

Representatives of farmer organisations from the Southern Province met on Thursday in Muhanga town under the Farm to Market Alliance (FtMA) calling on buyers to improve working relations including timely payments and respect contractual obligations.

During the meeting organised by Rwanda Development Organization (RDO) and Rwanda Rural Rehabilitation Initiative (RWARRI) with support from the World Food Programme (WFP), farmers said that one of the major difficulties they face was delayed payments which inconvenience their work.

The farmers say that some buyers collect their produce but take longer than the agreed period to pay them while others blamed some buyers for agreeing to collect the produce but bring few trucks for transportation which leads to losses.



Big buyers present at the meeting including Africa Improved Foods (AIF), Rwanda Grains and Cereals Corporation (RGCC) and EAX assured farmers of improved services and each gave a timeline as regard to payment processes as well as procedures.

The meeting which was organised to review the achievements of the past seasons, share lessons learnt and challenges, was also intended to make more linkages for the early market readiness of season 2022A.

As they norm on this platform, buyers present contracts to farmers who will have time to go through them and if agreed sign to commit to sell their produce to these buyers.

Similar meetings have been held starting with one in Kayonza on November, 30 2021 for farmers from the Eastern Province, in Rulindo on December, 01 2021 for farmers from the Northern Province and for Western Province in Karongi on December, 10 2021.

Pascal Habumugisha from WFP office in Kigali said that since the establishment of FtMA in Rwanda in 2016 it has made tremendous progress to link farmers to the market. The platform started with only 27 cooperatives and one buyer – RGCC, today there are 287 cooperatives supported under the initiative.

He explained that of the 14,000 MT maize production pledged by farmer

organisations 12,000 MT were contracted. Cooperatives totalling to 213 signed forward delivery contracts and 13,700 MT delivered to FtMA buyers representing 114% of the contracted volume with Rwf 3.4 billion in total sales.

The platform which was created to support smallholder farmers through their organisations has also led to increased production as well as improved quality produce.



Farmers are trained on how to improve quality starting from the preparation of their farms, good agriculture practices, post-harvest handling and storage, quality control and food safety trainings to ensure they have high quantity and quality produce in each season, and be able to bring surpluses on market.

To increase the quality, FtMA has trained 33,638 farmers (48% women) focusing on Post-harvest handling and storage.

To avoid any uncertainties, farmer organisations are also encouraged to acquire insurance coverage and FtMA links farmers to financial institutions including those that seek access to finance.



Diana Mugwaneza, the Programs Officer at RDO urged farmers to buy insurance coverage so that they do not run into unforeseen losses. She said that insurance will guarantee continuity in their activities and have a sustainable agriculture.

Mugwaneza further called on every cooperative to register for EBM (electronic billing machine) as the new law requires so that everyone is tax compliant and contribute to the development of the country. She added that serious buyers will not buy from cooperatives that don't provide tax invoices.

Cooperatives that require support on how to use EBM were promised advocacy to engage the concerned institutions like Rwanda Revenue Authority to help them.

Theresa Mukashyaka, president of Tuzamurane Cyeza Cooperative in Nyarunyinya, Muhanga District applauded FtMA and RDO for supporting her cooperative to access markets for their produce as well as trainings and advisory services.

Mukashyaka gave a testimonial that through the advice of RDO they acquired insurance coverage and when disaster struck they were able to recover every cent they had invested through insurance premium.

During the meeting financial institutions present like Urwego and Bank of Kigali explained about products that they offer to farmers and urged farmers to come to them in case they needed any financial services.



Awarding best performing cooperatives

The one-day interactive meeting ended with the recognition of best performing cooperatives in every district awarding them. The award prizes funded by World Food Program (WFP) included electric weighing machines, moisture content checking machines and tarpaulins to help farmers improve harvests.

FtMA is the only initiative in the maize sector to have connected farmers through forward delivery contracts to the largest commodity buyers in the country. The initiative is making present financial solutions scalable through introducing third party guarantors and training farmer organisations on governance and financial practices. The commitment of buyers is further strengthened through the promotion of increased adoption of advanced post- harvest handling and storage technologies amongst farming communities.