For Jinja grain trader Mr Daniel Mpugi, business is a matter of luck from one season to another. There is always uncertainty about the quality of grain he is purchasing because when the consignments are not up to standard it translates into financial loss and sheer wastage.

From his base at the Bugembe Agali Awamu market in the heart of Jinja’s industrial area, Mr Mpugi coordinates client orders for the purchase of a range of cereals and legumes, the bulk of which consists of maize and beans. However, in his trading activities which extend beyond Uganda’s borders to Southern Sudan as well as Kenya, he is constantly on the look-out for quality.

“Both traders and farmers suffer huge losses due to poor post-harvest handling,” he says. “We have to contend with a lot of broken maize, as well as losses occasioned by high moisture content and pests.”

However farmers like 75-year old Mr Jafali Katende are giving traders and institutional buyers alike reason to smile lately since adopting and maintaining good post-harvest management practices. Mr Katende, who is a member of the Bituli Commercial Village in Butagaya sub-County is keen on ensuring that his maize meets and surpasses the basic quality standards so that the traders will make a return visit and offer him a good price for his efforts.

“We have learned a lot from the Commercial Village Storage Project,” he enthuses. “We are careful about how we handle the maize right from the farm until it is ready for the market.”
There was a time when he and his farming colleagues would gather the harvested maize on bare soil to dry it and then beat the kernels off the cob, bag it (with the debris picked off the ground) and hope the traders would come quickly to lift it off them before the pests devoured the crop.

Not so anymore. Mr Katende, his wives Nuru and Zainabu now spread out a tarpaulin sheet on the ground every time they need to air their maize in the open. They have abandoned the old practice of beating the kernels off the cob and instead they have been adopted the hand-held maize sheller or they book their turn to use the mechanized version which is stationed at the commercial village store premises where farmers bulk their grain prior to selling.

They are also well versed in the steps for pesticide dusting and dedicating a clean, well ventilated space where they can stack their produce on raised wooden pallets. Mr Katende’s family are in the process of buying the natural fibre bags to hold their grain.

According to the managing director of Hilltop Farm Limited, an animal feed processing company in Jinja, Mr Stanely Tumwesigye Murumba, the steps taken by farmers like Mr Katende automatically remove the need to hire labour to sort and separate the grain from the debris.

“We are relieved when we come face to face with quality,” he says, “And we are willing to pay a good price for it.”

The improved prices have not escaped Mr Katende’s attention: “As a family we are greatly encouraged that the traders are willing to give us a better price. This makes us want to work even harder to ensure that in the next season we will have more grains to trade.”

The District Marketing and Production Officer, Dr Stephen Kiwemba couldn’t agree more: “The impact of the USAID-COMPETE and Farm Concern International interventions are almost immediate and tangible,” he adds, “I would like to see the project being replicated to include an even bigger area to transform the lives and livelihoods of farmers and traders alike.”