For Rwandan farmers, a good harvest is only the beginning. The bigger challenge is getting that harvest to market in the right condition, meeting the required quality standards and securing a price that rewards their effort.

This is the challenge the East Africa Exchange (EAX) has sought to address since its establishment in 2013. Conceived as a regional commodities marketplace, EAX was created to tackle some of the structural weaknesses that have long constrained agricultural trade in East Africa, including fragmented markets, post-harvest losses, inconsistent quality, limited access to finance, price volatility, and inadequate storage and logistics.

EAX Chief Executive Officer Clement Kayitakire

The idea emerged from discussions among East African leaders at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2012, with an ambition to create a common marketplace through which commodities could move more efficiently within the region, across Africa and eventually into global markets. Rwanda moved early to implement the concept, and Kigali became the Exchange's headquarters.

But EAX soon encountered a fundamental reality: a commodities exchange cannot succeed simply by providing a platform where buyers and sellers meet.

As EAX Chief Executive Officer Clement Kayitakire explains, the market also needs reliable supplies, trusted quality, adequate storage, transparent pricing and efficient systems for moving both commodities and money.

That realization pushed EAX beyond the traditional role of a trading platform and deeper into the agricultural value chain—working to build the systems that can connect farmers and producers to more organised, transparent and efficient markets.

Building the Market from the Farm

EAX has invested in certified warehouses, silos, mechanical dryers and other post-harvest infrastructure while using field extension services to train farmers and cooperatives on handling, storage, quality improvement and structured trading. The

objective is to connect production with market requirements from the outset.

The need is particularly clear in the case of post- harvest losses. In the early years of EAX's operations, maize production was losing up to 30 percent after harvest. Such losses represented more than wasted grain. They meant lost income for farmers, reduced food entering the supply chain and economic value disappearing before produce reached consumers.

EAX's response has been to make quality a shared responsibility across the commodity chain.

Farmers are trained in appropriate drying and storage practices, including the use of tarpaulins and shelters, as well as careful shelling, cleaning and moisture management. Field officers test commodities for parameters such as moisture and aflatoxin levels and help determine their grade before the produce moves further into the market.

As farmers have become more familiar with market requirements, the number of trucks rejected at EAX facilities for poor quality has fallen significantly.

For Mr. Kayitakire, this process is about helping farmers understand that quality is not simply an additional burden, but part of creating a commodity that the market is prepared to reward.

Quality Beyond the Farm

Quality assurance continues once commodities arrive at EAX facilities.

According to Herman Kazora, Head of Quality Assurance at EAX, their approach is to control quality throughout the commodity chain rather than wait until a commodity is ready for sale.



"When commodities are received into EAX facilities, our quality team conducts inspection and sampling," Kazora explains. The process assesses moisture content, foreign matter, damaged grains, infestation and other relevant quality requirements. Commodities that meet specifications are accepted and recorded, while those that do not are assessed for appropriate corrective action.

That corrective action can include drying, cleaning, sorting, re-bagging or other forms of conditioning. Where a quality problem cannot be corrected or presents a food-safety risk, the affected commodity is isolated and handled according to established procedures.

Storage is equally important because quality can deteriorate even after a commodity has been accepted.

Therefore, EAX monitors stocks for moisture changes, infestation and other forms of deterioration, supported by proper stacking, aeration, hygiene, sanitation, pest control and fumigation. Quality checks continue during processing at milling plants to ensure both raw materials and finished products maintain the required standards.

Technology supports these processes through moisture meters, weighing systems and other testing equipment. But Kazora stresses that technology alone is insufficient. It must work alongside trained personnel, established procedures, regular inspections and effective warehouse management.

His mandate is straightforward: “receive the right quality, preserve that quality while the commodity is in our custody, and ensure that the commodity leaving our facilities
still meets the required standards.”

This system is also designed to build trust. Buyers want confidence that the commodities they purchase meet agreed specifications, while sellers need a transparent basis for determining the quality and grade of their produce.

When disagreements arise over rejected commodities or deductions, EAX relies on test results, clear explanations and, where necessary, re-testing. Maintaining records of interventions also provides traceability and helps identify the causes of quality problems rather than simply treating their symptoms.

Kazora notes that credibility is ultimately measured by the confidence of buyers who continue to do business through the Exchange because they know quality is taken seriously and accountability extends from receipt to final delivery.

Information that Changes the Bargaining Position

Quality is only one part of an efficient market. Information is another.

EAX CEO identifies the information gap as one of the less visible challenges facing farmers. A farmer may know how much it costs to produce but have limited knowledge
of prevailing market prices. This can create pressure to sell quickly, sometimes at unfavorable prices.

EAX’s electronic trading platform provides price information and market analytics while connecting buyers and sellers across borders. Greater access to information can strengthen farmers’ negotiating position and give buyers greater confidence in the commodities available to them.

The digital platform is complemented by electronic warehouse systems and electronic warehouse receipts. These allow commodities stored in certified facilities to be traded without physically moving the goods every time ownership changes.

The warehouse receipt can also serve as a basis for accessing financing from partner financial institutions, helping turn stored commodities into potential working capital.
This addresses another pressure that can force farmers to sell immediately after harvest: the need for cash.

If properly stored grain can support access to credit, farmers have greater scope to wait for more favorable market conditions rather than selling simply because they need immediate liquidity.

Aiming High: Towards International Markets and the Exchange’s Broad Ambitins

The combination of better quality, storage, market information and structured trading is increasingly connecting Rwanda to regional commodity flows.

EAX’s commodity portfolio now includes maize, dry beans, sorghum, paddy rice, soybeans and cooking oil, with commodities supplying local milling factories as well as government and strategic food-supply programmes.

When domestic production generates surpluses, commodities can move into regional markets. Beans, for example, are exported to the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania, while some commodities moving through Tanzania ultimately

reach Middle East markets. Rwanda also imports commodities when domestic production is insufficient to meet national demand, particularly during off-season periods.

This two-way movement is characteristic of a functioning regional commodity system: selling when supplies are abundant and sourcing when they are scarce.

For Rwanda, the significance goes beyond individual transactions. A more organized commodity market can strengthen food-security systems, improve supply-chain efficiency and create stronger connections between farmers, traders, processors, financial institutions and regional buyers.

A Broader Ambition

The agricultural exchange may, however, be only the beginning of EAX's longer-term ambition.

The Exchange is undergoing a restructuring process aimed at expanding its mandate toward a regional, continental and eventually global multi- commodity platform. The broader vision includes trading in minerals and metals such as gold, tin and tantalum; soft commodities including tea, coffee and edible oils; energy products; and, over time, derivatives and more advanced risk-management instruments.

The logic is that the same principles used to organize agricultural commodities; standardization, transparent pricing, reliable infrastructure, quality assurance, digital trading and trusted settlement—can be applied to other strategic commodities.
For Africa, the potential is significant. The continent possesses enormous agricultural and mineral resources, yet many commodity markets remain fragmented and value chains underdeveloped. A transparent and technologically enabled marketplace could help connect production with capital, buyers and global demand.

The road ahead remains demanding. Storage and drying capacity must expand, logistics must become more efficient, farmer participation must deepen and regional standards must become more harmonized. A broader multi-commodity market will also require investment, sophisticated regulation and sufficient market liquidity.

But the direction is increasingly clear. EAX is seeking to build more than a place where commodities are bought and sold. It is building a system in which agricultural products can be stored better, graded more transparently, financed more effectively, priced with better information and traded more efficiently.

For farmers, that can mean stronger market access and greater opportunity to capture
value. For buyers, greater certainty. For governments, better food-supply and market information. And for the region, another building block for economic integration.

The journey begins at the farm. But with the right infrastructure, information and quality systems, the value of what is produced there can travel much farther.

From harvest to market and increasingly from Rwanda to the region and beyond.

