

Rwanda and the United Kingdom are in talks to scale up environmentally friendly cooling systems to reduce post-harvest losses and protect the ozone layer, officials said Tuesday.

The discussions, launched March 24, aim to mobilize investment in modern, climate-friendly cold chain technologies and make them more accessible to farmers, according to Rwanda's Ministry of Environment.

Rwanda currently loses about 13.8% of its agricultural output due to limited storage, drying and cooling infrastructure, data from the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources shows. The government is targeting a reduction of those losses to below 5% by 2029.

Losses vary by crop, with onions accounting for 15.4%, chili peppers 17.2%, rice 12.4% and maize 13.8%. Fruits and vegetables are particularly vulnerable due to the lack of adequate cold storage facilities.

Environment Minister Dr. Bernadette Arakwiye said the partnership with the UK is expected to deliver sustainable solutions that address both food loss and environmental concerns, noting that some cooling technologies release gases that damage the ozone layer.

"We are exploring opportunities and financing mechanisms to expand efficient cooling systems closer to production areas," she said.

Through the partnership, Rwanda has established the Africa Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Cooling and Cold Chain (ACES), which promotes technologies that do not emit hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), potent greenhouse gases linked to ozone depletion.

The center also tests and certifies cooling equipment to ensure compliance with environmental standards as demand for cooling rises alongside increasing temperatures.

Gwilym Jones, the UK government's climate adviser for East Africa, said the talks are part of broader efforts to unlock sustainable investment and strengthen cooperation in key sectors, including agriculture.

"We are building a strong partnership to invest in solutions that address critical challenges in a sustainable way," he said.

ACES Chief Executive Officer Toby Peters said up to 30% of Africa's agricultural produce is lost after harvest due to inadequate storage, resulting in financial losses, reduced food security and wasted farm investment.

He called for urgent and scalable solutions to reduce losses and build resilience across the food system.