CASE STUDY NOVEMBER 2026

INVEST SALONE

Building a market

How Wangu built a passion fruit supply chain with forest-edge farmers

Working with smallholder farmers around Sierra Leone's Gola Forest, Wangu Holdings was able to build a reliable local supply of passion fruit. With a matching grant from Invest Salone's COMPETE Salone facility, the company gave farmers a dependable buyer, and it has continued to expand its sourcing network since the grant ended.



The commercial challenge

Cocoa is an important source of income for farming households around Sierra Leone's Gola Forest – but the income is not year-round. Once the harvest ends, household income can fall sharply, contributing to what farmers commonly refer to as the "hungry season".

Wangu Holdings, a Sierra Leonean fruit nursery grower and processor, had a problem of its own. To expand its fruit processing business, it needed a reliable supply of good-quality produce. Yet sourcing fresh produce from hundreds of smallholder farmers across remote communities was expensive and unpredictable. Volumes varied, transport was difficult and post-harvest losses were high.

For smallholder farmers, growing a new crop only makes commercial sense if there is a reliable market for what they produce. For an agribusiness, investing in processing and purchasing systems only makes sense if farmers can produce sufficient volumes of consistent quality. This is a familiar cycle, and breaking it required more than a new crop – it required Wangu to build a functioning commercial relationship with farmers based on trust, consistency and mutual benefit.

With support from COMPETE Salone, the company set out to test whether it could create a viable passion fruit supply chain together with smallholder farmers living in communities around the Gola Forest, providing the farmers with additional income outside the cocoa season. To work, the model needed a credible market, practical logistics and a commercial relationship that benefited both sides.

This was particularly important in the forest-edge communities, where farmers had experienced short-term development projects in the past. Asking them to commit land, labour and time to an unfamiliar crop required confidence that Wangu was not another temporary project, but a business that intended to continue buying their produce.

Testing a commercial solution

Partnering with Jula Consulting, the Ngoleagorbu Cocoa Farmers Union and The Ethical Trading Company to establish and test the new supply chain, Wangu set up demonstration farms, trained farmers in commercial production and forest friendly practices, and provided tools and labour support in the early stages.

Wangu established an extension team to provide regular technical support on the ground and used commercial riders to collect fruit from remote communities. As the network grew, technical advice from Invest Salone helped the company sharpen how it recruited, trained and supported farmers.

Trust had to be earned, and because some farmers saw the initiative as yet another short-lived project, Wangu concentrated on committed growers and asked those who succeeded to show others how. The turning point was the first harvest. Once it was sold, farmers could see that Wangu was a genuine buyer. Some expanded production using their own money, and farmers outside the pilot asked to join.

Results at a glance

296
smallholder farmers actively growing passion fruit

21
communities participating in the supply chain

300+
farmers involved in training and reforestation activities

300+
metric tonnes of passion fruit sold to Wangu

Alongside the extra income, farmers gained practical production skills, and more than 300 took part in training and reforestation activities.

Farmers investing in success

Momoh Bockarie, an early adopter from Joru, doubled the size of his farm after his first returns. He spent the income on his house, labour for his rice farm, a commercial motorbike, his children's schooling and day-to-day household costs.

> "It is difficult to find a crop that provides such yield at this time of the year, so I am happy and committed to continuing this work."

Momoh Bockarie





Yatta Bangura from Mendekelema became one of the five largest suppliers. She refined her techniques, expanded her farm and put her earnings into her trading business. Her success persuaded other farmers to take the crop seriously as a commercial opportunity.

Tanima got off to a slow start, with little commitment from farmers. Peer learning and closer monitoring turned that around: the community became one of the three highest performers, and farmers earned welcome cash while their other crops were still growing.

> "Passion fruit has presented me with an opportunity to earn additional income, which I have used to invest in my daily trading business"
>
> **Yatta Bangura**

Beyond the grant

Six months after Invest Salone's support ended, Wangu was expanding into more communities across Kenema District and had begun buying other fruits and leafy vegetables for processing.

The company is also exploring an aggregation store and cold room to cut losses and speed up delivery and payment. This continued growth suggests the pilot is evolving into a commercially driven supply model.



What the experience shows

- **Start with a credible market.**
  Farmers are more willing to invest in a new crop when they know there is a dependable buyer.
- **Build the systems, not just the skills.**
  Training works only when it is backed by practical systems for selecting farmers, extension support, collection, purchasing and payment.
- **Let successful farmers make the case.**
  Visible commercial results changed perceptions and drew in new participants.



Conclusion

Reliable smallholder supply chains depend on commercial confidence on both sides. Wangu gained a stronger domestic fruit supply; farmers gained income in the season when they needed it most. The clearest sign of success is what happened next: farmers invested their own money, new growers asked to join and Wangu continued to expand after external support ended.



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Contact Invest Salone
enquiries@investsalone.com | investsalone.com

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