The FCI Investment forum discussions, on meeting the growing demand of Cassava and Sweet Potatoes

The Cassava and Sweet potato Investment forum organized by Farm Concern International-(FCI) in early 2014, had participants discuss opportunities to meet the growing demand for cassava and sweet potato products that is estimated at USD 48 Million (KES 4,762,800,000) annually. The Investment forum was aimed at attracting private sector investment in the processing and commercialization of Cassava and Sweet potato crop, as a key source of starch for human, animal and industrial use.

The low productivity of Cassava is a result of limited market opportunities due to low utilization of mechanization and production or processing tools. Cassava has enormous potential to improve food security and livelihoods of people in Africa - it is an industrial crop in emerging countries like Brazil, Indonesia and Thailand.

Sweet potatoes are among the world’s most versatile and under-exploited food crops. They are cultivated in over 100 developing countries mainly by smallholder households and currently rank as the fifth most important food crop on a fresh-weight basis in most of these countries after rice, wheat, maize and cassava (FAOSTAT, 1998).

Lack of access to appropriate mechanization to support production and processing of cassava and sweet potatoes is hindering development of cassava market in Africa even though the continent is the highest producer of the crop in the world. This technological gap has left farmers with no option but to produce cassava on a low scale mainly for subsistence and local markets – with 93 % consumed as food – compared to Latin America and Asia where less than half is utilized for food consumption. This situation is under-utilizing the benefits that cassava and sweet potatoes offer the continent both as a source of food and industrial raw material.

In light of this information, FCI with support from Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa - (AGRA) following the implementation of Expanded Commercial Village Processing Project-(ECVPP) programme in Kenya and Tanzania that focuses on Cassava and Sweet potatoes, organized the Cassava and Sweet potatoes Investment Symposium dubbed “Unleashing Business Opportunities in Cassava and Sweet potatoes” on 5th February, 2014 at FCI Africa Regional office. This was attended by local, regional and international

Objectives of the Investment symposium

- Unleashing/sharing processing opportunities for cassava and sweet potatoes for industrial use.
- Establish strategic business partnerships with various actors in cassava and sweet potato sector.
- Facilitate establishment of cassava and sweet potato business networking platforms.
- Exhibit various agribusiness innovations and technologies for cassava and sweet potatoes.
private sectors, farmer associations, donor organizations, research institutions, governments and development organizations for strategic partnerships in unleashing business opportunities in Cassava and Sweet potatoes value chains.

Key note speakers during the Investment Symposium included AGRA’s President Jane Karuku who emphasized on the need for adoption of various innovative technologies in enhancing commercialization of the two crops for improved food security and increased income. Other speakers were Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization (KALRO) Assistant Director, Dr. Joseph Ochieng and Kilifi County Minister for Agriculture & Fisheries, Hon. Mwalimu Menza among others.

The Cassava and Sweet potatoes Investment Symposium highlighted that small holder farmers are the drivers of the country’s agricultural systems. However, small holder farmers lacked sustainable business models to support and upgrade their systems. Investment opportunities would also ensure crop continuity which would go a long way towards feeding thousands of Kenyans and other Africans living in dry areas and experiencing drought.