EABL brews demand for sorghum seed

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Increased demand for beer, mainly driven by East African Breweries Ltd (EABL), has lifted production of sorghum seed in the country with contractual farming having a positive impact on the once overlooked crop.

A market report by Seed Trade Association of Kenya (STAK) shows high industrial demand has seen seed firms offer more varieties since 2015 with production also going up.

STAK says the market share for the top four sorghum seed companies has steadily increased from 81 percent in 2013 to 95 in 2017.

"More varieties were released between 2015 and 2017 than in any other period, especially for sorghum. This is primarily due to the emerging importance of sorghum as an industrial crop in the brewing industry," says the report.

According to the Economic Survey 2019, production of sorghum has been rising from 1.9 million bags in 2014 to 2.1 million bags last year.
For sorghum, Kenya ranks fourth in terms of the number of varieties sold (11), after Burkina Faso (17), and Mali and Zimbabwe (with 12 each).

Oscar Magenya, director of Research and Innovation at the Ministry of Agriculture says increased sorghum production has been spurred by breweries and especially the opening of the EABL branch in Kisumu.

“Opening of the new branch in Kisumu has increased production of sorghum in the country in the last couple of years,” said Mr Magenya.

“It is noteworthy that sorghum, which has been an orphaned crop for many years, is now gaining popularity,” said STAK chairman Kassim Owino during release of The African Seed Access Index report in Nairobi this week.

The report notes that there is need to improve the availability of foundation seed for bean, cowpea and sorghum seed, as several Kenyan-owned companies face challenges in accessing this material in sufficient quantities and in a timely manner.

“There is a need to improve the variety release process in Kenya, which is notably longer and more costly than in other African countries. The process has been one of the primary concerns of seed companies, which view it as time-consuming and bureaucratic,” said the report.
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