

Prairie Volta to produce 8,000 tonnes of rice, February 4, 2012 pg 15



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The company's officials at the mill

PRAIRIE Volta Limited, owners of the Aveyime Rice Project, is set to feed the local rice industry with 8,000 tonnes of high grade rice this year.

Since the company began its operations in 2009, it has been able to produce some 7,500 tonnes of rice for the Ghanaian market.

While 4,000 tonnes have been milled and sold, the remaining has gone into seedlings for other farmers.

To further consolidate its gains as the biggest rice farm in Ghana, the company is embarking on an expansion drive and has acquired an extra 2,500 acres of land, bringing its total land size to 5,313 acres.





Currently, the farm is cultivating Jasmine 85 and Sierra (basmati variety) from the United States but is also planning to experiment with some other varieties from Brazil to increase output.

When the Daily Graphic visited the farm a vast expanse of green paddy rice was everywhere. While two harvesters were busy harvesting 267 acres, a fleet of tractors were also preparing the cleared land for the planting season.



Part of the irrigation channel that supplying water to the rice field

Irrigation engineers were also at post working on irrigation channels that the company said could supply water to close to 5,000 acres.

The Managing Partner of the company, Mr John Vandyke Mensah, told the Daily Graphic that in spite of the challenges, the company had weathered the storm and was positioning itself to benefit from the increasing demand for local rice.

The company, he stated, had invested a lot in technology which remained the backbone of commercial agriculture.





The fleet of tractors on the farm

According to him, a major challenge facing the local rice industry is that while commercial farmers receive little or no incentive, a lot of the government intervention is aimed at small scale farmers.

In the early 1970s, Ghana used to produce enough rice for local consumption and export. But due to unbridled trade liberalisation, Ghana is now a net importer of rice. It is estimated that Ghana spends US\$600 million as import bill annually on rice for local consumption. While the country's rice production stands at 30 per cent, the other 70 per cent is imported.

But Mr Vandyke-Mensah noted that it would take deliberate and sustained efforts to provide adequate incentives to commercial rice farmers to reverse the trend.

To boost food production, the government recently announced that work would soon commence on the Accra Plains Irrigation Project, to cultivate more than 150,000 hectares to enhance food security and ensure self-sufficiency.

That, Mr Vandyke-Mensah noted, was a laudable idea but advised that when completed the project should not be left in the hands of small-scale farmers as it would better serve commercial farmers who could in turn help pay back the cost of the infrastructure.

"We have all the land, water and the human resource to produce enough to feed ourselves. We should not be importing food," he said trudging through the field.

He observed that in order to attract more investors to the sector, there was the need for the government to create an environment where access to finance was made easy and at cheaper rates in addition to direct interventions such as bearing the cost of the provision of infrastructure.

He said as part of its expansion drive, the company would invest in several satellite farms particularly in the Volta Region.

The Managing Director of the company, Mr Everett Anderson, gave a positive outlook for the company in the coming years, saying "the future is bright and we are thrilled by the prospects as we have revised out structures to deal with the problems of the past."



Mr Clovis P.L. Mezzomo, the Field Operations Manager of the company, for his part said the company had developed an irrigation system that would improve production.

He, however, admitted that the major challenge now was developing a technology that would cut the cost of production and at the same time increase yield.



Mr Vandyke-Mensah (left) sharing ideas with Mr Mezzomo during a tour of the farm



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