

Farmers encouraged to grow quick-maturing crops

By Moses Walubiri

As preparations for the second planting season get underway in many parts of Uganda, the Government has advised farmers to plant quick-maturing plant varieties in light of the adverse weather patterns.

A number of areas in the country have received intermittent rainfall, prompting farmers to prepare their gardens for planting purposes.

"The rains have not proved reliable of late. It would be prudent for farmers to plant quick-maturing plants. Only when the rains persist should they plant the type that take long to mature," Alex Lwakuba, the commissioner of crop production, told the media yesterday.

Lwakuba, with a number of technocrats from the agriculture ministry was at the Uganda Media Centre, together with the state minister for animal industry, Joyce Kabatsi, to launch crop intensification advocacy messages.

In particular, Lwakuba advised farmers to plant varieties developed by scientists at the National Agriculture Research Organisation (NARO) at Kawanda, citing the climbing beans variety as apt.

Like many countries around the globe, Uganda is currently in the throes of adverse weather patterns, marked by unusually prolonged



Kabatsi

droughts due to global warming.

For a large part of this year, parts of Karamoja, Teso and Isingiro have been affected by prolonged drought that has spawned severe food shortages and subsequent intervention by the Government, through the Ministry of Disaster Preparedness.

The result has been a direct threat to Uganda's enviable position as a regional bread basket, as its own food security gets eroded with each passing year.

Besides valiant efforts to wean the country off dependence on rain-fed agriculture through irrigation schemes, the Government has invested heavily in research by NARO, to come up with quick-maturing plant varieties, especially

cereals that are also drought-resistant. The crop intensification advocacy messages are aimed at disseminating vital information, tailored to help farmers growing Irish potatoes and rice in seven districts of Uganda realise better yields through improved techniques.

According to Kabatsi, the messages will be relayed through radio and talkshows in the rice growing districts of Butaleja, Bugiri and Tororo in eastern Uganda and Kabale, Kisoro, Kanungu and Rubanda.

The core message to the farmers is the result of research conducted by the agriculture ministry under the auspices of the Dutch government.

The message will entail educating farmers about using fertilisers, modern agronomic methods, water management for rice growers and the need to use good seedlings.

"The research findings provided important information and facts that have enabled the ministry to develop the national agricultural extension policy and the national fertiliser policy that Cabinet approved last year," Kabatsi said.

Rice production in Uganda is currently at 2.5m tonnes per hectare, with minimum input, yet its potential is, according to Lwakuba, five million tonnes. For Irish potatoes, it is six million tonnes a hectare, yet the country's potential is 14 million tonnes.