continuous non-compliance will lead to a total ban," said the managing director.

### **Fruit flies**

Kenya has been fighting over the last seven years to have its avocado access the Chinese market in its full form.

However, Beijing has been uncomfortable due to the presence fruit flies pest in Kenya's avocados.



The popularity of the fruit has soared around the world in recent years due to increased awareness of their health benefits, experts say.

In Kenya, Africa's second-largest producer of avocados — behind South Africa — thousands of coffee farmers are turning to planting avocado trees known as 'green gold,' with 7,500 hectares under cultivation.

Seventy percent of growers are small-scale farmers.

Chinese inspectors were in the country in March ahead of President Uhuru Kenyatta's visit to Beijing in April, which unlocked the avocado export deal.

"Inspectors from China who were here in March were concerned over fruit flies on our avocado and they only allowed us to export on condition that the fruits are frozen," she said.

Dr Kimani said Kephis is still working round the clock to ensure that the pests are eliminated and have Kenya export fresh avocados to China.

Kenya recently resumed export of avocado to South Africa after close to 10 years of not accessing the market as a result of the fruit flies that led to the ban.

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