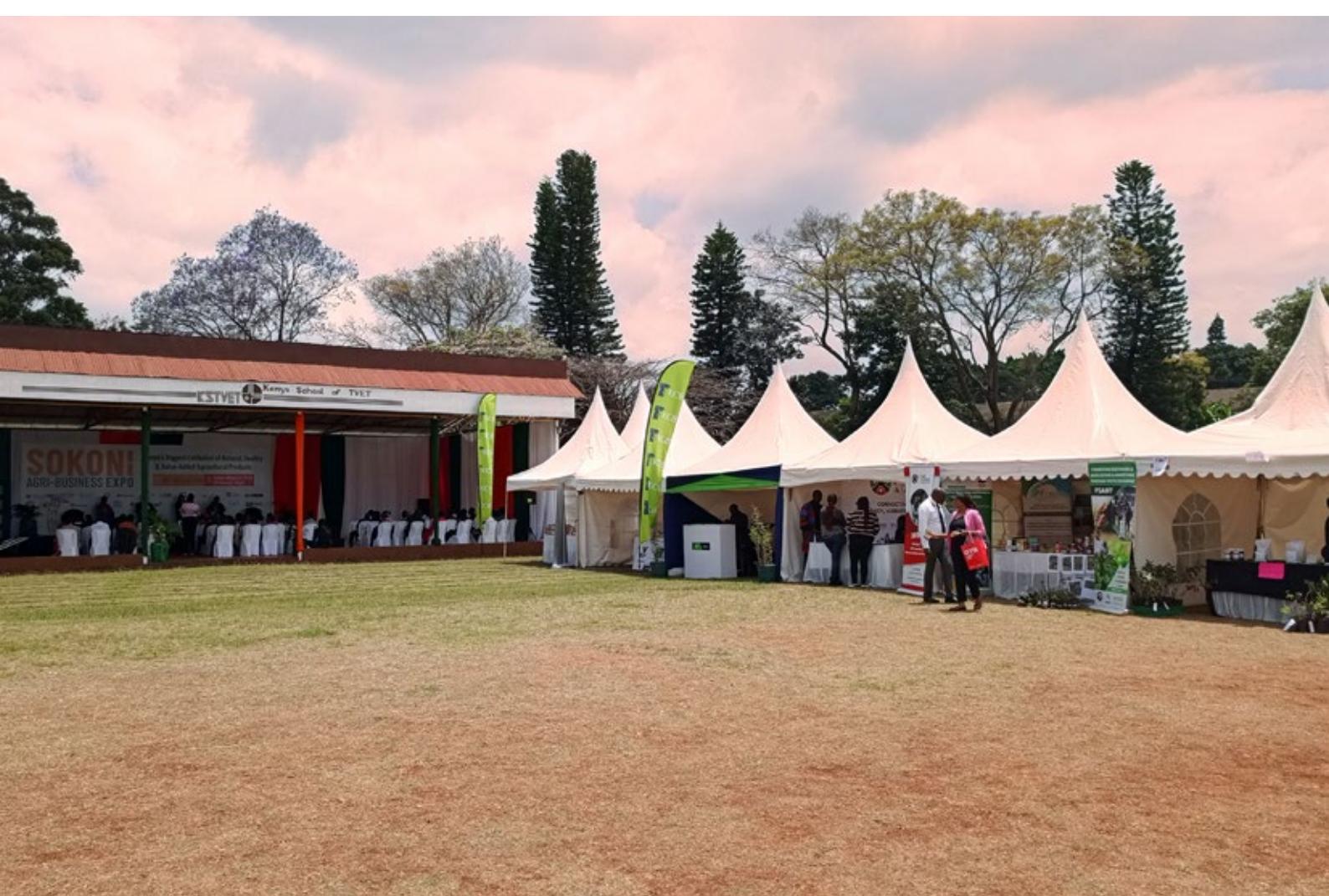


SOKONI AGRI-BUSINESS EXPO

28-29 AUG. 2025 - KENYA SCHOOL OF TVET, GIGIRI



END OF EVENT REPORT

SOKONI AGRI-BUSINESS EXPO

Introduction

The Sokoni Agribusiness Expo 2025 was held under the theme Expanding Agricultural Opportunities for Sustainable Development. The event brought together a vibrant mix of exhibitors and stakeholders who demonstrated that agriculture is not only about farming but also about creativity, innovation, and the power of value addition. From nutritious foods to lifestyle products, the Expo showcased how Kenyan agribusinesses are transforming natural resources into safe, healthy and convenient products that resonate with modern consumers.

Numbers at Sokoni Agri-Business Expo 2025: Eight (8) counties were represented, including Nairobi, Makueni, Garissa, Nyamira, Laikipia, Wajir, Mombasa, and Kilifi, reflecting the diversity of Kenya's agricultural landscape. Thirty-seven (37) exhibitors participated—seventeen (17) service providers focused on collecting leads/contacts, and twenty (20) with physical products to sell onsite while also gathering leads for future sales. Exhibitors included both established companies and emerging SMEs, led by men and women across generations. Together, they recorded onsite sales of about Ksh. 2,005,000. Two companies sold out all their products on day one, and many others expressed satisfaction with their performance and consumer engagement. This underscored the strong demand for natural and sustainable products.

Range of Products Displayed: The exhibition floor was a lively showcase of innovation. Products on display ranged from food items such as snack bars, nuts, flour, and dried fruits and

vegetables, to beverages including wines, juices, coffees, and teas. Exhibitors also presented a wide array of skincare and beauty products, from handmade soaps and body oils to serums and moisturizers; alongside hair care solutions and natural braids. Lifestyle products such as traditional kiondo, bags, clothing, and home décor further highlighted the creativity and cultural richness embedded in Kenya's agribusiness sector.

Objective of the Exhibitors: Beyond sales, exhibitors came with clear objectives: to collect feedback on their products, connect directly with consumers, and build leads for future growth. For service providers, the Expo offered an important platform to showcase their expertise and engage new partners. The inclusivity of the event, bringing together businesses of different sizes, regions, and ownership, demonstrated the collaborative spirit at the heart of Kenya's agribusiness sector and set the stage for meaningful discussions throughout the Expo.

While the exhibition floor brought the creativity and diversity of Kenya's agribusiness sector to life, the panel discussions provided a platform to dig deeper into the opportunities and challenges shaping the industry. Experts, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and stakeholders came together to exchange ideas, share experiences, and explore solutions that can unlock the sector's full potential. These conversations complemented the showcases by addressing the structural, financial, and policy issues that influence how products move from farm to shelf, ensuring that the Expo was not only a marketplace but also a space for knowledge and collaboration.

Appreciation to Our Partners





What's Holding Back Agribusiness Growth in Kenya & What Can Be Done About It?

The first panel examined the persistent barriers to agribusiness growth in Kenya and the pathways that could unlock the sector's potential.

Discussions emphasized that consumers are not merely end-users but central actors in shaping food systems. Their role, particularly through organized associations, is essential for demanding accountability, influencing policy direction, and ensuring that food systems remain responsive to the needs of the population.

Panelists underscored the importance of stronger, more inclusive dialogue between government and stakeholders across the value chain. **Both county and national governments were encouraged to engage with farmers, businesses and consumers in collaborative rather than adversarial ways. Such engagement was seen as necessary to ensure that policy development and implementation are rooted in practical realities and shared interests.**

Equally, the session highlighted the importance of farmer aggregation because Trust, quality and consistency were identified as the foundation of sustainable linkages between producers and markets. Strengthened cooperatives and producer

networks were seen as critical for enabling smallholders to supply at scale, reduce market fragmentation and build credibility with buyers.

The discussion also highlighted **consumers as a weak link in the agribusiness value chain**. While they hold significant power to influence standards and accountability, many remain reluctant to ask critical questions about the origin, safety and quality of the food/ products they consume. This lack of consumer pressure has slowed progress, allowing gaps in traceability and enforcement to persist. Without stronger consumer demand for accountability, both producers and policymakers face less urgency to improve practices across the chain, leaving food systems vulnerable to inefficiencies and lower standards.

While challenges such as weak policy execution, structural inefficiencies and limited access to markets remain significant, the panel concluded that the opportunities in Kenya's agribusiness sector are substantial. Enhanced farmer-to-market linkages, greater participation of small and medium enterprises, and deeper involvement of youth hold the potential to transform agribusiness into a robust driver of food security and economic growth.



Bridging the Gaps Between Harvest and Shelf

The session on "From Harvest to Shelf: Strengthening Agro-Processing Systems for Market Growth and Food Security" examined the persistent gaps that hinder Kenya's agro-processing sector and outlined pathways for building stronger, more resilient value chains.

A central theme was the skill and knowledge gap at the farm level. Many farmers continue to face challenges in harvesting and handling practices, resulting in significant quality losses. For crops such as macadamia, poor harvest timing reduces market value and diminishes the potential for farmers to access premium returns. These inefficiencies at the production stage reverberate downstream, increasing costs for processors and weakening competitiveness.

The discussion further highlighted the **limited extent of value addition at the farm level**. A large proportion of produce reaches markets in raw form, with little effort in sorting, grading or preservation. This leads to inconsistent quality, fragmented volumes, high post-harvest losses, and unreliable supply chains. For processors, the burden of correcting these deficiencies increases production costs, disrupts planning and reduces the competitiveness of Kenyan products in both domestic and export markets. The absence of structured value chains also weakens trust and long-term relationships between farmers and processors, leaving the sector fragmented and vulnerable.

Financing constraints remain a major barrier to progress. Farmers and processors alike struggle to access affordable credit for investment in technology, storage infrastructure and training. Without such investments, it is difficult to modernize systems, improve efficiency or enhance productivity. Equally, compliance with food safety and certification standards continues to limit opportunities, particularly for smallholders and SMEs, who often lack the resources to meet local and international requirements. This exclusion locks them out of premium and export markets where demand is strong.

The session underscored the role of agro-processing not only in value creation but also in advancing food and nutrition security. By fortifying products, ensuring proper storage and extending shelf life, processors contribute directly to the availability of safe, nutritious and affordable food. With Kenya still importing the vast majority of its wheat, the importance of innovative approaches such as contract farming and improved local production systems was emphasized as part of the solution to closing nutritional and supply gaps.

Conclusion: Looking ahead, the discussions made clear that building a resilient value chain is a collective responsibility. Farmers, processors, policymakers, financiers, and consumers must work in unison to establish systems that are structured, predictable and competitive. Strengthening agro-processing is about more than adding value to crops; creating sustainable food systems, generating new market opportunities and safeguarding food security for future generations.



What's Helping or Hurting Agro-Processors in Kenya?

The policy roundtable examined the realities facing Kenya's agro-processing sector and drew attention to the persistent gap between policy formulation and implementation. Participants noted that while the policy framework is extensive, the absence of effective execution continues to undermine progress.

This gap is most visible in the country's heavy reliance on food imports. Despite agriculture contributing substantially to national GDP, Kenya imports large volumes of wheat and rice each month, underscoring structural weaknesses that require urgent redress.

Trust and market linkages were also identified as critical elements in the growth of agro-processing. Intermediaries, though often criticized, play a central role in moving produce from farms to processors and markets. Yet without structured systems and clear offtake arrangements, the chain remains fragile. The roundtable emphasized the need for well-designed import substitution measures and stronger local value chains that can reduce dependency and improve resilience.

Another area of concern was the absence of clear definitions within the sector. The lack of consensus on what constitutes an agro-processor has left many cottage industries and small-scale processors outside the reach of support mechanisms and policy benefits. The discussion called for a more inclusive approach that recognizes both small and large players as vital contributors to value addition and employment creation.

Dialogue was considered an essential tool for resolving these challenges. While national and regional platforms exist,

engagement at county level remains limited, leaving producers without a direct voice in shaping the systems that affect them most. Building such platforms was seen as a necessary step for translating policy intentions into local impact.

Conclusion: In closing, the roundtable reaffirmed that the way forward lies not in producing more policies but in making existing ones practical, results-oriented, and accountable. Effective implementation, supported by clear performance indicators, robust infrastructure and consistent monitoring, was identified as the foundation upon which Kenya's agro-processing sector can thrive.



From Farm to Product

The women's session at the Expo highlighted how value addition is opening new doors for women in agribusiness. By moving beyond selling raw produce, women are creating higher-value products, building enterprises, and gaining a stronger presence in the market. This shift not only boosts incomes but also gives women greater visibility and influence within the agricultural value chain.

Opportunities are clear: **The growing appetite for safe, nutritious and convenient foods is creating space for women to develop products that meet both household and commercial needs.** Digital platforms and agribusiness fairs are breaking down barriers to market entry, allowing women to sell directly to consumers and reduce reliance on middlemen.

Support from development partners and government initiatives is also helping women gain access to training, mentorship and networks that can strengthen their enterprises. At the same time, women's ability to draw on traditional knowledge and

community ties positions them well to create products that are both competitive and culturally relevant.

Gaps in Value Addition: Yet despite these gains, significant gaps remain. Access to finance continues to be a major constraint, as many women face challenges in meeting collateral requirements or building formal credit histories. Skills in advanced processing, packaging and certification are unevenly distributed, leaving some women unable to meet export and premium market standards. In addition, entrenched barriers such as limited land ownership, cultural biases, and unequal access to information restrict women's ability to move beyond small-scale operations.

The discussions underscored that with the right mix of training, financing models and inclusive policies, women can become powerful drivers of innovation, resilience, and growth in agribusiness. Their leadership in value addition is not just an economic gain; it is a step toward building fairer, more sustainable food systems for Kenya.



Young, Bold and Breaking Barriers: Agribusiness Startups Changing the Game

This session focused on the role of young entrepreneurs in redefining Kenya's agribusiness landscape and highlighted their capacity to drive innovation, sustainability, and resilience within food systems. The discussion emphasized that agriculture should no longer be viewed as a fallback option but as a dynamic profession with opportunities for growth, creativity and impact.

A central theme was the contribution of youth to climate-smart agriculture. Participants noted **the untapped potential of technology**, including digital tools and artificial intelligence (AI), to enhance climate prediction, increase productivity and support evidence-based decision-making.

The panel further explored how entrepreneurial energy can close gaps in market access. Young agribusiness founders are creating new value chains, linking farmers more directly to consumers, and building enterprises rooted in authenticity and consistency.

Nutrition-sensitive agriculture also featured prominently in the dialogue. The need to address malnutrition through diversified production and value addition was underscored, with **youth encouraged to design practical and scalable solutions that meet both nutritional and economic needs**. Participants highlighted the importance of aligning global food system priorities with local realities to ensure that innovations are relevant and impactful.

The session concluded with a call for greater investment in young people. With access to skills, tools, supportive policies and enabling environments, youth have the potential to transform agribusiness into a driver of sustainable livelihoods, improved nutrition and climate resilience.



Financing Value Addition in Agriculture; common pitfalls & how to get it right



This session examined the financing landscape for small and medium enterprises and farmers engaged in value addition, highlighting both emerging opportunities and persistent challenges. The discussion stressed that access to finance is closely tied to market demand; without demonstrable demand, investment remains limited, regardless of available financial instruments.

Participants explored new models of financing, including inventory-based products and risk-sharing mechanisms supported by impact investors and development finance institutions. These approaches are designed to address the unique risks of agriculture while providing flexible solutions that can unlock growth.

Business readiness was repeatedly identified as a determining factor for securing finance. Strong record keeping, sound financial discipline, and clear separation of personal and business accounts were seen as essential to building credibility with financiers. Equally, evidence of personal investment in a venture was considered an important signal of commitment and seriousness.

The dialogue further emphasized that scaling in agribusiness requires careful choice of financial instruments and robust governance structures to avoid the risks of over-financing and debt distress. Financing, it was noted, must extend beyond capital. Technical assistance, insurance products, and structured market linkages are critical elements that enable businesses to grow sustainably. Compliance with standards and certifications was also underscored as a prerequisite for accessing premium markets and maintaining competitiveness.

Conclusion: The session concluded with a caution against common pitfalls that undermine financing opportunities, including weak cost structures, unrealistic pricing, inadequate records, and failure to comply with required standards. It was agreed that SMEs and farmers must position themselves through reliability and partnerships, while financiers and policymakers should prioritize blended finance models, ecosystem support, and risk-sharing frameworks to strengthen value addition in agriculture.

Unlocking Trade Opportunities; Quality, Certification, Packaging & Intellectual Property

This panel addressed the critical factors that determine access to both domestic and international markets, with particular attention to standards, packaging, and intellectual property protection. The discussion highlighted that certification is not optional but a fundamental requirement for competitiveness. Whether supplying supermarkets, export destinations, or niche organic markets, businesses must demonstrate compliance with rigorous national and international standards to secure credibility and build trust with buyers.

Packaging, Taste & Quality: Packaging was presented as a decisive factor in shaping consumer perception and confidence. Beyond its aesthetic value, packaging signals quality, consistency and reliability, all of which are essential for success in competitive markets. Consistency in product taste and quality was also emphasized as non-negotiable for sustaining both local and international demand.

Institutions such as the Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute (KIRDI) were recognized for their role in supporting small and medium enterprises with packaging

innovations, production standards and intellectual property management.

The challenge of counterfeiting was another central concern. Kenya continues to lose significant revenue **annually to counterfeit products which is estimated to be worth Kshs. 1.6 Billion, a problem exacerbated by the rise of digital platforms.** This undermines both legitimate enterprises and consumer trust. While enforcement mechanisms remain critical, consumer education was identified as equally important in reducing the prevalence of counterfeit goods and directing demand toward genuine products.

The session concluded with a strong focus on intellectual property as a driver of innovation and competitiveness. Patent databases, including expired patents, were noted as valuable resources for entrepreneurs seeking cost-effective pathways to innovation. Strengthening the use of intellectual property intelligence was seen as essential for enhancing research, improving competitiveness, and stimulating industrial growth.





Overall Conclusion

The Sokoni Agribusiness Expo reaffirmed that Kenya's agribusiness sector carries significant potential to drive national development, yet its progress continues to be constrained by weak policy execution, structural inefficiencies and limited access to finance and markets.

The deliberations across all sessions pointed to three recurring themes: the necessity of inclusive dialogue and trust among stakeholders, the urgency of translating policies into practical and implementable actions, and the central role of youth and small enterprises in building a resilient and future-ready sector.

The discussions further demonstrated that solutions are already within reach. Strengthening farmer aggregation, promoting sound financial practices, investing in certifications and protecting intellectual property emerged as concrete steps that can transform challenges into opportunities. What remains is the commitment to implement these measures with urgency, coherence and accountability.

The Expo underscored that when government, private sector actors, consumers and farmers work together, agribusiness can evolve beyond its current limitations. It can serve not only as a foundation for food security but also as a source of employment, innovation and economic transformation for Kenya and the wider region.

The Sokoni Agribusiness Expo & Conference Report was Compiled & Written by:-

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NEXT EVENT

26 - 27 March 2026
@ Kenya School of TVETS



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