

KUROILERS THAT WERE INTRODUCED LAY BETWEEN 150-200 EGGS A YEAR, COMPARED TO LOCAL BIRDS

By John Agaba

Govt introduces 32 disease resistant crop varieties

The Minister for Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, Vincent Ssempijja, yesterday said the Government had released 32 disease-resistant and nutrition-enhanced varieties to ensure increased farm productivity.

Some of the crop varieties include maize, cassava and beans, which farmers can now access and plant and be sure they will get better yields.

"We have to embrace technology, with population growth, and changes in the environment and our researchers and scientists have released these varieties. We have to use them," Ssempijja said.

He made the remarks at the Uganda Media Centre, where he briefed journalists on progress of the agriculture sector since the current National Resistance Movement government was sworn in about two years ago.

After scientists have developed new varieties, the organisms have to be tested before the National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) can endorse them as feasible and good for local soils and for productivity.

After, the varieties have to be multiplied either by private seed makers/multipliers or the Government before they are released onto the market.

"Uganda is moving from small-holder subsistence farming to large scale mechanised farming. One step to embrace

this, is to adopt varieties, which are disease-resistant and harsh-environment tolerable," the minister said.

For instance, Nase 14 is tolerant to cassava brown streak disease and resistant to cassava mosaic disease.

He said they had also introduced kuroiler chicken, which are disease-resistant and fast-growing. About 2,305,194 kuroilers were distributed to 5,500 households and 40,000 birds have been exported to regional markets to ensure benefit. The kuroiler lays between 150 and 200 eggs per year, compared with indigenous birds, which lay about 40 in the same period. Cocks weigh between three and four kilogrammes within four months.

Ssempijja said NARO has also developed two anti-tick vaccines to effectively control blue ear ticks (*Boophilus decoloratus*). It has also developed two bio-acaricide formulations to manage the emerging challenge of tick resistance to available acaricides.

Away from new varieties and the vaccines, the minister said his sector had also started to map soils in the country, led



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by Makerere University. So, they can inform farmers on particular foodstuffs they can plant in particular locations.

"The ministry has started on an ambitious project, where they need farmers to know that their soils are favourable for

crop X and not Y," he said.

On strengthening extension services through a single spine extension service system, Ssempijja said the Government embarked on recruitment of public agricultural extension staff in local governments.

As a result, the extension worker to farmer ratio had been reduced from 1:5,000 to about 1:1,800 and they had recruited 3,052 staff, which is 60% of the target.

Another commitment in the manifesto was to enhance systematic distribution of improved seeds, planting and breeding materials through the National Agricultural Advisory Services and Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) initiatives.

On this, the minister said they had procured and distributed inputs to promote key strategic crops, through National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) and OWC.

He said the acreage planted for perennial crops had increased substantially, with tea spanning over 32,000 acres, oranges 171,000 acres and mangoes 176,000 acres. Prior to the five-year term, Uganda exported 3,556,692 (60kg bags) of coffee worth \$351,153,000 in the financial year 2015/2016.

"Last year, the country increased production to 4,186,606 (60kg bags) worth \$490,250,000. This is an increase of 14%," Ssempijja said.

He said 10,924 hectares of

oil palm had been cultivated by organised smallholder farmers, supported by a public-private producer partnership between the Government, the international fund for agriculture development and private sector players, including BIDCO Uganda Ltd.

He said by last December, a total of 1,810 farmers (36% female) were benefiting from the oil palm smallholder scheme, with 1,080 farmers already harvesting from 3,021 hectares of mature oil palms and earned sh1.2b each month.

"The private partner BIDCO is currently producing 27,198 tonnes of crude palm oil per year and pays tax worth sh157.4b per year," Ssempijja said. He said they had rolled out an e-voucher subsidiary programme to promote access to and use of fertilisers.

"Sukulu fertiliser factory is being constructed through the public-private partnership. It will produce 300,000 tonnes of fertilisers, 300,000 tonnes of steel products, 200,000 tonnes of sulphuric acid, 300,000 tonnes of gypsum and 100,000 tonnes of rare earth elements," he said.

Ollen Wanda Kahurubuka, a senior planner for agriculture at the National Planning Authority, said the country needs critical interventions to improve farmer livelihoods. That was what the agriculture sector was doing.

However, there still remains challenges of over relying on rainfall and food processor plants to add value to locally produced foodstuffs.