



Kenya Avocado Export Requirements

6 Rules Every Farmer Must Meet Before Exporting



A Comprehensive Guide for Kenyan Avocado Farmers

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Introduction

Kenya is one of Africa's biggest exporters of avocados, and demand for Kenyan Hass avocados continues to grow in Europe, the Middle East, China and other international markets. This growing demand has encouraged more farmers to plant avocado trees, hoping to earn better prices than those available in local markets.

While export prices are often attractive, many farmers discover that producing good fruit alone is not enough. Export markets are highly regulated. Every avocado that leaves Kenya must meet strict quality, food safety and plant health standards before it reaches consumers overseas.

This guide by Farmers Trend Limited explains the six export requirements every Kenyan avocado farmer should understand before supplying fruit for export.

1. Register with AFA/HCD and Follow the Official Export Season

The first requirement is registration with the Agriculture and Food Authority (AFA) through the Horticultural Crops Directorate (HCD). Registration creates an official record of avocado growers participating in Kenya's horticulture sector. It also helps regulators monitor production, improve traceability and ensure exporters buy fruit from legitimate sources.

Registration has become increasingly important because international buyers now want to know exactly where their food comes from. Supermarkets in Europe and other developed markets expect exporters to provide information about the farm where the fruit was grown, the production methods used and the handling procedures followed before export. Without proper records, exporters struggle to satisfy these buyer requirements.

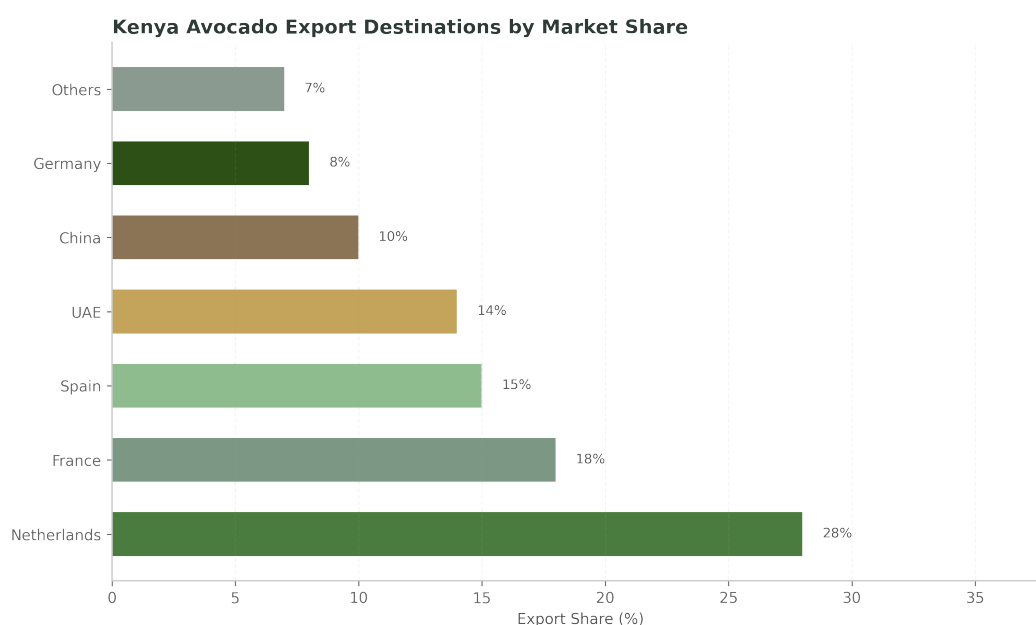


Figure 1: Kenya Avocado Export Destinations by Market Share

AFA registration also supports Kenya's efforts to maintain order in the avocado industry. Farmers are encouraged to work with licensed exporters and registered marketing agents instead of selling fruit to unlicensed brokers who often encourage premature harvesting. These brokers usually focus on quick profits rather than protecting the long-term interests of farmers or the country's export reputation.

Official Export Season Compliance

Another important requirement under AFA regulations is compliance with the official avocado export season. Unlike many crops, avocado exports are controlled to prevent immature fruit from entering international markets. Before the season opens, regulators inspect registered packhouses, assess crop maturity and confirm that exporters are ready to begin harvesting.

Farmers should therefore avoid harvesting simply because a buyer offers a good price before the official season opens. Early harvesting may provide quick cash, but it exposes farmers and exporters to significant losses if the fruit fails maturity tests or is rejected by buyers.

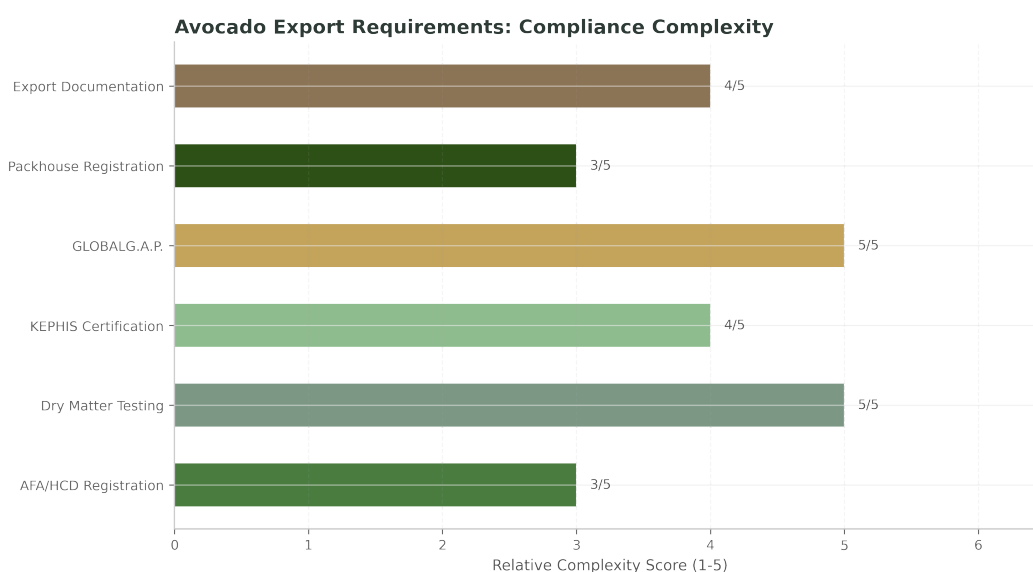


Figure 2: Avocado Export Requirements: Compliance Complexity

Farmers should also keep proper production records throughout the season. These records include pesticide application dates, fertilizer use, irrigation schedules and harvesting records. Good documentation improves traceability and makes compliance inspections much easier.

2. Dry Matter Testing and Fruit Maturity

If there is one export requirement every avocado farmer must understand, it is fruit maturity. Every year, many avocado consignments are rejected because the fruit was harvested before reaching the required maturity level. In most cases, the fruit may look large and healthy from the outside, but internally it has not developed enough oil content to ripen properly.

This is why exporters rely on dry matter testing before harvesting begins. Dry matter measures the amount of solid material inside the avocado after removing water. As avocados mature, they accumulate more oil and the dry matter percentage increases. Higher dry matter generally means better eating quality, improved flavour and proper ripening after harvest.

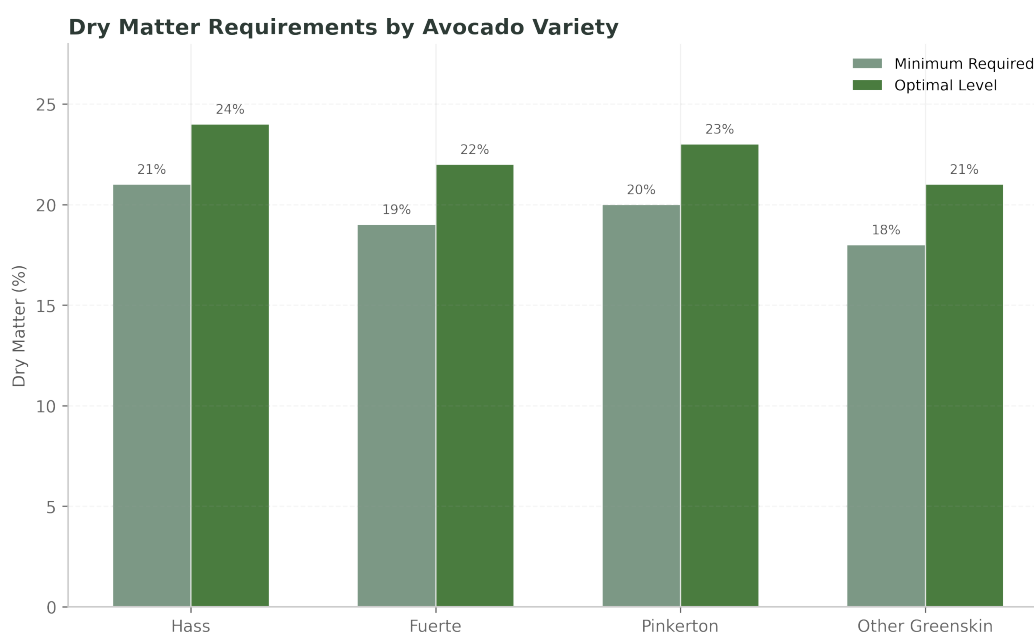


Figure 3: Dry Matter Requirements by Avocado Variety

The Testing Process

Dry matter testing is carried out by collecting representative fruit samples from different parts of the orchard. The avocado flesh is weighed, dried in an oven and weighed again after the moisture has been removed. The remaining weight is then used to calculate the dry matter percentage.

Although the procedure sounds technical, it is one of the most reliable methods of determining harvest readiness. Exporters and inspection agencies rely on these results before allowing commercial harvesting to begin.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Many farmers make the mistake of judging maturity based on fruit size alone. Large fruit is not necessarily mature fruit. Weather conditions, tree health and irrigation practices can all influence fruit size without affecting maturity.

Harvesting immature avocados creates problems throughout the supply chain. The fruit may remain hard for weeks, soften unevenly or develop poor flavour. Consumers who buy such fruit often blame the country of origin rather than the individual farmer. As a result, one poorly handled shipment can damage Kenya's reputation in an entire market.

Farmers should never harvest because neighbouring farms have started picking. Every orchard matures differently depending on altitude, rainfall, tree age, management practices and variety. Waiting for proper maturity protects both income and future market opportunities.



Figure 4: Well-maintained avocado orchard in Kenya

3. KEPHIS Registration and the Phytosanitary Certificate

After meeting the maturity requirements, the next step is compliance with the Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS). KEPHIS is responsible for protecting Kenya's plant health and ensuring exported agricultural produce complies with the phytosanitary requirements of importing countries.

Every avocado consignment intended for export must be inspected before a phytosanitary certificate is issued. A phytosanitary certificate is an internationally recognised document confirming that the fruit has been inspected and found free from regulated pests and diseases. Without this certificate, most importing countries will not allow the shipment to enter their borders.

Common Reasons for Export Shipment Rejection

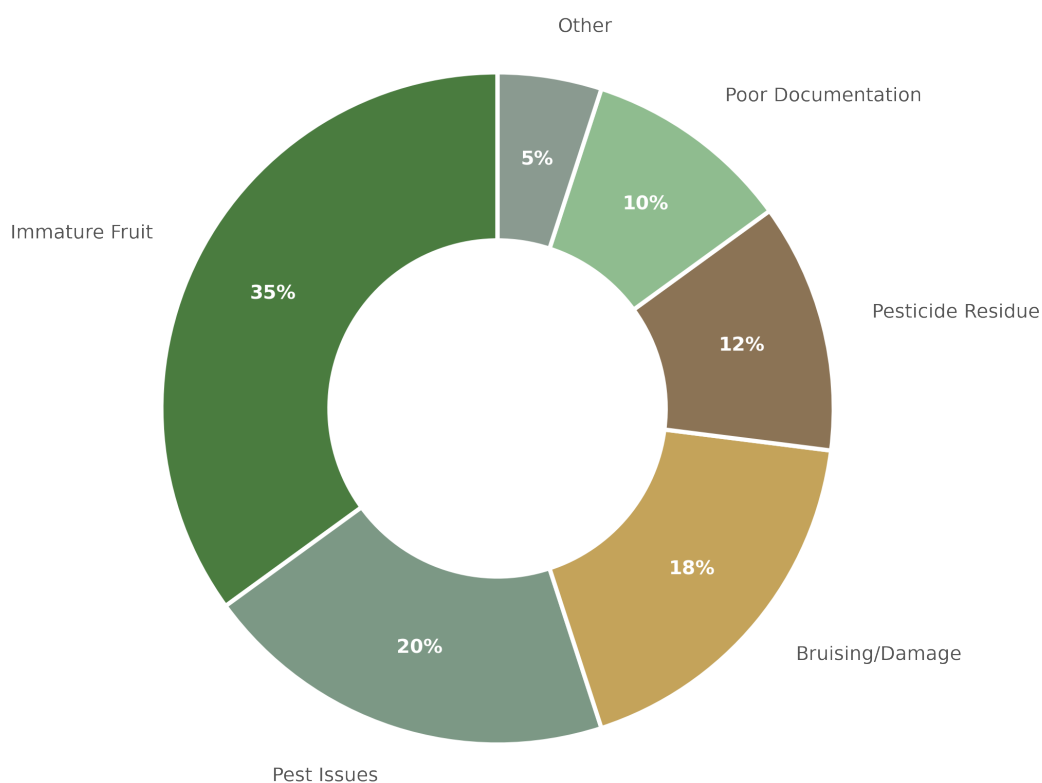


Figure 5: Common Reasons for Export Shipment Rejection

Integrated Pest Management

Farmers should understand that pest management is not something to think about a few weeks before harvest. It begins immediately after the previous harvest and continues throughout the production season. An orchard with poor weed management, neglected pruning and inadequate pest monitoring is much more likely to experience problems during inspection.

Integrated Pest Management offers one of the best approaches for controlling pests while reducing unnecessary pesticide use. This includes regular scouting, orchard sanitation, biological control where appropriate and responsible pesticide application when necessary.

Keeping fallen fruit on the ground for long periods, for example, creates breeding sites for fruit flies and other pests. Simple orchard hygiene practices can significantly reduce infestation levels and improve export compliance.

4. GLOBALG.A.P. Certification Is No Longer Optional

Many small-scale farmers believe GLOBALG.A.P. certification is only meant for large commercial farms. That is no longer the case. Today, many exporters, farmer groups and cooperatives help smallholders obtain certification through group schemes, making it much cheaper than applying as an individual farmer.

If you plan to supply avocados to exporters targeting Europe or the United Kingdom, you should expect to hear about GLOBALG.A.P. sooner or later. Most buyers in these markets want proof that the fruit was produced safely, responsibly and in a way that protects both consumers and the environment.

What GLOBALG.A.P. Covers

GLOBALG.A.P., which stands for Global Good Agricultural Practices, is an internationally recognised standard that sets out how food should be produced on farms. It covers everything from how pesticides are used to how workers are treated, how irrigation water is managed and how records are kept.

Certification does not mean a farm is perfect. It means the farm follows accepted practices that reduce food safety risks and make production more consistent.

Key Certification Areas

Certification Area	Key Requirements
Record Keeping	Fertilizer dates, pesticide records, application rates, harvest dates
Water Management	Irrigation source quality, contamination prevention measures
Worker Welfare	Protective clothing, chemical handling training, sanitation facilities
Environmental Care	Reduced pesticide use, soil conservation, resource management
Food Safety	Pre-harvest intervals, chemical storage, hygiene practices

For exporters, working with certified farmers reduces business risk. They know the orchards follow recognised standards and are more likely to produce fruit that satisfies international buyers.

Farmers who have not yet obtained certification should not be discouraged. Many exporters organise training programmes before every season and recruit farmers into certification groups. Joining such programmes is often the easiest and least expensive path to becoming certified.

5. Packhouses and Cold Chain Management

Growing quality avocados is only part of the work. The way the fruit is handled after harvest determines whether it arrives overseas in good condition. Many farmers assume that once fruit leaves the farm, the responsibility shifts entirely to the exporter. In reality, fruit quality can begin deteriorating within hours if harvesting and handling are done carelessly.

The Role of Registered Packhouses

A packhouse is much more than a storage building. It is where export fruit is received, inspected, sorted, graded, packed and prepared for shipment. Every stage is designed to protect fruit quality before it begins the long journey to overseas markets.

When fruit reaches the packhouse, inspectors first check whether it meets export standards. Damaged, diseased or undersized fruit is removed before grading begins. The remaining fruit is sorted according to size, weight and quality. Buyers in different markets often request specific size categories depending on consumer preferences.



Figure 6: Avocado packhouse processing line

Proper Harvesting Practices

Fruit should never be dropped onto the ground. Every impact creates bruises that may not be visible immediately but become noticeable after several days in storage. These bruises reduce shelf life and increase rejection rates.

Harvesters should use proper picking poles or harvesting bags instead of pulling fruit from branches by hand. The stem should be trimmed to the recommended length because long stems can puncture neighbouring fruit during transport.

One mistake repeated every season is leaving harvested fruit under direct sunlight while waiting for collection. Avocados continue respiring after harvest. Exposure to high temperatures increases water loss and speeds up the ripening process before the fruit even reaches the packhouse. Keeping harvested fruit in a shaded, well-ventilated area helps preserve quality until transport arrives.

Why the Cold Chain Matters

Many of Kenya's export markets are thousands of kilometres away. The fruit harvested today may not reach supermarket shelves in Europe or Asia for several weeks. During this period, temperature control becomes one of the most important quality management tools.

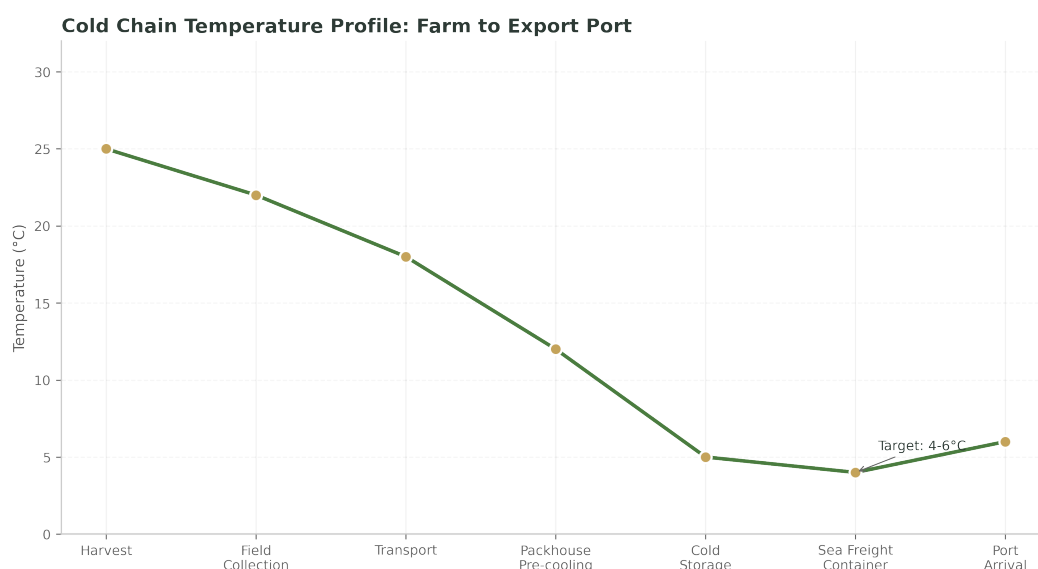


Figure 7: Cold Chain Temperature Profile: Farm to Export Port

The cold chain simply means keeping avocados at the correct temperature from the time they leave the packhouse until they reach the buyer. This process begins with pre-cooling. Freshly harvested avocados contain field heat. Removing this heat quickly slows respiration, delays ripening and helps preserve freshness.

For sea freight shipments that take between three and five weeks, avocados remain inside refrigerated containers known as reefers. These containers continuously control temperature, humidity and airflow to keep the fruit in good condition throughout the voyage. Even small temperature fluctuations can create serious quality problems.



Figure 8: Cold storage facility for avocado export

6. Export Documents Every Shipment Must Have

No avocado shipment can leave Kenya without the required export documents. These documents allow customs authorities, shipping companies and buyers to verify that the consignment meets legal and commercial requirements.

Required Documents

Document	Purpose
Phytosanitary Certificate	Confirms fruit is inspected and free from regulated pests/diseases
Commercial Invoice	Details about buyer, seller, quantity and value of shipment
Packing List	Describes contents: number of cartons, weights, packaging details
Certificate of Origin	Confirms avocados were produced in Kenya
Transport Documents	Air Waybill (air freight) or Bill of Lading (sea freight)

Document	Purpose
GLOBALG.A.P. Certificate	Proof of good agricultural practices (for EU supermarkets)

Additional Requirements for Exports to China

China has become an important market for Kenyan avocados, but it also has some of the strictest import requirements. Only orchards and packhouses approved under the agreed export protocol can supply fruit destined for China.

China also requires registration with the General Administration of Customs of China, commonly known as GACC. This registration helps Chinese authorities verify approved production sites and processing facilities before imports are allowed.

Why Some Export Shipments Are Rejected

Every export season, some consignments fail to reach overseas buyers because they do not meet required standards. In many cases, the problem began long before harvest.

Immature fruit remains the leading cause of rejection. Even when avocados look large from the outside, low dry matter means they will not ripen properly after export. Poor pest management, careless harvesting, poor record keeping, and incorrect pesticide use are other common reasons for rejection.

Practical Steps Farmers Can Take to Meet Export Standards

Meeting avocado export requirements does not happen a few days before harvesting. It starts when you establish the orchard and continues throughout the life of the trees. Farmers who consistently supply exporters understand that every activity in the orchard affects the quality of the fruit they harvest months later.

Orchard Establishment

One of the first decisions is choosing the right planting material. Exporters prefer Hass avocados because they are widely accepted in international markets. Planting certified grafted seedlings from a trusted nursery reduces the risk of poor varieties, weak rootstocks and low yields.



Figure 9: Hass avocados ready for harvest

Ongoing Orchard Management

Proper orchard management makes a big difference. Trees that are pruned regularly receive more sunlight and better air circulation. This reduces disease pressure and makes it easier to spray, scout for pests and harvest fruit.

Nutrition should be based on the needs of the trees instead of guesswork. A soil test and leaf analysis provide a better understanding of nutrient deficiencies and help farmers apply the right fertilizer at the right time. Balanced nutrition improves flowering, fruit set, fruit size and overall quality.

Water management is equally important. Avocado trees need adequate moisture during flowering, fruit development and periods of prolonged drought. Water stress can reduce fruit size and increase fruit drop. However, overwatering creates its own problems by encouraging root diseases such as Phytophthora root rot.

Record Keeping

Good record keeping ties all these activities together. Farmers should record when they spray, the products used, fertilizer applications, irrigation schedules and harvesting dates. These records not only support certification but also help farmers evaluate what worked well during the season and what needs improvement.

Common Questions About Avocado Exports

Question	Answer
Can a small-scale farmer supply export markets?	Yes. Many exporters buy from smallholders who meet the required standards. Join cooperatives for easier certification.
Can I export without AFA registration?	No. Registration is mandatory for all horticultural exports in Kenya.
Why is dry matter testing so important?	Immature fruit does not ripen properly. Dry matter testing confirms maturity before harvest.
Is GLOBALG.A.P. compulsory?	Not for every market, but increasingly expected by EU and UK buyers.
Who issues the phytosanitary certificate?	KEPHIS issues it after inspection confirms compliance with importing country requirements.
Can I harvest when prices increase?	No. Only harvest during the approved export season and after fruit reaches required maturity.

Final Thoughts

Kenya has built a strong reputation as a producer of high-quality Hass avocados, but maintaining that reputation requires commitment from everyone involved in the value chain. Farmers, exporters, regulators and packhouses all have a role to play in ensuring that only mature, healthy and properly handled fruit reaches international markets.

The six export requirements discussed in this guide are not independent rules. They work together to protect fruit quality from the orchard to the consumer. Registration with AFA creates an organised production system. Dry matter testing ensures only mature fruit is harvested. KEPHIS inspections protect importing countries from regulated pests. GLOBALG.A.P. certification gives buyers confidence in how the fruit was produced. Registered packhouses and proper cold chain management preserve quality during transport, while complete export documentation allows shipments to move smoothly through international borders.

Farmers who consistently meet these standards place themselves in a better position to supply exporters year after year. They are also more likely to receive technical support, participate in certification programmes and build lasting relationships with buyers.

Export farming should not be viewed as a quick way to make money during one season. It is a long-term business that rewards farmers who invest in quality, discipline and continuous improvement.

Every pruning decision, every fertilizer application, every pest control measure and every harvesting decision contributes to the final quality of the fruit.

As Kenya continues to grow its avocado exports, the farmers who will benefit most are those who understand that international markets reward consistency more than quantity. A smaller harvest that fully meets export standards is often more profitable than a large harvest that fails inspection.

If you are planning to establish a Hass avocado orchard or improve an existing one, start by building a strong foundation. Plant certified seedlings, keep proper farm records, seek technical advice when needed and work closely with licensed exporters. Taking these steps early makes it much easier to meet export requirements when the harvesting season arrives.

For more practical farming guides on avocado production, orchard management, pest control and export farming, visit Farmers Trend. Farmers Trend also supplies certified grafted Hass avocado seedlings and offers extension services to farmers across Kenya.

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