

...engineers explains to Ms Amelia Kyambadde, the Trade minister and others during last week. According to Ms Kyambadde, the factory, which had been slated to open in 2016, is expected to open in August. The Soroti Fruit Factory is an initiative of the government of Uganda International Cooperation Agency and Teso Tropical Fruit Growers Cooperative Union. COURTESY PI

Tax imported rice, farmers demand

BY STEPHEN OTAGE

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KAMPALA. The Rice Association of Uganda has said they will petition Parliament to impose Import Duty on rice sourced out of the country.

Ms Racheal Chiconco Mbabazi, the chairperson of the Rice Association of Uganda, said they reject tax waivers on imported rice as 80 per cent of rice consumed in Uganda can be got here if farmers are given capacity to do their work in a better way.

"We produce 80 per cent of the rice consumed in Uganda. Rice is now both a cash and food crop but government does not [take the industry as a priority]," she said adding that rice farming is still disorganised which is the reason production per acre is still low.

The association, Ms Mbabazi said, has farmers in Butalejja, Bugiri, Tororo, Amuru, Nwoya, Abim, in Lango, and Kanungu districts producing upland rice.

Twenty per cent of the rice, which is imported

comes from Tanzania, according to Ms Chiconco Mbabazi.

Mr Yob Okiror, the chairman of Eastern Rice Company, said they have organised farmers into a cooperative union that has enabled them to run a rice mill since 2014.

"Most farmers produce half a tonne of rice per acre and we believe we can raise this production to one and a half tonnes in the districts of Pallisa, Kumi and Bukedea since this is now a cash and food crop," she said.

The rice sector has in the last few months had supply challenges, which has pushed up prices.

Recently, government threatened to grant importers permits to close the supply gap if local producers fail to sufficiently serve the market.

Mr Joweris Samanya, the general manager of Busowa Farmers' Cooperative Union, said there are more than 6,000 registered rice farmers in the districts of Bugiri, Butalejja and Tororo with more others not registered.

REGISTERED FARMERS

According to Joweris Samanya, the general manager of Busowa Farmers' Cooperative Union, there are more than 6,000 registered rice farmers in the districts of Bugiri, Butalejja and Tororo with more others who have not registered.

"We have more 35,000 [registered and non-registered] rice farmers cultivating paddy rice in the Igogero Swamp. However, most of these use hand hoes. Government must come in to help us," he said.