

The Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI) has stated that the delayed rains this season were not unexpected, which is attributed to climate change, a long-standing issue in Rwanda for over 30 years. Despite the delay, the government has implemented measures to protect agriculture from such disruptions.

Dr. Mark Cyubahiro Bagabe, the Minister of Agriculture, shared this information during a press conference on Thursday, November 28, 2024. He explained that although the rains came late, it was not surprising. Climate change has been a recognized challenge for decades. He added that Rwanda has worked hard to ensure that agriculture continues, even in the face of changing weather patterns.

“The delayed rains did catch us off guard, but climate change has been an issue for over 30 years,” said Dr Bagabe. “However, measures have been taken to help us cope with the impact of these changes.”

MINAGRI also highlighted concerns about a potential decline in crop yields. Dr. Bagabe noted that, based on current conditions, the harvest might not be as good as expected. “We are already seeing signs that the harvest could face significant challenges,” he explained.

In areas like Nyagatare and Gatsibo in the Eastern Province, crops planted in September—such as maize and beans—have not grown as expected by November. MINAGRI has been proactive by providing farmers with drought-resistant crops, like sweet potatoes, which are reportedly doing well despite the challenges.

Dr Bagabe emphasized that the government was not surprised by the delayed rains. “Rwanda has focused a lot on using our natural water resources to mitigate these challenges,” he said. Since 2001, the government has been improving wetland areas for irrigation. More than 76,000 hectares are now irrigated, helping farmers in regions like Kagitumba, Mpanga, Gabiro, Nasho, and Gako.

Farmers in these areas, particularly those growing maize, are using irrigation techniques to improve crop production. For example, over 1,000 hectares of maize are grown in Gako, Bugesera District, and in Gabiro, farmers are cultivating up to 400 hectares of maize.

These irrigation systems are seen as crucial to preventing food shortages and famine risks. MINAGRI believes that by improving irrigation, farmers can grow crops

that provide not only food but also income. Dr. Bagabe added, “If farmers invest in water and fertilizers, they can earn money because our policy is aimed at ensuring sufficient production.”

MINAGRI also reports that Rwanda is now self-sufficient in seeds, with no need to import maize seeds from outside the country. The ministry continues to focus on helping farmers grow crops that are resistant to drought, pests, and disease. Research by the Rwanda Agricultural Board (RAB) is ongoing to find even better seed varieties.

While the delayed rains have created challenges, Rwanda’s agricultural strategy, focused on irrigation and sustainable farming practices, aims to ensure the country remains resilient in the face of climate change.