

Official: One million farmers grow bio-fortified crops in Nigeria

Dr Paul Ilona, the country manager of Harvestplus, an international agriculture organisation, says over one million smallholder farmers grow bio-fortified food crops in Nigeria. Ilona disclosed this in Ibadan on Tuesday during an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN).



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He said that no fewer than six million people consumed more nutritious foods from bio-fortified crops in the country through the efforts of Harvestplus to address malnutrition. "Our on-farm yield increases from bio-fortified crops is estimated at 20% over local varieties, over 8,000 persons are estimated to be employed directly or indirectly by investors in the bio-fortified sector.

"We trained over 200 extension agents now, continuously rolling out training on good agricultural practices and quality processing of bio-fortified products.

"We were able to include bio-fortification into four key policy documents of the Ministries of Agriculture, Health, Budget and National Planning aimed at creating an enabling environment for investors.

"Also, bio-fortification was included in budgets of federal and four state governments; over 20 international and local NGOs are mainstreaming bio-fortification into their livelihood programmes," he said.

Ilona said that the inclusion of bio-fortified foods into the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) of the government was one of its latest achievements.

Naturally produced nutrients

According to him, Harvestplus developed and released six varieties of vitamin A cassava in partnership with the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and the National Root Crop Research Institute in Umudike.

Ilona said that Harvestplus it also developed and released eight varieties of vitamin A maize in partnership with IITA and the Institute for Agricultural Research, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Kaduna State.

The country manager said that his organisation released two varieties of orange sweet potato, rich in vitamin A, in partnership with the International Potato Centre (CIP). He said that Harvestplus developed over 25 innovative vitamin A cassava and maize-based food products, 10 of which were now fully commercialised.

"Our current advocacy efforts are led by 15 advocates in the academia, 17 traditional rulers, 21 women leaders, 25 policy makers and 26 celebrities," he said.

Ilona described bio-fortification as a natural process different from food fortification. "Their concepts are similar, but their applications differ. In food fortification, you introduce new essential nutrients into foods, but in bio-fortification, the plant produces its nutrient directly and naturally," he said.

NAN reports that Harvestplus improves nutrition and public health by developing and promoting bio-fortified food crops that are rich in vitamins and minerals. It provides global leadership on bio-fortification evidence and technology. The staple crops are naturally bio-fortified and not genetically modified. (NAN)

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