

Harvesting and drying of cashew nuts

Recognize the problem

Harvesting and drying have an effect on the quality on cashew nuts. If not properly dried, the quality of the cashews will be bad and this will reduce the selling price of the nuts. Early harvest of cashew results in shrivelled nuts. Poorly dried nuts may develop mould and this will give a dark greyish colour to the nuts. It is therefore vital to ensure that cashew is only harvested when the fruit has fully matured and dried in the field to prevent post-harvest losses.

Well-dried high quality nuts (Photo by Sakurai Midori, CC BY)



Background

Post-harvest losses are high when the cashew is harvested early and poorly dried. It reduces the shelf life and quality of the nuts. It also makes the nuts susceptible to nut borer attack, and causes build-up of fungi that produce poisons called aflatoxins. Aflatoxins are dangerous. They cause reduced growth in children, liver cancer and suppress the human immunity system. The nuts should therefore be dried adequately so that moisture content of the nuts is reduced to as low as 12%, which means very dry. At this moisture content, shelf life and quality is enhanced. Harvesting and drying involves a number of operations which farmers should adhere to

Management

- Clear the area under the tree canopy just before harvesting by weeding all vegetation to avoid contamination
- Harvest fully grown and ripened fruits of cashew. This is seen by the fully grown fruits dropping to the ground
- Allow fruits to fall to the ground themselves, and do not shake the tree
- The fruits that have dropped from the tree should not be left on the ground for a long time as this compromises the quality of the nuts
- Pick the fruits from the ground. The number of times this should be done depends on the abundance of fallen fruits. In some cases, fruits are picked at least four times a day.
- Remove the nut neatly from the apple using a sharp knife or nylon thread
- Air-dry the collected nuts for 5 to 7 days on mat or on tarpaulins or on a table.
- Drying should be done in the shade which could be under a tree canopy
- When drying, repeatedly turn the nuts at least three times a day using a rake to achieve uniform drying of nuts
- Do not dry on a metal surface as this may scorch the nuts
- Dried nuts can be placed in jute sacks
- Allow further drying by putting the sacks in a well ventilated room
- A storage room should have a clearing space of 0.5m between sacks and the roof

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe



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