

Rice farmers tipped on fertiliser use

BUTALEJA

By Prossy Nandudu

Combining different types of fertilisers will increase rice production and its nutritional content in rice growing areas in Uganda, researchers have said.

According to researchers, this will reduce malnutrition and enhance food security.

This is one of the innovations that researchers at the Africa Innovations Institute (Afrii) are promoting in the rice-growing areas of Doho in Butaleja and Kibimba in Bugiri district.

The fertilisers to be combined include macro fertilisers; needed by plants in large quantities and micro fertilisers; needed in smaller amounts. The micro fertilisers include zinc, manganese, boron and sulphur, while the macro ones include nitrogen.

Thomas Awiyo, an agronomist with Afrii, said the pilot project is being implemented in the two districts because of constant water supply. Pallisa and Lira will be included in the second phase later this year during the farm trials.

He said the first harvest from Doho was done in December last year and analysis is underway, while harvesting of the first crop in Kibimba is ongoing.

These will later be analysed for yields, grain quality and nutritional content.

"At the end of the experiment, farmers should be in position to take up fertiliser combinations that will give them the desired yields. The fertiliser combinations will also be verified by our scientists," Awiyo added.



FARMERS SPEAK

Hassan Hasere, Doho

We spend a lot of money on fertilisers but get little harvests. However, since Afrii has come in to advise on fertiliser combination, we hope to get better yields.

Sarah Nandago, Kibimba in Bugiri

The project is teaching us a good practice of transplanting rice. I advise other farmers to embrace the new advice.

This is part of the enhancing rice markets in Uganda, through smart micro nutrient fertilisation (ENRICH) project, focusing on increasing yields, grain nutrient and creating market

linkages for rice farmers in Uganda. Photos by Prossy Nandudu

linkages for rice farmers in Uganda. "We are combining the fertilisers in selected farmer fields to see the effect on yields. Japan and Asia, which embraced fertiliser combinations, harvest about eight tonnes of rice per hectare, far too high compared with Uganda's 2.5 tonnes," he said.

The three-year project, worth sh1.468b, is being funded by the Netherlands ministry of foreign affairs, through the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, (NOW-WOTRO).

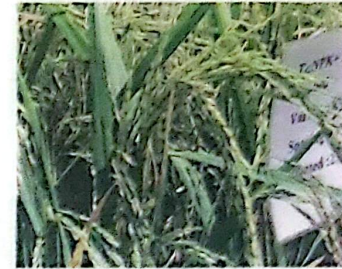
Locally, it is being implemented by the International Fertiliser Development Centre, AFRII, Africa Rice, International Soil Reference Information Centre and Wageningen

University, all from the Netherlands.

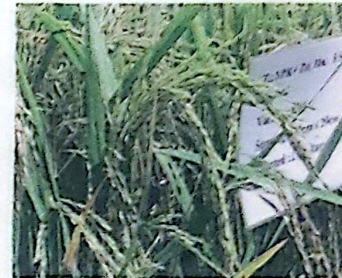
Prof. Otim Nape, the chairperson of Afrii, said the pilot project follows research they conducted to find out the challenges facing rice farmers in eastern Uganda.

The challenges discovered included poor use of fertilisers, lack of information on soil conditions, weather changes such as extreme heat and flooding, as well as pests and diseases, said Nape.

"At Afrii, we aim at creating innovations that will help farmers increase productivity. We do this through collaborations with partners with success stories and introduce those that can be embraced by our farmers," said Nape.



Rice grown using fertilisers



Rice grown without fertilisers

He added that the research findings will also address malnutrition issues in rice growing areas, based on a food systems and nutrition report from the Ministry of Health.

The report indicates that rice-growing areas are the worst hit in terms of malnutrition.

To help farmers better use fertilisers, Nape added that Afrii is currently holding talks with Makerere University, which has innovated mobile soil testing kits, to see if these can be given to farmer leaders, who will be trained in how to use them and also teach others.

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