The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Country Representative in Rwanda, Mr. AttaherMaiga,said that about 75 per cent of smallholder Rwandan farmers still battle challenges related to access to inputs, modern technologies finance as well as markets.

“In Rwanda, nearly 75% of the population is engaged in smallholder farming. With an average areas of about 0.33 ha only, according to IFAD data, these producers face enormous challenges to have access to inputs, modern technologies, finance and markets,” said Maiga.

The four-day training whose theme was “contract farming” ended today in the Rwandan capital, Kigali with a call on governments and private sector to direct more resources into contract farming through putting in place legal and operational aspects.

Maiga noted that Rwanda needs to leverage resources to meet increasing demand for quality, diversity as well ensuring unfailing supply of agricultural produce. Rwandans living in urban centres have been on the riseduring the past decade, constituting 47% with changing tests in dietary habit and dwindling demand in grains,FAO diplomat said.

He hence said more attention to the changing consumer needs that continue to challenge agricultural and food systems was urgent.

“Because of these social and demographic trends, dietary habits are changing and so is the demand for intangible food attributes such as the ones associated with quality, diversity and supply regularity. Demand for non-grains and animal proteins is raising and so is demand for processed foods and for food –away from home. Demand for grains, instead, is declining,” Maiga said.

FAO reiterated a call on the governments and stakeholders to have keen interest in the changing food and agricultural coordination systems to open market systems that guarantee smooth operations between players in food value chains and farmers particularly the smallholder farmers.

Maiga said this can be achieved through contract farming.

“Through these contracting schemes, buyers of farm products can ensure that they will have a regular supply of produce that meet quality requirements and are timely

delivered. Farmers, on the other hand, can benefit from having a guaranteed market for their products and, in many cases, gain access to technology, inputs and financing” he said.

Participants that came from all the 30 districts of Rwanda shared their experiences, knowledge and challenges encountered in contract farming. They echoed renewed commitment to tackle challenges and use the technical knowledge and skills got during the training.

**By George Kalisa**