Rwanda’s silkworm farming and silk production industry has generated more than 779 billion Rwandan francs (about $535 million) in foreign exchange since its inception, the National Agricultural Export Development Board said.

The growth in exports has been driven by high-quality silk products that meet international standards, NAEB said.

Silkworms, small white insects similar in size to corn kernels, feed on mulberry plants. The worms spin cocoons that are harvested and processed into silk, a material widely used in global textile markets.

The sector was launched through the PDCRE project (2003–2011) under the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources. It continued under the PRICE project (2012–2021), managed by NAEB.

NAEB was later tasked with overseeing and developing the industry to make it self-sustaining and profitable for both the country and local producers.

In 2016, NAEB attracted private investment from HE Works Rwanda Ltd. The company stopped operations in 2021, and NAEB assumed full responsibility for managing the sector.

NAEB Director General Claude Bizimana told lawmakers on Thursday that the industry remains productive despite the absence of a private investor, and officials are seeking a long-term partner to help scale operations.

“When we process silk, we do it in two ways. The machines we use produce the silk. We need an investor with that expertise, but annual output is 125 billion francs. That money is also used to develop these activities,” Bizimana said.

The sector currently employs more than 256 people monthly. There are 155 mulberry farmers and silkworm breeders involved, 46.1% of whom are women and girls.

Silkworm farming can provide steady monthly income, with farmers able to harvest and sell products within about 30 days. A kilogram of cocoons sells for at least 4,000 francs.

NAEB provides technical support through experts in silkworm breeding and mulberry farming. The agency also oversees the supply of silkworm eggs, market

development, and the operations of six Cocoon Production Centers and the Kigali Silk Factory Ltd.

To support farmers, NAEB buys cocoons at 4,000 francs per kilogram, up from 2,800 francs under the previous private investor. The price is reviewed annually based on international market conditions.

NAEB projects that the sector will earn more than 298 million francs in the 2025-2026 fiscal year, strengthening its role in export revenue.

In the long term, NAEB is working with stakeholders to attract a qualified investor with expertise to develop the sector and expand production at Kigali Silk Factory Ltd.

Several investors have already shown interest, and discussions are at an advanced stage.

The goal is to establish a stable partnership between investors and farmers to ensure sustainable growth and continued contributions to Rwanda’s economic development.