

Amuru farmers tipped on hybrid rice

Adoptable ideas

By Johnisani Ocakacon

Rice farmers in Nwoya and Amuru districts have been advised to grow hybrid rice to tap into the international market.

The call was made by John S.J Daniel, the chairperson of the Rice Association of Uganda (RAU). He was sensitising the rice farmers at Anaka Town Council in Nwoya recently, under the theme *Preserving and Safeguarding the Domestic Rice Sector in Uganda* to encourage farmers grow quality rice for domestic consumption and export.

Daniel noted: "96% of the rice is consumed in the country, while 4% is imported. The rice association was formed to find market for domestic rice in the region and to improve its quality to suit the world market."

State of rice production
According to RAU, the country is targeting a total production of 600,000 metric tonnes by this year. As such, farmers are being sensitised to adopt best practices in a bid to achieve high yields.

According to the rice association, 96% of the rice consumed in the country is grown in Uganda by around 200,000 farmers. Of these, at least 50,000 are based in northern Uganda, especially the districts of Nwoya and Amuru, plus over 120,000 in eastern Uganda - Butaleja, Bugiri and Tororo districts. All these areas are zoned for rice production.

Selection of seeds
Daniel said farmers need to grow seeds that are resistant to pests and drought. He also said the seeds should be hybrid for farmers to get high yields.

"Many farmers have been encountering challenges of getting good quality seeds. We are here to see that we introduce the growing of hybrid seeds in the region,"



John S.J Daniel speaking to rice farmers from Amuru and Nwoya districts. Photo by Johnisani Ocakacon

Challenges affecting farmers

John S.J Daniel, the chairperson of the Rice Association of Uganda, said small scale farmers still lack money to construct warehouses to store their crops, which end up rotting.

Haji Ahmed Naleba, the director of Lwoba Irrigation Farm in Butaleja district, said one of the challenges many farmers suffer is drought. He advised farmers to use drip irrigation, which he said is affordable. "Pumping water for

rice production is a challenge for farmers, but the Government is working hard to sort out the problems by providing alternative measures of training local farmers on how to use drip irrigation, which is affordable. The Government also wants to provide water pump machines at affordable prices to farmers," he said.

He said the association should help fight fake seeds on the market.

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He said many farmers have been growing seeds like Nerica, an improved variety, but they have not realised potential to increase rice

productivity in the region, as farmers still use local seeds.

How to grow rice

Daniel said when planting hybrid rice, farmers need to

remove all stumps, roots and trees before ploughing. "Farmers need to plough and disc harrow once if the land is sloppy. They can harrow two weeks after ploughing to allow the weeds to die," he said.

He added that farmers need to divide the garden into 50m2 or 100m2 and construct mounds, depending on the slope, to store rain water and to allow good drainage. They also need to use fertilisers.

According to Daniel, when planting rice, the spacing and dibbling should be at least 30x30cm or 20x20cm and the seed rate: 50-60 kg/ha. Drilling at 25-30 cm row spacing and 5 cm within row; seed rate: 75-80 kg/hectare.

He said when broadcasting hybrid seeds, the rate should be 80-100kg/hectare.

Rice in the region

Daniel said when farmers grow hybrid seeds, they will increase the tonnage of rice produced per acre.

Prosper Maposa, the farm manager of Amatheon Agri in Got Apwoyo sub-county, Nwoya, said they mainly upland rice.

"This season, we planted rice on 45,000 hectares," he said. Amatheon is one of the biggest rice farms in Nwoya.

Maposa said from one hectare, they harvest five tonnes of rice and the entire 45,000 hectares in the first season gives approximately 225,000 tonnes, which is consumed within the region, leaving hardly anything for export.

"We are planting a hybrid

District leaders want government to train farmers on how to identify fake rice seeds

variety of upland rice called Nance 3 and 5, which grows well in this region," he said.

Maposa added that the rice being produced in their farm is consumed locally and regionally.

"But what we produce is not enough. The Government needs to support farmers so they can increase production," he said.

Rachael Mbabazi, who is a board member of the rice association, said they were introducing the organisation to local rice farmers in Nwoya and Amuru, where about 50,000 farmers grow the crop.

"We are going to work with the National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO), National Agricultural Advisory Development (NAADS), Operation Wealth Creation and other government programmes to support farmers by providing extension workers to teach farmers good agricultural and

irrigation systems," Mbabazi said.

"We shall fight for rice production in this country to remain profitable for the farmers by protecting their rights," she added.

Mbabazi said the forum would provide hybrid seeds and market to local farmers. She said they would also benefit from trainings in rice production to increase their productivity.

Farmers speak out

The chairperson of Doho Irrigation Scheme Farmers' Co-operative Society Limited, Gesa Kabasa, who is also a rice farmer, said northern Uganda has fertile land, which supports the growth of upland rice.

"Farmers should move from subsistence farming to commercial production so they can be self-reliant," Gesa said.

He said Uganda currently consumes more rice than it exports, therefore, farmers in Acholi need to increase production so the country can export more.

Haji Ahmed Naleba, the director of Lwoba Irrigation Farm in Butaleja district, who also grows the crop, said the biggest problem farmers encounter in rice production is lack of unity among them to tap into government support.

"I urge farmers in Nwoya and Amuru to use this forum to lobby support from the Government," he added.

He said when farmers are in group or association supporting them becomes very easy unlike the individual and call for farmers of Nwoya and Amuru to form groups.

Call for support

The LCS chairperson of Amuru, Michael Lakony, asked the Government to support local farmers by providing farm inputs.

This will help improve on agricultural production in Acholi sub region, which has lagged behind in terms of development.

The Nwoya district agricultural officer, Alfred Kilama, said local farmers need to be trained.

"Farmers do not know how to identify good seeds from fake ones in the market and where to sell their harvest," Kilama said.

Rice a priority crop

Lakony said as a district, they are prioritising growing rice in Nwoya and Amuru.

"The Rice Association of Uganda will help to fight middlemen who always buy rice cheaply from farmers, only to sell at a much higher price," he said.

Lakony said: "This kind of association will save rice farmers in these two districts link up to sell their rice at the same price which will improve the livelihood of people in the two districts."



Uganda has about 200,000 rice farmers. Of these, 50,000 are based in the north