

The Kenyan horticulture regulator has slapped a ban on export of Kenya's popular avocado varieties to curb harvesting of immature crop by hungry farmers and dealers.

Head of Horticulture Directorate Benjamin Tito says that the move on Fuerte and Hass varieties will be effected on November 15 with exceptions given to exporters who have the jumbo type and those having off season crop.

"The closing of Hass and Fuerte harvesting season for the 2021/2022 fiscal year shall be affected on November 15 to protect our overseas market from immature crop," said Mr Tito yesterday.

Mr Tito said exporters with the jumbo variety will only do it by air and not sea with the size expected to be at least 184 grammes for a single fruit.

Dealers and companies with off-season crop shall request verification for inspection from HCD regional offices in writing within 24 hours as from Friday next week. The review on when the ban will be lifted will be conducted on January 15 next year to ascertain the status of the crop.

The move follows rampant cases of traders picking immature fruit to capitalize on high prices of the commodity in the global markets.

Avocado has been a major contributor of income from horticulture earnings, raking in nearly half of the total returns from fruits. The season for main varieties will affect local prices as a shortage is expected.

Already, there have been price movements with a piece of the fruit now retailing at Sh30 from Sh20 previously.

Kenya's avocado market in the Middle-East was hit in 2018 following export of low quality crops. The price of the fruit to Dubai dropped by almost half in March 2018 as sale of immature crops hit the value of the produce.

The Directorate of Horticulture indicated that the price of a unit of avocado dropped from 35 dirhams (Sh945) previously to 16 dirhams (Sh432) during the period.

The decline resulted from immature avocados that were being exported to Dubai by unscrupulous businessmen following high demand for the fruit.