Rwanda has expanded its agricultural insurance program to include greenhouse farming, a move officials say will protect farmers from growing climate-related risk crops while supporting the country’s push to modernize agriculture.

The new greenhouse crop insurance scheme was launched Thursday in Kigali by the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board, known as RAB, under the government-backed National Agriculture Insurance Scheme (NAIS), locally known as “Tekana Urishingiwe Muhinzi Mworozi” program.

More than 120 greenhouse farmers and agriculture stakeholders attended the launch.

The insurance program comes as greenhouse farming gains popularity in Rwanda because of its ability to produce high yields on relatively small plots of land. Farmers use the structures to grow crops such as tomatoes, cucumbers and bell peppers while reducing exposure to pests and erratic weather.

But greenhouse farming also requires heavy investment in infrastructure, irrigation system and specialized equipment, making farmers vulnerable to major financial losses when storms or floods strike.

Under the new arrangement, farmers will continue paying 60% of insurance premiums while the government subsidizes the remaining 40%, officials said.

Joseph Museruka, project manager of the National Agriculture Insurance Scheme (NAIS)

According to Joseph Museruka, NAIS project manager, greenhouse farmers had pushed for insurance coverage for years because of the high costs involved in the business.

“Some farmers invest between 30 million and 40 million Rwandan francs in greenhouse operations,” he said. “With the increasing frequency of strong winds and floods, insurance has become essential.”

Rwanda introduced subsidized agricultural insurance in 2019 to protect farmers and livestock keepers from losses linked to natural disasters and disease outbreaks. The program initially covered crops including rice, maize, potatoes, cassava and soybeans, as well as livestock such as poultry, fish and pigs.

Officials say the expansion to greenhouse farming aligns with Rwanda’s agricultural transformation strategy for 2024-2029, which seeks to increase export-oriented production and improve productivity through modern farming techniques.

Farmers welcomed the move, saying climate-related damage has caused repeated losses in recent years.

Cécile Nyiransabimana, a greenhouse farmer from Nyanza District

Cécile Nyiransabimana, a greenhouse farmer from Nyanza District, said strong winds once ripped the plastic covering off her greenhouse shortly before harvest, destroying an entire crop of bell peppers.

“It caused serious losses because the crop was almost ready for market,” she said.

In Rwamagana, the Rwanda Greenhouse farmers’ Cooperative said several of its greenhouses had previously been destroyed by storms, discouraging some growers from continuing with the business.

A standard greenhouse measuring 8 meters by 30 meters costs about 11 million Rwandan francs ($7,800), while larger models can cost twice as much.

The insurance package will allow farmers to cover not only crops but also greenhouse structures, irrigation equipment and transportation systems, according to officials.

Under the NAIS program, the Government of Rwanda subsidises 40 percent of the total agricultural insurance premium, enabling farmers to secure insurance coverage with significantly reduced financial burden.

Farmers enrolled in the program are expected to receive compensation within 30 days of reporting losses to participating insurers, including BK Insurance, Radiant, Sonarwa and Old Mutual.

Since the launch of the national agricultural insurance program in 2019, more than 200,000 farmers and livestock keepers have received subsidized coverage annually, according to government figures. Authorities say insurers have paid out more than 9.3 billion Rwandan francs in compensation over that period.