

Why young Africans are swapping the office for the farm

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Farming has an unglamorous image across Africa. But this might be changing - the BBC's Sophie Ikenye met some young professionals who packed in their office jobs and moved back to the family farm.

Six years ago Emmanuel Koranteng, 33, gave up his job as an accountant in the US and bought a one-way ticket to Ghana.

He now has a successful business growing pineapples in a village one-and-a-half hours away from the capital, Accra.

He says that even when he was far away from the farm, it was always in his thoughts.

Across the continent, Dimakatso Nono, 34, also left her job in finance to return to the family farm in South Africa.

'Always a market for quality'

She left her lucrative job five years ago and moved from Johannesburg to manage her father's 2,000 acre farm three hours away in Free State Province.

She says she wanted to make an impact.

"I knew that if I came to assist my father, I would be able to actually make meaningful change."

She began by counting his cows.

"At the beginning, we were not sure about what the animals were doing and where they were in the fields, so for me it was important to ensure that every single day, every activity that we do is recorded."

Life on the farm has not been easy.

This year's drought across Southern Africa put an end to her apple, maize and sunflower crops.

So does she ever have days when she thinks she made the wrong move away from the corporate world?

"No, not at all, not for me.

"I'm not always on top of the world but on such days I appreciate the fact that if need to rest or recuperate, there's no better place than here where you have the nature to support you."

'Make agriculture entrepreneurial'

But both young farmers have found it difficult to get funding for equipment.

For this reason, Mr Koranteng has decided to stay small.

"If you are small and you don't have funding, don't try to do anything big. It's all about being able to manage and produce quality because if you produce quality, it sells itself," he says.

But there is to be made money in farming.



A World Bank report from 2013 estimates that Africa's farmers and agribusinesses could create a trillion-dollar food market by 2030 if they were able to access to more capital, electricity and better technology.

"Agriculture has a bright future in Africa," says Harvard University technology expert Calestous Juma.

Nutritious fish biscuits

But to encourage more young people to return to the land, he suggests a simple solution: A name-change.

"The best way to attract young people into farming is to define it as agribusiness - this entails making agriculture entrepreneurial and technology-driven.

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And it also means making the finished product, rather than just growing crops and selling them.

"The focus should be on the full value chain - from farm to fork, not just production," he says.



That is exactly what Claudius Kurtina is doing.

He farms fish in western Kenya.

But he doesn't sell those fish.

Instead he makes them into high-protein, high-energy biscuits.

The 28-year-old entrepreneur wanted to make a product which had both a long shelf life and high nutritional value.

The product has been certified by Kenya's Bureau of Standards and local schools have ordered his biscuits.

"The motivation behind this was nutrition, for children in remote places from poor backgrounds, even refugees. Anywhere you can't get fish in its natural state," he says.

These biscuits aren't made by hand, but by special machines, which are costly.

That is likely to be true for any farmer who wants to copy this model.

So for Mr Juma, in order to attract more younger people to farming, you need to provide funding with conditions they can meet.

"Agriculture needs the same types of credit and risk-reducing incentives that are given to industrialists.

"Young people are not averse to farming.

"They are averse to risk. They are human."

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