

Farmers decry losses as Uganda is declared free of bird flu

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KAMPALA. Poultry farmers have not been able to export any of their products for the last seven months since bird flu was declared in Uganda on January 15.

The virus was detected in districts of Wakiso, Kalangala and Masaka on the shores of Lake Victoria.

Last Saturday, the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries in conjunction with the Ministry of Health, announced that the country is free from bird flu.

Addressing journalists at the Media Centre at the weekend, the State minister for Agriculture, Mr Christopher Kibazanga, said the ministry in March started concerted efforts by multi-sectoral national task force to control the disease.

"The ministry has since been carrying out active surveillance in all affected districts, and laboratory samples collected from domestic poultry and wild birds have been confirmed negative since March to date. Therefore, the country is hereby declared free from bird flu," Mr Kibazanga said.

The chairperson of Uganda Poultry Association, Mr Aga Ssekalala, said farmers were unable to export products to neighbouring countries,



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Died. Dr Noelina Nantima, assistant commissioner, animal disease control, said more than 10,000 wild birds are estimated to have died while 50,000 domestic birds are estimated to have been lost to bird flu.

Poultry. A poultry farmer attends to chicken at Makerere Research Institute in Kabanyolo recently. Kenya has lifted a ban on the Ugandan poultry products after the country was declared free of bird flu.

PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

which has affected their income. He said the poultry exports were shut-

down near to zero and farmers lost about Shs4m to Shs7m every month

since January.

Mr Patrick Yiga, a farmer dealing in fruits, poultry and seedlings, said after the ban was imposed on Uganda's poultry products, not only did they make losses in poultry products but also in maize bran and silver fish, which are chicken feeds.

He blamed the Agriculture ministry for always 'exaggerating' certain epidemics even when they have not escalated.

"Other European countries, whenever they get an epidemic, they don't attract attention from other countries but they contain it internally. If the government had kept quiet and controlled the virus internally, we couldn't have witnessed a ban on our poultry products," Mr Yiga said.

The outbreak of bird flu negatively impacted the country's economy as the poultry products were banned for exportation to Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo.

The South Sudan national livestock and fisheries minister, Mr James Duku, said Sudan will not put a ban on Uganda's poultry exports despite the outbreak of Avian influenza because the condition was not as alarming as perceived outside.