

Could East Africa be the new frontier for food and grain production?

Chris Kaijuka, chairman of The Grain Council of Uganda (TGPU), featured speaker at the upcoming Agribusiness Congress East Africa in Namulonge in November said: "My vision for the agri-sector is a national grain sector that supplies the region and is the preferred source of high-quality grain. There are opportunities in agriculture with our two seasons (bimodal) and a fast-growing population - the highest in the world at 3% per annum."



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The TGPU is the official host partner of this leading regional farming event which returns to Uganda from 29-30 November as a fully-fledged conference and outdoor exhibition with its move to the National Crops Resources Research Institute (NaCRRI) in Namulonge. Apart from the high-level conference with high-level expert speakers, Agribusiness Congress East Africa will this year also feature more than 45 exhibitors, free training workshops and agronomy consultations, roundtable discussions as well as live demonstrations and crop trials.

According to Kaijuka, the TGPU is "currently pursuing affordable financing for infrastructure development and working capital for members. We look forward to the launch of the electronic trading on the Uganda National Commodity Exchange where we are shareholders."

He adds: "For us to truly grasp the opportunity for East Africa, and Uganda in particular, which has evolved into the new frontier for food and grain production and the continent's food basket, we need to come together and take action to move the industry forward. We urge all industry players with a stake in agriculture to take advantage of this golden opportunity to meet with suppliers, buyers and technocrats and contribute to the development debate."

Challenges facing East African agriculture

Tomson Okot, senior programme director at Farm Concern International - an Africa-wide agri-market development agency specialised in value chain analysis, profitable smallholder commercialisation and market access - will be part of a panel discussion at the event on *Identifying East Africa's investment trends and outlooks for 2018*.

With regards to the main challenges facing the agri-sector in East Africa, Okot says: “With an enormous potential of fertile soils and favourable climate, East Africa has a comparative advantage to produce several agricultural products, process and export as a food basket of the EAC-COMESA region. However, despite its potential, intra-East African Community trade is about \$5.63bn only (representing only 10% share of intra-EAC trade to the total trade). East African exports of goods and services to the COMESA region and other countries within the East African Community (EAC) is thus still low.”

He continues: “Limited market-led incentives, low commercialisation and subsistence agriculture in East Africa is a barrier to trade. Access to competitive markets remains one of the major challenges facing smallholder farmers in East Africa. Specifically, smallholder farmers are constrained by the low level of commercialisation, multiple layers of predatory market players that reduce gross margins and limited access to market information.”

[Full interviews with Kaijuka, Okot and more expert speakers and partners.](#)

Conference and expo:

More than a thousand agri-professionals are expected to attend Agribusiness Congress East Africa conference and expo from 29-30 November – entrance to the expo is free.

Venue: National Crops Resources Research Institute (NaCRRI), Gayaza Road Namulonge, Kampala, Uganda

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