

**Building
Bridges** for
Women's Economic
Empowerment



Empowering Women in Agriculture

The Story of Nicola Karuga: Head of Sales and Marketing

In the heart of Kenya's agricultural landscape, a family-run business has been steadily blooming, quite literally, for several decades. Everest Enterprises Limited, led by Nicola Karuga and co-managed with her sister, has been making waves in the horticulture industry, specializing in fresh fruit, vegetables, and the enchanting world of flowers.

Providing them with opportunities to support their families brought a sense of fulfillment that transcended mere financial success. Everest Enterprises Limited also embraced a philosophy of resilience and continuous learning. Nicola advised other women managing their businesses not to give up in the face of difficulties. Farming, she said, is akin to a gambler's game, with many factors beyond one's control. However, she emphasized the importance of patience, faith, and persistence in the face of adversity. The vision for Everest Enterprises Limited is to keep growing and empowering the community. Nicola envisions a future where they can maintain high-quality products while actively contributing to the welfare of those around them. She believes that being small but efficient and supportive can have a profound impact on people's lives.

Nicola Karuga, the head of sales and marketing, spoke passionately about the journey of Everest Enterprises Limited during a recent interview. The company's roots trace back to 1986 when they first started as farmers of fresh fruits and vegetables. However, in 2014, they made a significant shift and ventured into the flourishing world of flowers. The transition from vegetables to flowers was not without its challenges. Nicola explained that the horticulture industry is vast, and mastering one aspect often leads to a desire to explore other avenues. The family's love for flowers combined with their farming expertise paved the way for this transition. However, challenges awaited them on this new path. As women in a traditionally male-dominated industry, obtaining financial support and investment was no easy feat. Roses, being their primary flower, required substantial investments, making it challenging to secure funding. Moreover, adapting to market trends and shifting preferences posed another obstacle. The market demanded various colors and varieties, leading to the need for constant research and adaptation to stay ahead. Another significant challenge was the lack of cooperation among farmers and governing bodies. Nicola emphasized the importance of farmers coming together as a collective force to address common issues and lobby for better policies. This sense of unity could lead to more effective solutions and growth for the entire industry. Despite the challenges, Nicola expressed her deep satisfaction in overcoming them. She found joy in witnessing the positive impact of their work on the community. Empowering the local workforce.

The Story of Sharon Karuga: Commercial Director

Sharon, one of the co-managers, shared her inspiring journey from exporting vegetables to flourishing in the world of roses in a recent interview. Her passion, dedication, and adaptability have played a crucial role in overcoming challenges and envisioning a prosperous future for the company.

With a wealth of experience in exporting vegetables since 1988, the team saw an opportunity to expand their expertise into the flower business. The decision to venture into roses was backed by meticulous research, recognizing the potential and high capital expenditure required for such a venture. Sharon shared, “You spend a lot at the beginning to be able to get your greenhouse structures in place. We decided to give it a go and then expand.” Over the past nine years, the company has evolved its rose portfolio, cultivating over ten different varieties of roses, catering to the European and Middle Eastern markets. The journey has not been without challenges. Sharon humbly acknowledged the impact of climate change on their agricultural practices. East Africa, including Kenya, experienced one of the longest droughts in over 40 years, highlighting the importance of adapting to climate change. Agriculture’s unpredictable nature necessitated innovative approaches to work around climate constraints. Embracing regenerative agricultural practices became a priority for Sharon’s team. Implementing water harvesting techniques and composting helped improve soil health, ensuring the best possible quality of flowers. The success of Everest Flower Farm depends on Sharon understanding her customers’ unique demands. While large-scale buyers in Europe, particularly the Netherlands, prefer their big head-sized roses, the Middle Eastern customers appreciate the variety provided by the unique microclimate of the Timau region, where the farm is located.

Sharon is also an ardent supporter of women in entrepreneurship. She acknowledges the challenges women face in accessing finance but strongly encourages women to support each other and share best practices. Through her own journey, she has learned that reaching out for help and support is more fruitful than she ever anticipated.

As Sharon envisions the future of the business, one word stands out: growth. She aims to expand the company’s acreage and diversify into summer flowers, catering to the growing demand for custom-made bouquets that combine roses with other blossoms. Her ambition reflects the resilience and determination she embodies as a leader.



WIN-WIN

STRATEGIES

