

02/12/2013 - 12:07hs

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Pinesso Group to triple cultivated area in Sudan

The Brazilian agricultural company cultivated 10,500 hectares in the Arab country in 2013, but plans to reach 30,000 hectares in 2014. The target is to invest in maize, sorghum and beans, in great local demand.

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São Paulo – Pinesso Group plans to triple crops in Sudan, the Arab country in North Africa, where it has been operating since 2010. This year, the Brazilian company planted 10,500 hectares of cotton, maize, sorghum, beans and sunflower, but plans to reach 30,000 next year, according to the group president Gilson Pinesso. The businessman, enthusiastic about taking agriculture to Africa, should travel to Sudan this week to work on the plan for the next crop.

The company aimed to reach 20,000 hectares in 2013, but delays in rains in the country made it change its plans. Precipitation, which normally starts in Sudan in May, this year only came in July, stopping at the same time as usual, in early October. “We had a serious problem with lack of rain,” said Gilson, adding that rain levels were atypical.

However, the Brazilian businessman did not lose faith in the potential of Sudan for agriculture. In 2013, 5,500 hectares were cultivated in cotton, 2,000 hectares in maize, 2,000 hectares in sorghum, 500 hectares in beans and 500 hectares in sunflower. Gilson’s plans are to maintain the extension of cotton and increase the maize, sorghum and bean crops.

While cotton lint prices are expected to drop in coming years, and Pinesso Group exports from Sudan to China, Indonesia, Turkey and Egypt, the other three products find a strong internal market. Maize is used for feed production for chickens and as raw material for maize oil, beans are greatly consumed in the country and sorghum is used in everyday feeding, to make products like bread and a kind of polenta.

Gilson recalls that Sudan is a great producer of sorghum, but that maize has a better protein level and is therefore in great demand. “If we had more maize, we could supply the local market better,” said the businessman. While the tonne of maize is sold for US\$ 90 in Mato Grosso, in Sudan it currently costs US\$ 350.

What creates this scenery in the country, of high demand and high food prices, is a joint set of factors, among them the low productivity in Sudan and the population’s great consumption. Added to that, according to Gilson, Sudan faces problems with exchange flows, as with the division of the country, it lost a significant share of oil export revenues. With this, there has been a significant drop in the inflow of dollars.

“And there is also this problem with the North American embargo that affects mostly the poor population,” said the businessman. The US embargo makes it difficult, mainly, to obtain financing alongside international banks, for areas like foreign trade and investment. “It is the population that suffers,” said Gilson.

Despite climate problems, Pinesso Group is pleased with the performance of crops in Sudan. Cotton should produce 2,700 kg per hectare. “This year we expected spectacular production in cotton,” said Gilson,



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recalling that the company has learnt how to deal with the soil characteristics in Sudan, that the land is more fertile and that the varieties cultivated are more adequate. The lack of rain, however, stunted our objective of reaching 3,600 kg per hectare. The harvest should begin on December 10th.

But beans were picked in mid-October and generated 1,500 kg per hectare, a volume, according to Gilson, considered good for the technology employed. Maize is being picked, as is sorghum, and should generate 5,500 kg per hectare. "The production cost is very low and the domestic maize is very good," said the businessman. Sorghum should produce 2,400 kg per hectare and sunflower 1,200 kg per hectare.



Pinesso Group works in the country with the support of the country's government. It has concessions to use 100,000 hectares of land and may thus expand the area. Currently, 23 Brazilians work for the company in the African country. "There have already been more Brazilians, but we are using trained Sudanese labour," said Gilson. The Sudanese were trained by Brazilian technicians and also came to Brazil to learn on Pinesso crops.

Some professionals who went to an agricultural school in Sudan are already trained, with practice in crops cultivated by Pinesso. The Brazilian group usually receives Sudanese farmers so that they may learn about the cultivation and transfer knowledge in the area. "Sudanese agriculture has already improved since we came here," said Gilson.

The businessman recently visited South Africa to participate in a seminar about Brazilian projects in the continent and returned enthused. Gilson hopes that in future other Brazilian agricultural organisations may implement projects in Sudan and Africa and that they may generate income on the continent.

Pinesso Group is one of the great Brazilian agricultural companies. Apart from operating in agriculture, it also has business in the areas of livestock, agricultural machinery and logistics, among others.

***Translated by Mark Ament**



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