

Nigeria to save N300bn annually from rice import

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ABUJA, Nigeria - Nigeria will be saving about N300bn it spends annually on importation of rice as local production of the commodity has now reached 15 million metric tonnes, the federal ministry of Agriculture disclosed yesterday. The director of Agriculture at the Kano office of the ministry, Muhammad Adamu, who gave the hint, while inaugurating the Rice Millers Association of Nigeria (RIMAN) in the state, said in Kano alone, 1.2 million metric tonnes of rice was produced in 2016.



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He noted that, with the significant increase in local production and the effort to make the local variety qualitative and more attractive to Nigerians, the country expects to begin exporting rice to West African countries between 2018 and 2019.

Adamu said, presently, 34 states in Nigeria are producing rice, with most of them now producing three times in a year.

He disclosed that investigations carried out by the federal government revealed that rice imported to Nigeria stay up to 10-15 years and are preserved with chemicals that are capable of causing cancer.

In his remarks, the chairman of the Board of Directors of Rice Miller's Association, Peter Dama, said the association was established to promote local milling of rice that is fresh, healthy and nutritious.

Stemming rice smuggling

According to him, the association is willing to collaborate with the Nigeria Customs Service to stem smuggling of expired rice into Nigeria.

Dama added that the association intended to work closely with regulatory agencies and policymakers to ensure standards in local rice milling.

On his part, the customs officer in charge of rice enforcement, Ado Hassan, warned that any customs officer caught conniving with rice smugglers will have themselves to blame.

He said in less than one year, the zonal command of the agency confiscated 800,000 bags of rice in Kano and Jigawa States. Noting that about 9,000 bags of rice are still in stores of the agency, he stated that most of the bags were being given to internally displaced persons after being certified fit for consumption by the National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC).

Stopping fish trade to boost local production

Meanwhile, the federal government has announced that it will stop issuing fish importation quota to importers, saying the venture was no longer sustainable. Minister of State for Agriculture and Rural Development, Senator Heineken Lokpobiri, said this during a meeting with the Ijebu Development Initiative on Poverty Reduction (IDIPR) in Abuja, yesterday.

The minister pointed out that stopping the trade will help boost local production of fish and other aspects of agriculture in the country.

Noting that the current deficit in fish in Nigeria is over two million tonnes, he urged citizens to invest to boost fish production and create jobs in the sector.

Lokpobiri said: "We realised that fish import is no more sustainable and what we did was to encourage those that import it to think of the backward integration by reducing the quota year by year in agreement with the CBN.

"Very soon, we are not going to give quota for fish importation. We want everybody to set up their fish farms, employ our people and create jobs for our people.

"When we came last two years, Nigeria was producing about 700,000 tonnes of fish but this has increased to about 1.2 million tonnes which means that there has been an increment of 400 tonnes. This increase represents more than 50 percent of what we were producing".

Lokpobiri who commended the IDIPR for contributing to fish production in the country advised other states to emulate the community's agricultural initiative. He said the federal government will soon complete and commission the fish feed mill located at Eriwe village farm in Ijebu community of Ogun State.

The minister quoted the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) as saying that Ijebu community has the highest number of fish clusters in the world.

Challenges hindering the agricultural initiative

Earlier, the chairman, Board of Directors of the initiative, Prof. Olanipekun Alausa, listed some challenges hindering the agricultural initiative to include inadequate access to loans and lack of modern agricultural tools for mechanised farming.

Alausa who said the initiative was currently supplying food items to nine local government areas in the state appealed for more support from the federal government to enhance the initiative's performance.

He said the scheme, which was established in 1999 as a non-governmental organisation, was geared towards community development to reduce poverty and improve the livelihood of people, using agriculture and micro-credit among others. The chairman said the scheme was involved in poultry, piggery, bee-keeping and cocoa farming to ensure poverty reduction and contribute to agricultural development in the country.

He said: "We want provision of access roads in the farm villages, access to direct credit and government's grants toward our poverty reduction programme.

The change in the life of the poor is visible as the needs and well-being of women and other disadvantaged groups in our community are being met.

"Hundreds of young graduates now see agriculture as a thriving business and cluster innovation farming platform has been proved beyond doubt that it is capable of making fortune".

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