

Best farmers tour Rotterdam port

By Joshua Kato
and Eddie Seejoba

The 11 best farmers, currently touring the Netherlands are amazed at the history and size of the port of Rotterdam. "I am amazed by the order at this port," said Julius Bigabwa, a farmer.

Rotterdam is the largest port in Europe and ninth largest in the world. Overall, it is only bettered by eight Chinese ports in volume of goods handled.

The best farmers arrived in the Netherlands on Sunday morning, after an eight-hour flight by KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, that sponsored farmers' tickets. They are hosted by the government of the Netherlands, through its embassy in Uganda. Other sponsors of the annual best farmers competition are dfcu Bank and Koudijs Animal Nutrition.

This year's best farmers were Isaac Malinga, Julius Bigabwa, Tom Anyii, Justine Didi Omeke, Patrick Bakumpe Makanga, Robert Ociti, Rachael Amol, Timothy Jokkene, Margaret Mbaga, Cella Kansime and Jacob Kazindula. They were also accompanied by Vision Group's chief executive officer, Robert Kabushenga.

On Saturday night, the group applauded Vision Group's efforts in promoting modern agricultural practices as they departed from Entebbe Airport. They will tour various model farmers and companies dealing in agricultural inputs.



Uganda's best farmers competition winners aboard a boat while touring a port in the Netherlands on Sunday. Photo by Joshua Kato

BETWEEN THE LINES: Objective

During their stay in the Netherlands, the farmers will, among others, visit livestock nutrition processors, seed industries, dairy and horticulture farms.

The excited farmers said by going the extra mile to enable winners visit and learn from successful models in the Netherlands, *New Vision* had given hope to Ugandans to revive the once vibrant sector, which is the backbone of the country's economy.

Hopes, expectations

"I was shocked when I was picked as one of the winners from the central region, but I am more excited to be offered the opportunity to travel to the Netherlands. I hope to learn a lot from more advanced farmers and improve my practices," said Amol from Wakiso district.

Amol has a greenhouse where she grows tomatoes, vegetables and sweet pepper on half an acre. She is interested in learning modern techniques of farming and how individual Dutch farmers maximally utilise their little space through applying modern technology to achieve high farm yields.

Kansime, a horticulturalist from Wakiso, said: "This is a good idea because it encourages farmers to work for the best and exposes them to others who have excelled in farming," she said.

She said promoting agriculture to such levels had changed many people's perceptions that farming was for the illiterate. "But here we are a



Vision Group's chief executive officer Robert Kabushenga (seated, left) and Harvest Money editor Joshua Kato (squatting, right) with Uganda's best farmers on arrival in the Netherlands

their age," she explained.

Okello, a beekeeper from Lira, said that the competition and winning had inspired him to invest in processing honey before selling it.

Bakumpe, a banana and poultry farmer from Kyotera, said he hoped to inspire many people to take up agriculture.

produce food in excess, but with time, it lost its position because many youth have abandoned agriculture and resorted to gambling and the bodaboda business.

Bakumpe said the competition would help revive the sector and propel it to greater heights.

Mbaga, a dairy farmer from Sheema,

Background

Touring the port aboard a luxurious tourists boat, the farmers were told by a guide that in the first half of the 19th century, the port's activities moved from the centre westwards towards the North Sea.

To improve the connection to the North Sea, the Nieuwe Waterweg

Waterweg was designed to be partly dug, then to further deepen the canal bed in line with the natural flow of the water.

However, the last part had to be dug using manual labour as well. Rotterdam from then on had a direct connection between the sea and harbour areas with sufficient depth. The Nieuwe Waterweg has since been deepened several times. It was ready in 1872 and all sorts of industrial activity sprouted on the banks of this canal.

According to figures from the port authority, in 2017 the port handled over 461.2 million tonnes of cargo of different types. The ship is visited by 29,022 sea vessels of all types plus over 105,000 smaller inland vessels. In 2017, the ship handled over 7.4 million containers.

Treated to sumptuous dinner

After the tour of this historical port, the farmers then had a sumptuous dinner at the famous Brazilian restaurant Rodizio, located just next to the five-star Kurnus Hotel near The Hague's North Sea beach. The restaurant among others serves a 'Latin' buffet and nearly all kinds of roast meat.

The farmers enjoyed the food, as they were serenaded with music, played by a live band, with admirable queen dancers. Many of the farmers were seen nodding their heads to the music as they munched one round of *mchomo* after another, some of the farmers then joined the all-lady band on the dance floor.

"This VIP treatment is beyond what I expected when I joined the best farmers competition," Tom Anyii said after the meal.

In the course of their stay in the Netherlands, the farmers will among others