

**Title** Banana growing for export: innovative approaches in production and marketing- the need for partnerships

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### **Abstract**

This article elaborates alternative ways to link subsistence-based banana growing systems to international markets and the need for scientific and marketing partnerships. As part of the health food and organic movement, exotic dried fruits like banana become increasingly more popular. At the same time, the majority of banana grown in East Africa originates from smallholder farms; few of these have the capacity to cater for the volumes demanded by the predominantly overseas markets. Coupled with lack of capacity is skill deficits, and high overhead costs associated with producing and exporting goods from the region. As a result, the potential contribution of banana production to rural poverty eradication rarely materializes. Gourmet Gardens has developed a range of alternative strategies to exploit this market. Farmers are assisted in forming producer organizations and to pool their produce. Centralized processing facilities help to overcome problems related to product quality and overhead costs. Another novelty in the project is the use of organic and fair trade certification and trade-marking to brand and add value to products. Finally, in light of the rapidly changing environmental, social and market challenges, the project strongly depends on professional and functioning partnerships and cooperation. Key challenges are outlined.