As Rwanda gears up to host the annual African Food Systems Forum (AFSF 2024), the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MINAGRI) launched the ‘Five Fruit Trees per Household’ initiative on Thursday, August 9, 2024. This program aims to combat malnutrition while enhancing environmental sustainability across the country.

The launch event, attended by key stakeholders including the Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, Dr. Ildephonse Musafiri, representatives from the AFS network, AGRA, and the One Acre Fund, marks a significant step in Rwanda’s commitment to food security and environmental stewardship.

Dr. Musafiri highlighted Rwanda’s readiness to host AFSF 2024, where heads of state, ministers, business leaders, development partners, farmers, youth, women, and other stakeholders will collaborate to advance the continent’s food systems.

“The Africa Food Systems Forum 2024 will be a crucial platform for diverse stakeholders, including world leaders, investors, academia, farmers’ organizations, and the private sector, to showcase innovations, technologies, and best practices. Together, we aim to accelerate food systems transformation in Africa and beyond, with youth and women leading the charge,” Dr. Musafiri stated.

African countries are working towards building productive, nutritious, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable food systems, essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. However, despite progress, significant challenges remain, particularly in addressing malnutrition among Rwandans.

Malnutrition, especially among young children, continues to be a pressing issue. Although Rwanda has made steady progress in reducing undernutrition in children under five since 2000, much work remains.

The 2019-2020 Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey (RDHS) revealed that 16% of Rwandan children aged 6-59 months suffer from vitamin B12 deficiency, while 40% are at risk of vitamin B12 deficiency or insufficiency. The situation is similarly concerning for women, with 24% of non-pregnant women suffering from vitamin B12 deficiency, and 50% at risk of deficiency or insufficiency. Among pregnant women, 44% suffer from vitamin B12 deficiency, and a staggering 72% are at risk.

In response, MINAGRI and its partners have launched the ‘Five Fruit Trees per Household’ initiative, a program aimed at improving nutrition, boosting household incomes, and promoting environmental sustainability.

Dr. Alexandre Rutikanga, Chief Technical Advisor at MINAGRI, emphasized the program's multifaceted benefits. "This initiative addresses nutritional needs by providing fruits rich in essential vitamins and minerals, crucial for the health of children and pregnant women," he explained.

Dr. Rutikanga also highlighted the economic benefits, noting that households can generate income by selling surplus fruits, thereby increasing savings and creating jobs through nurseries, orchards, and fruit processing. From an environmental perspective, he pointed out, "Planting fruit trees improves soil fertility, prevents soil erosion, enhances ecosystems, improves air quality, combats climate change, and promotes sustainable land management."

The 'Five Fruit Trees per Household' initiative will initially be rolled out in the districts of Rutsiro, Ngororero, Nyamasheke, Gicumbi, Ngoma, Kayonza, Kirehe, Nyaruguru, Nyamagabe, Rubavu, and Kigali City, with a projected cost of over 18 billion Rwandan francs.

Commenting on the upcoming AFSF 2024, Amath Pathé Sene, Managing Director of AFS, emphasized the importance of the Africa Agribusiness Dealroom, a pioneering matchmaking platform within the AFS summit. "Now in its sixth year, the Dealroom has become a pivotal platform, facilitating connections and fostering growth. Over 1,000 companies have benefited from investor matchmaking, and 16 governments have engaged in fruitful investor interactions, demonstrating the transformative power of strategic collaboration in the agribusiness sector," Sene noted.

The Africa Food Systems Forum (AFS Forum) is the world's premier forum for African agriculture and food systems. It brings together stakeholders to take practical action and share lessons that will drive the future of African food systems forward.