



MOUAAU *News*

Monday, Dec. 9 - Dec. 15, 2024. Vol. 1, No. 8

A Weekly Online Publication of the Public Relations and Protocol Unit, Office of the Vice Chancellor

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MOUAAU has indigenous forest crops that other Varsities of Agriculture do not have - NUC Accreditation Team

By Ubadire Agua, Chinedu Ononiwu & Emmanuel Nwankwo (FOREM Dept)



Prof. Nuhu GworGwor



Prof. Maduebibisi Ofo Iwe

The National Universities Commission (NUC) Team that visited Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, UmuDike (MOUAAU) for the accreditation of its B. Agric programme has revealed that the University has many indigenous forest crops that

other Universities of Agriculture in the country no longer have.

Leader of the Accreditation Team and a Professor of Agronomy (Weed Science) at the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Jos, Prof. Nuhu GworGwor, made the

revelation while addressing the Vice-Chancellor and Management of MOUAAU, on Wednesday, November 20, 2024.

According to Prof. GworGwor, MOUAAU has done well to ensure the sustenance of indigenous for-



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est crops, which he said would have gone into extinction without the intervention of the University.

Among the forest crops highlighted during the visit were Wonderful Kola (*Buchholzia coriacea*), Ose oji (*Aframomum melegueta*), Oji Igbo (*Cola acuminata*), Ukwa (*Treculia africana*), Ukazi (*Gnetum africanum*), Ogbono (*Irvingia wombolu*), as well as Ugba (*Pentaclethra macrophylla*). Each of these crops boasts immense cultural significance, nutritional benefits, as well as economic potential, yet they remain underutilised or at risk of extinction.



Wonderful Kola

Known for its large, aromatic seeds, Wonderful Kola is revered for its ability to enhance digestion, boost immunity, and improve blood circulation. The seeds are rich in essential nutrients like calcium, magnesium, and zinc, making them a nutritional powerhouse. With proper planting techniques such as sowing seeds at a 2-3cm depth in a shaded nursery, the crop germinates within 30 days, providing a viable farming option for those seeking economic returns. In addition to its health benefits,

the Wonderful Kola tree serves as a natural ally in combating climate change. Its deep roots improve soil fertility and structure while offering habitat for wildlife. Economically, its seeds fetch three times more income than traditional melon seeds, positioning it as a high-value crop.



Ose Oji (Nature's Pharmacy)

Popularly called Grains of Paradise, Ose Oji, or *Aframomum melegueta* is celebrated for its antioxidant, antibacterial, and antidiabetic properties. Farmers can cultivate this crop using seeds from mature fruits or rhizomes, intercropping it with staples like yam and cassava. Ose oji contributes to soil fertility and moisture retention while serving as an income generator. Its seeds are not only used as spices or medicinal products but also have applications in cosmetics and insecticides, making it a versatile option for agro-entrepreneurs.

Oji Igbo (The Kola of Commerce)

Oji Igbo, or kola nut, a cultural icon in Nigeria, stands out for its caffeine-rich seeds that stimulate the nervous system and serve as a source of antioxidants. The Oji Igbo



tree also enriches ecosystems by preventing soil erosion and hosting diverse insect and bird species.

Economically, the kola nut is a goldmine which offers farmers ten times the revenue of maize. Its cultural and social value further boosts its demand across Africa and beyond.



Ukwa (African Breadfruit)

A household name in many Nigerian communities, *Treculia africana* or Ukwa provides a rich source of protein, carbohydrates, and unsaturated fats. Farmers can propagate the crop through seeds or cuttings and even interplant it with other crops. The Ukwa tree plays a vital eco-



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logical role by storing carbon, preventing soil erosion, and supporting a rich biodiversity of flora and fauna. A paint bucket of its seeds commands three times the price of cassava, cementing its status as a lucrative crop.



Ukazi (*The Evergreen Vine*)

Commonly used in soups and herbal remedies, *Gnetum africanum* (*Ukazi*) is cherished for its high vitamin, mineral, and fiber content. Its vines are easy to grow, requiring well-drained soil and minimal maintenance.

Ukazi also serves the ecosystem by conserving soil and water, improving biodiversity, and supporting rural livelihoods through its high market demand both locally and internationally.



Ogbono

The seeds of *Irvingia wombolu*, known as *Ogbono*, are a staple in West African cuisine and a significant source of income. Rich in protein, oils, and essential minerals, the seeds are used as thickening agents in traditional soups.

Environmentally, the *Ogbono* tree enhances soil fertility and supports pollinators like bees. Its seeds can be ten times more profitable than maize, offering a compelling reason for farmers to embrace its cultivation.

Ugba: (*The African Oil Bean*)

A symbol of culinary excellence, *Pentaclethra macrophylla* (*Ugba*) seeds are rich in essential nutrients and widely used as condiments. The tree supports agroforestry and biodiversity conservation, offering income opportunities through



products like oils and condiments.

MOUUAU's dedication to reviving these forest crops highlights the University's role in tackling the food crisis in the country. Through active involvement in research and cultivation these endangered indigenous forest crops, the University is sustaining their economic value and also creating pathways for rural development, poverty reduction, and environmental conservation.

The accreditation team leader's acknowledgment of MOUUAU's efforts highlights the possibility of scaling these initiatives across Nigeria. If more stakeholders embrace the cultivation and utilization of these forest crops, they could unlock a treasure box of ecological, economic, as well as cultural benefits.

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MOUAU 12th Convocation Lecture: Imo Gov. Charges Ohaneze Ndigbo to mobilise funds for production of indigenous Igbo crops and animals

By Chinedu Ononiwu, Joy Nlebedum, Eke-Ginger Collins & Anyim Sunday



Governor Hope Uzodinma

Imo State Governor, Distinguished Senator Hope Uzodinma has urged regional organisations such as Ohaneze Ndigbo to mobilise funds for the production of indigenous Igbo crops and animals.

Gov. Uzodinma made this call while speaking as the 12th Convocation Lecturer of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture on November 29, 2024, at the Sen. Anyim Pius Anyim Auditorium of the University.

In the Lecture entitled, "Agriculture and National Development in a Diversified Economy: A Vision of Renewed Hope Through Town and Gown Entrepreneurial Partnerships", Gov. Hope Uzodinma stated that regional organisations such as Ohaneze Ndigbo can mobilise funds strictly for research into modern and efficient food production in Igbo land.

According to the Convocation lecturer, this mobilisation for funds will ensure the return of

the indigenous Igbo cow breed known as 'Ehi Igbo', as well as the production of improved and fast-growing species of the Igbo indigenous chicken, 'Okuko Igbo' and the Igbo indigenous goat, 'Ewu Igbo', which he said are now going extinct.

Gov. Uzodinma also said that priced assets such as the indigenous Igbo palmwine tree, 'Ngwo', which produces the best palmwine, can be saved through the mobilisation of funds for research into their development. The Convocation lecturer warned that if necessary steps are not taken, foods that are indigenous to Igbo land, such as palmwine and ugba, could one day be imported from China.

Gov. Uzodinma also called for strong collaborations among Nigerian universities, government and the private sector, which he said is necessary for robust research capable of revitalizing indigenous Igbo crops.

The Imo State Governor also advocated for strengthened ties with international institutions to ensure knowledge sharing and learning from global best practices in food production.



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