

2017 best farmers off to Netherlands

BY GEOFFREY MUTEGEKI

WINNERS of New Vision's 2017 Best Farmers' Competition will today fly to the Netherlands today on a week-long agro-business tour.

Ten farmers emerged winners of the fourth edition of the Best Farmers Competition held last year. They were on Thursday flagged off at dfcu Bank headquarters in Nakasero, Kampala.

The 2017 competition was sponsored by the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Kampala, dfcu Bank, Vision Group and KLM Airlines.

The farmers, who will travel to the Netherlands include Isaac Malinga, from Kapchorwa; Julius Bigabwa, a mixed farmer from Kabarole; Tom Okello, the proprietor of TAF Assured Mixed Farm from Lira; Justine Omeke Didid from Napak and Timothy Jokene from Gulu district. Others are Patrick Makanga Bakumpe from Masaka, Robert Ociti from Arua, Margaret Mbaga from Sheema, Jacob Noah Bamwise from Jinja and Rachel Amol from Wakiso district.

The agriculture minister, Vincent Ssempiija, who flagged off the farmers, commended Vision Group and the sponsors for their contribution towards the agriculture sector. "We salute everyone supporting agriculture. The sector needs all stakeholders and this farmers' competition contribution cannot be overlooked," Ssempiija said.

He revealed that the Government was considering partnering with winners to make them become change agents in their communities.

"We are organising farmers and doing a little bit of work on extension services to help them. We want to use these best farmers as nucleus of interest for other people around them," Ssempiija said.

The Netherlands ambassador to Uganda, Henk Jan Bakker, said the Best Farmers' Competition had helped change people's mindset about agriculture and had made more people join farming. "We need to form a group of the alumni of the



Isaac Malinga (second-left), the overall winner, speaking on behalf of the best farmers. Left is Vision Group CEO Robert Kabushenga

best farmers to form a force that will transform agriculture in this country. Farming is a business and working together is key," Henk said.

Jimmy Mugerwa, the chairperson at dfcu Bank, said farming can transform the country and is happy the mood in the country is changing, with more people appreciating farming.

"More people, including the media, are appreciating the value of agriculture. At dfcu, we are going to continue educating farmers and providing them with the best services," Mugerwa said.

The Vision Group chief executive officer, Robert Kabushenga, termed the farmers' tours as a great awareness tool for farmers about farming in the Netherlands. He challenged dfcu Bank to communicate more about the products they offer to farmers and

HIGHLIGHTS

■ On top of their trip, the winners will also share sh150m worth of farm inputs.

■ Fifteen self-sponsored dairy farmers from south-western Uganda were also flagged off on the trip.

■ The Netherlands is the largest exporter of agricultural produce in the world, which offers the visiting farmers a chance to learn new ideas.

■ The fifth edition of the Best Farmer's Competition is ongoing up to November 2018.

consider reducing the interest rate on agricultural loans.

"By bringing the interest rate down, you may end up making more money and serving more people," Kabushenga said.

He also called for the registration of all farmers in the country and urged financial institutions to allow farmers repay their loans on seasonal basis (when they harvest).

Kabushenga, who is also a farmer, said he will be travelling to the Netherlands with the best farmers to benchmark the best farm management practices.

"I am going with the farmers on self-sponsorship to learn farm management, the discipline, and other things the Dutch farmers do for good farm production," Kabushenga said.

Victoria Sekitoleko, the lead judge of the farmers' competition,

encouraged the winners to be focused and go to the Netherlands ready to learn. "You do not know much; when you go to the Netherlands, try to learn more and always be sympathetic and hold the hands of those who want to learn from you," Sekitoleko said.

FARMERS SPEAK OUT

Malinga, who represented the farmers, said the trip will be an opportunity for them to get exposed to better farming methods and market.

"Agriculture is my business; I am going on this trip to look for market and ways to improve my farm productivity and profit maximisation," Malinga said.

Bakumpe, one of the best farmers said his focus would be on how to use small pieces of land to produce more.