

Best farmers trip to the Netherlands

By Joshua Kato

"As a secondary school geography teacher, I read about this wonderful country called the Netherlands so many times. I always dreamt about visiting it, but it never occurred to me that one day that dream would turn into reality," says Rachael Amol, one of the farmers set to travel to the Netherlands on June 2. This was the same kind of enthusiasm expressed by the other farmers she is travelling with.

Rachael and 10 other lucky winners had gathered at the Embassy of the Netherlands on the morning of May 4 to fill in their visa application forms. The group included Celia Kansime (Wakiso), Julius Bigabwa (Kabarole), Isaac Malinga (Kaphorwa) and Tom Anyi (Lira). Others are Justine Omeke Didi (Karamoja), Patrick Bakumpe Makanga (Kyotera) and Margaret Mbiaga (Sheema). The group also includes Jacob Karindula (Jinja), Robert Oatu (Arua), Rachel Amol (Wakiso) and Timothy Jokkene (Gulu).

According to Josephat Byaruhanga, a senior agriculture policy officer at the embassy, the team of 11 will fly to the Netherlands on June 2 and return on June 9. He said everything was already in place, including the air tickets provided by KLM, the Royal Dutch airlines.

While applying for visas is always a challenge for ordinary Ugandans, the farmers went through the process with ease.

They later met the Dutch ambassador, Henk Jan Bakker, before being hosted to a luncheon at Aldi Bistrot in Nakasero, Kampala. The ambassador told the farmers that their visit would be a wonderful experience.

About the competition

This is the fourth group of farmers travelling to the Netherlands since the competition started in 2014. So far, 46 farmers have travelled to the Netherlands.

The best farmers competition is sponsored by the Embassy of the Netherlands, dfu Bank, KLM Airlines, Koudijs Nutrition Bv and Vision Group.

Netherlands is the second largest exporter of agricultural produce in the world, which offers the Ugandan farmers a chance to learn the best practices on how to increase their productivity.

Out of the top 10, the best three will have access to a sh100m asset acquisition prize of which the winner will get sh50m to first and second runners-up will take sh30m and sh20m, respectively. The other seven farmers will share sh50m, which comes up to sh7.1m each.

The 2018 competition is already running, with the main theme being practising agriculture as a business, with a special focus on farmers who add value to their produce.

Criteria



The 2017 best farmers having drinks at the Aldi Bistrot restaurant in Nakasero, Kampala. They are set to fly to the Netherlands



Ambassador Henk Jan Bakker

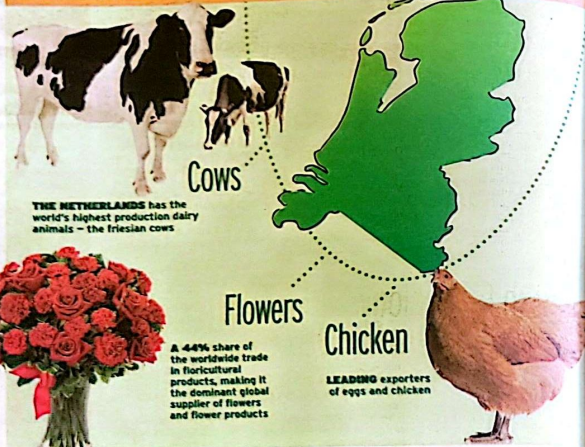
The competition is open to every farmer in Uganda. It does not consider farm enterprise or size, but rather puts emphasis on farm organisation and management, knowledge of farm and use of innovations, family contribution and continuity of enterprise, environment-smart practices, for example land and water conservation, animal waste control, social impact, markets access, post-harvest handling and value addition.

To join the 2018 competition, visit any of the Vision Group offices near you and hand in your nomination.

Highly mechanised

The livestock sector in the Netherlands is entirely and highly mechanised, since machines handle almost every stage of the cattle's life. This high production of milk, the 2017 best farmers found, is as a result of high mechanisation. For example, the hay is planted and

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harvested by tractors and compacted into hay by machines. The grass is loaded by machines onto trucks and packed in a shade by a machine.

"There is very little human involvement and that is why the grass is clean," says Erik Rianne Valk, a dairy farmer in Horstweg 21, Broeland, north-east of the Netherlands.

"When it comes to feeding, most

farmers have robots that collect the food from a store near the cow sheds and carry it to the cows for feeding. The feeding robots have sensors that know which cow has run out of feed.

While a Ugandan cattle keeper is worried about the milking time, this is not a concern for his Dutch counterpart. This is because most farms have automatic milking machines, where cows go when they

feel that they have heavy udders. The machine has sensors that detect the presence of a cow and then move to clean the teats first, then attach to start milking. When it detects that the milk is finished, it disengages and the cow walks away. The milk then goes into a tank, from where a truck picks it from.

In nearly all Dutch dairy farms,

cow dung is removed by a robot that

Netherlands set for June

Be good ambassadors

During lunch at Aldi Bistrot, the state minister for education, Dr. John C. Muyingo, paid the farmers a courtesy call.

"When you reach the Netherlands, be good ambassadors of Uganda. You will see a lot of good technologies, so make sure you learn about them and bring the knowledge back to Uganda," he said.

He told the farmers to broadcast the good things about Uganda to the Dutch. "Tell them about the opportunities in the round agriculture that we have," he said.

keeps moving around the cow shed. The robots suck the dung into a tank, before depositing it into a tunnel that takes the dung to a collection tank, where the process to turn it into manure starts.

Comparatively in Uganda, very few farmers feed their livestock with hay or dried grass. They instead let them graze in the paddocks.

Dutch poultry sector

While touring Dutch poultry farms and research and production centres in the Netherlands, the best farmers will find out that the sector is a cradle of automation and turnkey systems, which have enabled it to turn into the international market leader in the distribution of both chicken and chicken feeds.

Ugandan farmers discovered that most chicken types commonly kept in Uganda are Dutch products.

Dutch technology

It is not surprising that the Dutch, with just 1.4 million cows compared with Uganda's 12.5 million cattle, produce more than 100 times the amount of milk produced by Uganda. The average milk production of a Dutch cow is 25 litres of milk per day, compared to less than one litre for a Ugandan cow. This is just the average production per cow, however, there are many cows in the Netherlands that produce as many as 75 litres per day, compared to a recorded highest production of 25 per day in Uganda for a single cow.

And amazingly, the best farmers were told that the Dutch are breeding a cow that can produce 100 litres per day. In a year, a Dutch dairy cow produces an average 10,000 litres in 305 days of lactation, compared to an average 305 litres for a Ugandan cow around the same period.

"My interest will be to study and learn from the Dutch beef and dairy value chain," says Timothy Jokkene, a cattle breeder from Gulu. He hopes to acquire some equipment to improve on his abattoir.

Rabo Bank, which is



A mechanised cattle pen in the Netherlands, where cows are milked and fed by machines



The 2016 best farmers look at tomatoes grown in the Netherlands during their trip

These are the Bovan, Hisex, Dekalb produced ISA/Hendrix Genetics Company and the Novogen brown, produced by Verbeek.

Dutch chicken does not only dominate Africa, but also Europe. To put it in perspective, if you eat an egg or a piece of chicken in

northwestern Europe and Africa, chances are high that it is from the Netherlands.

The Netherlands is the world's largest exporter of eggs for consumption and egg products and the third largest exporter of chicken meat.

Of the 10 billion eggs that Dutch chickens lay annually, 6.5 billion go abroad and 50% of the meat and the hatching eggs also end up being exported. A large proportion of sales is made up of fresh produce and takes place in northwestern Europe.

Celia Kansime, a poultry farmer in Wakiso, who is set to travel on June 2 is looking forward to getting the same benefits.

"I have been getting challenges procuring my day-old chicks, but I think that once I am connected to the breeders who I am visiting, my challenges will be solved," she says.

"When it comes to quality, cost price and logistics, the Netherlands makes the difference," says Ruud Huime, the director of Food & Agri Netherlands at Rabo Bank, which is

connected to dfu Bank Uganda, is one of the sponsors of the best farmers' competition.

Role of co-operatives

The visiting farmers will also learn from the Dutch spirit of co-operation. In the Netherlands, the saying "Divided we fall and united we stand" is the basis on which agriculture has been developed for hundreds of years. Every Dutch farmer is a member of a farming organisation and this cuts across the whole agricultural sector.

"Our group is as old as 140 years," Valk told the 2015 best farmers. He is a member of Friesland campina, one of the largest dairy farmers co-operative groups in the world.

To reach Horstweg 21, the farmers were driven through beautiful cattle farms and imposing country homes. In this area, almost every homestead has livestock.

To enjoy better fruits from their cattle keeping activities, the Dutch farmers decided to start co-operative groups

HISTORY

The Netherlands, a farming powerhouse

The Netherlands is a farming power. When the best farmers visit, they learn how the Dutch do farming.

Previous lucky winners have adopted some of these practices on their farms. The dairy sector has particularly left many of the farmers who visit the country in awe. Others include the poultry sector, the weave of strong co-operative groups and the horticulture sector.

"I am now importing day-old chicks from the Netherlands. It all started during my visit there as one of the 2015 best farmers," says Johnson Basanwa, from Kamuli.

During his visit, he saw the high level of technological advancement that the breeders there used to produce chicks. He got their contacts and has since imported over 30,000 day-old chicks.

Over 150 years ago, the Dutch decided to take up dairy farming as a commercial activity. By then, according to available history statistics, Europe was going through a wave of industrial revolution.

But while countries like Germany and England put em

sector, the Dutch picked on agriculture, with dairy farming as the core business. The Friesian was picked as the main dairy cow, followed by the Holstein and others.

"At the time, the average Dutch cattle keeping homestead had an average of five cows," says Gervin Kerkdijk, a breed researcher.

The north-east was selected as the main dairy keeping area, the equivalent of South western Uganda.

Through the years, the government of the Netherlands has invested heavily in the dairy sector. Gradually, the dairy industry has grown into the best in the world.

According to Kerkdijk, there are an estimated 18,500 dairy farmers in the Netherlands, each with an average of 80 cows. The average acreage for each dairy farmer is 18 acres.

"A typical Dutch dairy farm has three main features. The first is the farmhouse and the cattle house in which the animals live, especially during winter.

"There is land on which grass for feeding and grazing the animals is grown and another structure for storing