

ABSTRACT

Avocado (*Persea americana* Mill.) belongs to the family Lauraceae and it is an important crop to rural communities and economies in Kenya. Currently, avocado is grown in several agro-ecological zones mainly by small-scale growers (85%) who grow it for subsistence, local markets and export. About 70% of avocado is grown in Central and Eastern region of Kenya. Central region produces 40%, Eastern 28%, Western 13%, Rift Valley 10%, Nyanza 6%, Coast 2% and Nairobi County 1%. The main production areas are Muranga, Kiambu, Thika, Embu, Meru, Taita Hills and Kitale. The aim of this study was to assess the production constraints and contribution of avocado to food security and income in Mount Kenya region. The study population comprised of smallholder avocado farmers. Purposive sampling was done in selecting highest producing sub-counties of avocado in Nyeri, Muranga and Embu counties. Simple random sampling was used to select 40 smallholder farmers from each of the selected sub-counties who participated in the survey. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using SPSS computer package. Results indicated several constraints in the production of avocado including pests and diseases, lack of quality planting material, poor soils, lack of technical knowledge by avocado farmers and lack of well-structured marketing system. The study identified a gap in value addition of avocado in Kenya. It was also demonstrated that avocado contributes highly to household income and food security. The crop should therefore be accorded priority by policy makers and more research needs to be encouraged especially in the management of pests and diseases. Capacity building to avocado growers should be routinely carried out so as to avoid the many challenges that emanate from lack of technical knowledge. Intervention in value addition of avocado is an aspect that Kenyan county governments need to engage in by investing in cottage industries on avocado processing.