

Kenyan farmers toast growing demand European demand for avocados

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Kenyan farmers like Simon Kimani hope to cash in on Europeans' taste for avocado toast

It may be loved and derided as the go-to millennial brunch, but avocado toast is proving a boon for Kenyan farmers as they cash in on the

seemingly ever-growing enthusiasm.

Across Kenya's ochre fields, farmers are switching coffee and tea for avocados in a bid to profit from increasing European demand for that most instagrammable of dishes.

Among them is Simon Kimani, 73, who tends five acres (two hectares) of [avocado trees](#).

"Recently when the avocado trade started growing up we thought that it is better to plant avocados, that's how I started," he says, pointing to his first trees, planted less than a decade ago.

Avocado toast is becoming a staple of European menus, says Laura Hannoun, a blogger who has listed the top-10 places to order the simple, hip dish which can set one back 14 euros (\$16).

"The fair price is between 10 and 11 euros," says the 25-year-old.

In Kenya, [smallholder farmers](#) grow avocados and sell them on to exporters. Kimani's buyer is Bernard Kimutai of Fair Trade Company Limited.

Kimutai has seen a sharp increase in exports of the popular Hass avocado in recent years.

"In 2016 we exported 20 tonnes, in 2017 we did about 40 tonnes," he says, hoping to double the figure again this year.



Renowned as a healthy food, full of vitamins, fibre and trace elements, avocado is becoming a staple of European diets

Harvesting is a low-tech affair: a broken wooden ladder and an old machete are all it takes for Kimani and his two employees to chop down the hard, green avocados, collected young so they reach Europe ripe.

In this way, Kimani produces around 28,000 avocados per year, and is paid the equivalent of a little over 10 euro cents each.

In European supermarkets, where they are sold alongside others from Chile, Israel and Mexico, they easily fetch 10 times that amount, if not more.

"One hundred percent of (our) avocados are for export. We try to improve the quality to make sure that what we get from the farmer is 90 percent exportable," says Kimutai, adding that any that do not make the grade are sold on to oil-processing companies.

Health and wealth

Kenya's temperate climate is well-suited to avocado cultivation, especially around the high altitude town of Thika, north of Nairobi, where Kimani has his farm.

In its terraced orchard, avocado trees grow alongside banana and coffee trees as part of a well-planned multi-culture that keeps the soil fertile.

But for Kimani, avocado is the crop of choice. "With the coffee there is a lot of work to manage the coffee but with avocados it is easier, to have more money, less labour," he says.



Farmers like growing avocado as it needs less tending

Less than three years since planting his first avocado trees, he now takes in two harvests a year. The Kenyan government is also onside, even providing courses to help farmers learn new skills, says Kimutai.

"The Kenyan government has encouraged farmers to grow more avocados because of the market."

Kenya is the world's sixth largest exporter of avocados—with three percent of the world's total—and Africa's biggest, producing 63,000 tonnes last year.

The strong demand from European countries allows companies like Kutaisi's to export throughout the year.

"Demand is going high, especially in the rich countries where they care more about health, considering that avocados in Kenya are produced organically."

Renowned as a healthy food, full of vitamins, fibre and trace elements, avocado is an increasing staple of European diets.

Hannoun eats [avocado](#) at least once a week, usually on toast, maybe with a poached egg or some pomegranate.

"It fulfils my desire for something tasty, while being healthier than pancakes or burgers," she says.

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