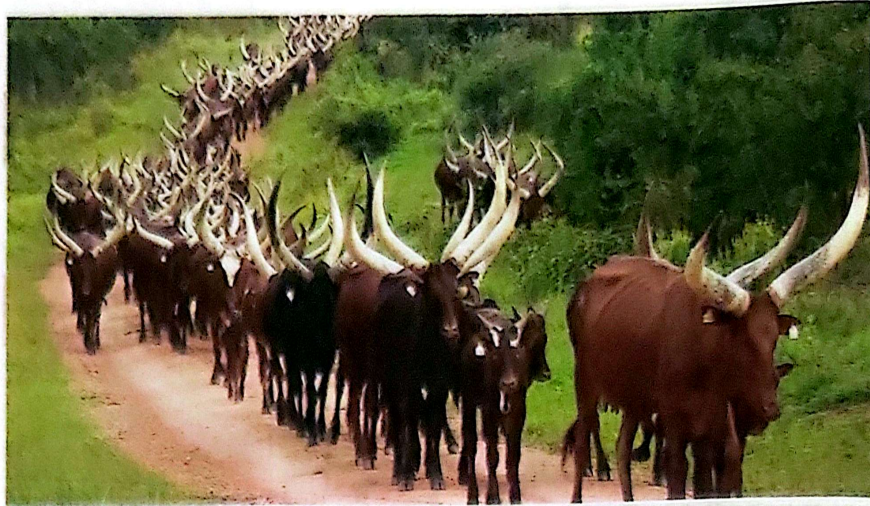




At risk. Ankole long-horned cattle facing extinction. President Museveni has directed the Agriculture ministry to lease out land from different state-owned ranches to individuals as part of efforts to save the species. FILE PHOTO.

Museveni orders giveaway of government ranches

Protection. The president says giving away government ranches to particular individuals to breed the local cattle will prevent it from extinction.

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KAMPALA. President Museveni has directed the Agriculture ministry to lease out land from different state-owned ranches to specific individuals as part of efforts to save the "Ankole long-horned cattle" from extinction.

In six days, the President who accuses Agriculture ministry officials of theft and neglect, wrote twice on June 3 and June 9 to the Agriculture minister, Vincent Bamulanzeki Sempijja, directing on how the issue of ranches should be handled in a move he says is a "change of strategy".

The June 3 letter is titled "sagala aggalamidae", a Luganda saying urging people to wake up from laxity.

On June 9 the President wrote directing the Agriculture ministry to allocate land to Mr Emmanuel Kamihingo, Mr Barnabas Tinkamanyire Nuwamanya, Mr Rutahigwa Eric and Ankore Long Horned Cattle Breeders Cooperative Society.

"I am, therefore, directing you to lease them some pieces of land maybe in the same Ruhengere, Nshara, Aswa or Maruzi Government Ranches to breed these rare but good cattle for commercial production," Mr Museveni's letter reads in part.

He said the move "will encourage other farmers to join the same industry and therefore grow and prosper by

our indigenous cattle".

In the letter, President Museveni also decries the "endless procrastination" in the Agriculture ministry and notes that he has made previous attempts to work with the ministry to save the Ankole cattle breed but has been frustrated. Mr Museveni, one of the largest cattle owners in the country, also accuses ministry officials of neglecting and stealing the cattle he has previously donated to the government.

"In those efforts, I have been giving cattle to your ministry officials who take them to Ruhengere farm in the name of breeding and nothing has ever come to fruition. They neglect them and steal them," Mr Museveni charged.

Senior presidential press secretary Don Wanyama declined to comment on the president's directives, saying he had not seen the said letters.

Ministers unhappy

A source privy to the plan, told *Daily Monitor* that senior Agriculture ministry officials and their counterparts in the semi-autonomous National Animal Genetic Resources Centre and Data Bank (NAGRC & DB), former Animal Breeding Centre (ABC), are unhappy with the President's directive seen as an attempt by some individuals to grab public land and other assets.

Another official who declined to be named told *Daily Monitor* that the spirit behind Mr Museveni directive is good because the ranches are underutilised, misused or neglected. He, however, said the President's directive was procedurally wrong and could

end in government losing more resources.

On July 10, Mr Kavuya wrote to NAGRC&DB, arguing that their organisation is modelled on individual smallholder farms scattered throughout Uganda without a large and common piece of land on which to carry out large enterprise livestock commercial farming for production.

More demands

After getting wind of the President's directive, a group of ranchers have also written to the Ministry of Agriculture seeking to partner with NAGRC & DB to manage Ruhengere Ranch.

Background

On June 9 the President wrote directing the agriculture ministry to allocate land to Mr Emmanuel Kamihingo, Mr Barnabas Tinkamanyire Nuwamanya, Mr Rutahigwa Eric and Ankore Long Horned Cattle Breeders Cooperative Society.

Led by businessman and rancher Ben Kavuya, the group of over 70 livestock farmers in "both beef and dairy sectors as well as breeders of the Ankole long-horned cattle" want to be given a 49-year lease on the state-owned Ruhengere Ranch, located in Mbarara District, about 24km off Mbarara-Masaka highway at Biharwe, which is 12km from Mbarara town.

According to NAGRC&DB, it is located close to the milk-shade of Masaka, Bushenyi and Mbarara where farmers

can benefit from the improved stock raised on the ranch.

The farm land covers around 5463ha, out of which about 1,366ha are under use for grazing of the existing cattle and goats. About 4097ha of the farm are occupied by squatters. The ranch currently keeps both cattle and goats for meat production.

In an interview, Mr Kavuya said industries that have been set up to process beef and other dairy products in the country are white elephants because they lack both qualitative and quantitative supply of raw materials.

For example, he said such a factory requires live weight of 400kgs "which Ugandan farmers cannot breed and fatten individually".

Mr Sempijja was in a meeting with the president in Jinja, an aide said when contacted on phone.

While the different correspondences relating to the requests for giveaway of the state-owned ranches were copied to her, State minister for Animal Industry Joy Kabatsi said she was yet to receive the said communication.

She, however, dismissed Reline's request for 20 square miles of Ruhengere Ranch as a joke.

"I haven't gotten the letter, but I have heard there are people who want 20 square miles. These are government farms and as far as I am concerned they still are," she said.

However, she said if a decision is taken by government to lease the ranches, then NAGRC&DB, the ministry's controlling body, will have no option but to hand over the ranch to the group.