

TIMB introduces shisha tobacco production in Zimbabwe

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The Tobacco Industry and Marketing Board (TIMB) has licensed Cavendish Lloyd Tobacco to contract and support shisha tobacco production in Zimbabwe. Shisha is a type of combustible tobacco that has low nicotine content differentiating it from the traditional flue-cured Virginia tobacco. Unlike cigarettes, this type of tobacco is consumed using a device called a hookah or water pipe.

A hookah or water pipe is a single- or multi-stemmed instrument for heating or vaporizing and then smoking the tobacco. An individual pulls from a pipe, and then the smoke is passed through a water basin, often glass-based, before inhalation. This is the reason why shisha is referred to by others as pipe tobacco.

Shisha tobacco is cultivated in almost the same way as our traditional Virginia tobacco with minor differences in agronomy. It uses staggered low amounts of fertilizer, and it is not topped (apical bud removal) to minimize nicotine amounts in the leaf.

Chemical applications for pest and insect control and growth period are just the same as other tobacco cultivars such as Virginia tobacco.

The crop is reaped when the leaves have completely lost all the nitrogen and have fully ripened. It is cured using the same flue-curing barns, temperature and humidity regimes for the Virginia flue-cured tobacco and it takes 4 to 5 days to complete curing.

The cured leaf has to have low nicotine content to protect the smoker from inhaling huge amounts of nicotine since shisha tobacco is about constant smoke inhalation in huge quantities. The cured leaf is preferred light and thin textured necessitated by low basal fertilizer applications.

Compared to flue-cured tobacco, shisha tobacco is easier to grow. The crop requires less fertilizer than flue-cured tobacco, and it has fewer field operations making it cheaper to produce. The crop is not topped (apical bud removal), suckers are allowed to develop, and the curing days are less than those for Virginia flue-cured tobacco. However, strict management of the crop as well as pest and disease control should be done to avoid negative effects on yield and quality since this is a precious kind of tobacco with high value.

Shisha tobacco (the end product) is usually a combination of tobacco prepared in molasses and flavored with fruit flavors. The water in the hookah does not remove any toxins and the fruit flavors do not make it a healthy choice, smokers are still prone to cancerous diseases.

It is important to note that shisha is not burley tobacco, neither is it cigar wrapper. It performs best in high-temperature zones and it also performs well in cold regions if the crop is planted early, just like other tobacco cultivars.

It will be processed locally and there are lucrative markets for the produce across Africa and Europe. It presents huge opportunities for Zimbabwean farmers. Its Addition to the stable of

tobaccos will help tobacco growers earn more and improve their livelihoods. This is in line with the Tobacco Value Chain Transformation strategy which seeks to increase tobacco value addition and beneficiation and grow the tobacco industry into a US \$5 billion industry by 2025.

Having started in Manicaland during the 2022/23 seasons, Shisha tobacco has great potential to be cultivated across all regions by several other farmers since the crop has similar agronomic practices and the same curing facilities as Virginia can also be used to cure shisha.

For more information, please get in touch with Cavendish Tobacco.