

Abstract

Tea is currently the single largest agribusiness in Kenya. Due to its profitability, tea industry has expanded tremendously over the 70 years of its existence in the country. The increase in acreage coupled with the increase in production per unit area has contributed to a glut in black tea in the world market. This has resulted in either stagnation or decline in price of tea. Owing to the 3-fold rise in production cost over the last decade or so, farmers' earnings have consequently declined. This is further aggravated by the fact that Kenyan tea is chiefly sold as a generic product that is blended with other teas of lesser quality elsewhere in the world. Therefore, there is a need to change the way teas from Kenya are marketed to ensure fair return from tea farming enterprises. In order to undertake value addition, branding of raw tea and develop diversified tea products, it is necessary to fully index and describe the types of tea products in Kenya. One way of doing this is by characterizing the active biomolecules in the tea. A study conducted to compare total polyphenols of some selected Kenyan teas with teas from other countries revealed that Kenyan tea germplasm had 7-27% more total polyphenols than germplasm from China, Japan and Taiwan which is traditionally used for green, oolong and pouchang tea manufacture and extraction of total polyphenols. Other than indicating that Kenyan teas are rich in antioxidants, the high levels of total polyphenols can be used to market Kenyan tea for premium prices.