

# Pack 102, Item 3

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**Raising new breeds of guinea fowl in northern Ghana: Benefits and challenges**

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**Notes to broadcaster**

Nine of ten households in northern Ghana raise guinea fowl, and the birds help these households become food secure. Village and suburban families typically raise five guinea hens and one guinea cock. Poorer households sell their birds early (usually during festivities), but better-off households keep the birds until the end of the farming season in March, then harvest eggs until October or November, when they replace the birds with new stock.

Guinea fowls are productive and their meat is nutritious. It has more protein and less fat than chicken meat, and is low in cholesterol. Guinea fowl eggs have a thicker shell than hen’s eggs, are more resistant to shock, and can be kept longer and transported farther in good condition.

Farmers in northern Ghana often sell guinea fowl first to meet immediate needs such as farm inputs or food during the June to August lean season. Families also use guinea fowl ritually in funerals, courtships, sacrifices, and to settle disputes. There is a high demand for both meat and eggs.

Raising guinea fowl can be a profitable business, but farmers must know how to meet a number of challenges. These include:

* high keet mortality (young guinea fowl are known as “keets”)
* low fertility and poor hatchability.
* lack of reliable sources of good quality day-old keets
* not enough information about the nutritional requirements of guinea fowl
* not enough quality feed in the dry months
* predation of birds and eggs by dogs, snakes, and hawks
* poor health care for guinea fowl

This script focuses on the advantages and challenges of introducing new breeds of guinea fowl. It is based on interviews with farmers who raise guinea fowl in the Upper East Region of northern Ghana.

You might choose to present this script as part of your regular farming program, using voice actors to represent the speakers. If so, please make sure to tell your audience at the beginning of the program that the voices are those of actors, not the original people involved in the interviews.

Estimated time with intro and outro: 25 minutes.

You could also use this script as research material or as inspiration for creating your own programming on raising guinea fowl or similar topics in your country.

Talk to farmers and experts who are raising guinea fowl or are knowledgeable about the birds. You might ask them:

Is raising guinea fowl common in your area? If so, what challenges do farmers face? Have some farmers devised solutions to these challenges that they could share on your program? What do extensionists and others say about these challenges?

Is raising guinea fowl a profitable business in your area? What are the economic prospects?

Have local farmers tried raising new breeds? What has been their experience?

Estimated running time for the script: 20 minutes, with intro and outro music.

**Host:** Good evening and welcome to *Kariba sosika* (Farmer’s talk), our farmers’ program.

**Insert Voice:** “Guinea fowl are the small-scale farmer’s friend! When food is scarce, it’s this bird that serves as a food bank for the family.”

**HOST:** You have just heard the enthusiastic voice of a farmer who keeps guinea fowl. This is Lydia Ajono and today we will talk about raising guinea fowl in the Upper East Region of Ghana and the benefits of these profitable, delicious, and nutritious birds for family life.

(PAUSE) Imagine your mother or wife is taking a guinea fowl to the market, and it gets out of her hands and flies away. How will she get it back? Later in the program you will find out whether she was able to catch the bird or not. We will also pass along some tidbits of information on the guinea fowl market that you will not want to miss. So stay tuned!

**MUSIC:** Play traditional women’s song for 20 seconds

**HOST:** Most small-scale farm households in northern Ghana can boast of raising some guinea fowl, especially in the Upper East Region. Raising guinea fowl is one of the key income-generating activities for farmers in this area. And the birds are not only sold. In some parts of northern Ghana, they are also used in cultural activities such as marriage rites.

Guinea fowl are hugely valuable in the lives of these farmers. But what prevents these them from taking full advantage of the economic potential of guinea fowl?

The people of the Upper East Region have a long history of domesticating the bird and now they are exploring ways to improve traditional breeds. But there are difficult challenges.

This program focuses on the challenges farmers are confronted with in raising guinea fowl, and the benefits and challenges of introducing new breeds. Please stay with me throughout the program.

**SFX:**Sound of guinea fowl

**Host:** Madam Theodora Kabuje is a retired teacher in her sixties who lives in Paga town, a border community between Ghana and Burkina Faso. Madam Theodora says that raising guinea fowl is a traditional activity for many families in the Upper East Region, and all across northern Ghana. I spoke to Madam Theodora and her colleagues from the Upper East guinea fowl farmers group. I asked Madam Theodora what raising guinea fowl means to her.

**Theodora Kabuje:** When I think about guinea fowl, I think of the traditional

methods of raising them: keeping them at home and allowing them to go out into the fields to feed, and then return home to roost on rooftops or on trees around houses.

In this part of the world, raising guinea fowls was reserved for men. Women only occasionally ate the birds. Traditionally, women were not thought capable of raising guinea fowls because the birds are difficult to manage, especially because they often hide their eggs and you have to look all around to find them. Also, you must have a hen to incubate and hatch the eggs. Guinea fowl do not pay careful attention to tending their eggs.

**Host:** The traditional, free-range method of raising guinea fowl is still the most popular approach among farmers in the Upper East Region.

I wanted to know if young farmers are attracted to keeping the birds. So I talked to Mr. Robert Dampare. Mr. Dampare is a young farmer who is a founding member of the Paga guinea fowl farmers group.

He explains his ideas on raising guinea fowl.

**Robert Dampare:** I do not think of raising guinea fowl in the traditional way. I love to raise guinea fowl, but the traditional methods scare me.

I am in my early thirties and I have embraced the modern method of raising guinea fowl. This includes using concentrates as feed, building enclosed housing, using medication, and having mechanical incubators to hatch the eggs. I believe this is the best way.

I was introduced to these modern methods about six years ago on the radio by an agricultural extension officer and some other experts.

In 2009, I attended a workshop where I was introduced to the improved breeding method. After the workshop, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture gave us a new breed to raise and to share with other famers.

I mobilized some colleagues in my community of Nayinia to start a guinea fowl farmers group and try the improved breed. Fifty-four farmers who were practicing the free-range method joined the group. The number of members increased and covered the whole Paga-Chiana district, and now the whole Upper East Region. These groups are making every effort to raise guinea fowls as their main farming activity, because crop production has not been very favourable in this area over the years.

**Host:** In the Upper East Region, there is a traditional taboo against women eating chickens in many households. As Madam Theodora explains, women eat guinea fowl only during childbirth when chickens and guinea fowl are slaughtered and offered to the gods. I asked Madam Theodora about traditional values and raising guinea fowl.

**Theodora Kabuje:** Traditional values don’t forbid a woman from raising guinea fowl. It’s just that the way the birds behave can make it difficult for a woman to manage them. Guinea fowl sleep on rooftops or in trees. When you need to catch one, you have to ask a young man to shoot it with a catapult, or chase and catch it.

**Host:** Listeners, let’s hear from Mr. Albert Asangeya, the leader of the Sirigu Mirigu District guinea fowl farmers group. He talks about his experience working with women to raise the birds, and about some of the challenges they faced.

**Albert asangeya:** My group of farmers from six communities in the Sirigu–Mirigu District tried a foreign breed three years ago. I sold over 100 birds at that time and increased the family income.

But the high cost of feeding and medication put many of us out of business. Right now we are still raising the traditional breed and a few crossbreeds from the neighbouring community of Zebilla in the Bawku West District of the Region.

On the issue of women raising guinea fowl, there are many cultural beliefs and perceptions that can discourage women from the business. For example, when a woman wants to sell a guinea fowl, she has to give it to her son or husband to take to the market for sale. The reason for this is that the woman fears it may fly away on the way to the market.

It is also believed that it’s difficult for women to keep hens to hatch guinea fowl eggs. Traditionally, hens belong to the son or the husband. Another problem is that guinea fowl lay their eggs in hiding places or in places close to a neighbour’s guinea fowl. If the neighbour does not understand, there can be misunderstanding and the neighbour may claim the eggs as their own.

Also, some traditional families may think a woman is keeping guinea fowl to challenge the husband, or dominate the family. These traditional views have discouraged women from raising guinea fowl. Nevertheless, our farmers group is supporting some of the women in the group to overcome some of these problems and raise guinea fowls.

**HOST:** These traditional misconceptions are some of the challenges faced by women in keeping the birds.

If you remember, at the top of the program, I posed a question. I asked what would happen if your wife or mother lost a guinea fowl on the way to market. Would she get it back? Well, yes, she would! Losing a bird often attracts nearby community members, who help catch her bird.

Now that our mother has her bird back, let me ask Madam Theodora how she broke through these traditional misconceptions.

**Theodora Kabuje:** I am very lucky that my husband and I don’t live in the family compound house, where it would be difficult to keep guinea fowl. We built a separate house and have our own living quarters away from the family. My husband and I took turns looking after the guinea fowl. That was how I gained confidence in raising the birds. We used to raise more than 100 guinea fowl in a season. This helped feed our family. We also sold some birds to pay for family needs such as clothing and school books.

I was a role model for women in the community, and I encouraged some of the other women to try keeping guinea fowls.

I kept traditional breeds till four years ago when I joined the community guinea fowl farmers group. That’s when we heard about some training for farmers on raising improved breeds of guinea fowl, and loans for medication and housing.

**Host:** Mr. Dampare, when did you and your colleagues start raising improved breeds of guinea fowl?

**Robert Dampare:** In 2012, an NGO introduced us to a breed from Belgium. The breeds we kept before 2012 were either from the Northern Region or from Zebilla in the Bawku West District. They were bigger birds and laid bigger eggs than the type we had here in Paga-Chiana district.

I was among the first farmers who were given 30 birds each to multiply and share with other farmers in the group. An NGO officer who was like an agricultural extensionist taught us how to prepare the feed, confine the birds, and give them de-worming medication to make them healthy.

**Host:** How many birds do you have now?

**Robert Dampare:** Currently, I have sold all my improved breeds and I am keeping only a few crossbreeds from Zebilla District. These are a traditional breed but bigger than the type we have in this district.

**Host:** Why did you decide to sell all the improved Belgian breeds that you received from the NGO?

**Robert Dampare:** It is expensive to keep these birds. They must be confined, and buying feed and medication is expensive.

The breeds from the northern Regions and from Zebilla are from this environment, but the birds from Belgium are an exotic type and require a lot of care.

**Host:** Madam Theodora, what about your experience with the improved Belgian breeds? How beneficial are they?

**Theodora Kabuje:** I received the Belgian breed in 2005 and, with the support from the NGO, my women’s group raised many birds that year and it really helped us to meet our family needs. The Belgian breed is good, but housing them and feeding them is very expensive. The price of feed has increased and the price of medication has made it challenging to raise the new breed.

When we started raising the Belgian breed, we got a loan from a rural bank. But the cost of paying interest on the loan coupled with the increased price of housing and feed has put some of us out of business.

**Host:** What do you think could be done to support farmers like you to continue to raise guinea fowl, especially improved breeds?

**Theodora Kabuje:** I think housing is the most important thing that women who raise guinea fowl need help with. We should be encouraging farmers to build semi-detached housing for the birds.   
These are houses which are partly roofed and partly open.

It is expensive to put up a full housing unit. I built full housing and I spent so much money. Now I don’t have the money to complete it. I just bought a few local improved breeds from the Zebilla area and I am trying to raise them this season.

**Host:** Mr. Dampare, what do you think could be done to support you and other farmers to keep raising guinea fowl in this district?

**Robert Dampare:** The Ministry of Agriculture should be more proactive to support farmers. And banks need to help farmers by reducing interest rates.

Raising guinea fowl is a way for district farmers to raise money to expand their crop production, especially for irrigated or dry season farming—there are so many dams and farm ponds available for vegetable production.

**Host:** In the Upper East Region, almost every household keeps guinea fowl. The people of the northern savannah raise the birds not only for good, nutritious meals, but also for cultural reasons.  
  
For example, in some marriage rites, guinea fowl are presented by the groom’s family from the dating stages to the final marriage ceremony. Long ago, gifts of guinea fowl to the mother-in-laws of the bride were mandatory for some families or tribes.

Cultures such as the Dagombas and Gonjas in the Northern Region and the Kusasi in the Upper East Region celebrate guinea fowl festivals between October and December every year. During these festivals, farmers show gratitude to their ancestors for blessing them during the cropping to harvesting seasons. Relatives and friends are presented with live guinea fowl and meals are prepared with guinea fowl meat.

The guinea fowl unifies people and binds families together, because almost all cultures in the Upper East Region adore the guinea fowl.

This is where today’s program ends. Next week at the same time, we will continue to discuss the guinea fowl value chain. Raising guinea fowl can help ensure food security in smaller households and provide other benefits to farmers anywhere in Africa, not just in northern Ghana. Goodbye until next week.

## Acknowledgements

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**Sources of information**

Interviews:

* Mr. Robert Dampare, secretary, Paga-Chiana District guinea fowl farmers’ association, and National Commission of Civic Education, Nayinia, Paga, Navrongo, Upper East Region
* Madam Theodora Kabuje, retired teacher, Paga town, Navrongo, Upper East Region
* Mr. Albert Asangeya, Sirigu-Mirigu guinea fowl farmers group, Sirigu Mirigu District, Navrongo, Upper East Region.

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