

PRAIRIE Volta Limited introduces new rice variety

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PRAIRIE Volta Limited, a local rice production company at Aveyimi in the Volta Region, has harvested 500 tons of Presidio, a long grain variety from the United States of America, which is expected to be on the local market now.

At the moment, the company was in the process of harvesting Jasmin, another long grain perfumed rice variety, also from the USA, on an 80 -acre land with "incredible results", the Chief Operating Officer of the Company, Mr John VanDyke-Mensah stated in an interview with the Daily Graphic.

New planting on 300- acres is also expected in December, to be followed with another planting on 150-acres in January, next year.

The company, according to Mr VanDyke-Mensah, is deploying all resources, financial and human, into land development to increase its acreage in order to produce more rice for the local market.

Prairie Volta, since its commencement, has cleared 875 acres of land, rough-plowed 800 acres, while 600 acres is at various stages of development.

It managed to plant 400 acres of rice in its first planting and 200 in the second season and has so far harvested 250 acres.

It is estimated that Ghana imports about 400,000 tons of rice at the cost of about \$600 million annually.

Mr VanDyke-Mensah, who was full of optimism, stated that, "there is incredible potential within our reach. All we need is just a little push".

So far, Prairie Volta Limited, a subsidiary company of Prairie Texas of the USA has injected \$12.4 million into revamping equipment which had been left untouched since 1990.

That notwithstanding, Mr VanDyke-Mensah said it had become critical for the company to acquire new tractors, as the six Jondier and Kase tractors it inherited from the previous company broke down constantly, delaying the clearing of fields and consequently planting.

The Jondier and Kase tractors, according to him, did not exist in the sub-region and so getting experts to maintain and rehabilitate them has become difficult.

" We need at least four new tractors to be able to clear our fields rapidly and plant enough rice to make an impact on the market", he said.

An agricultural aircraft which was bought by the previous managers had broken down when Prairie Volta Limited took over and although it had so far spent some \$250,000 to rehabilitate it, Mr VanDyke-Mensah said there were still technical problems that had to be resolved before it could be used.

Prairie Volta Limited has 3,177 acres of land strategically located near the Volta Lake for easy irrigation and has also negotiated for another 4,400 acres at Animle in the Ga Dangme area of the Greater Accra Region.

It now owns 40 per cent shares in the one year-six month old company while the government and the Ghana Commercial Bank , (GCB), have 30 per cent shares each.

The decade- old abandoned rice plantation project bounced back to life into the hands of Prairie Texas of the USA in May, 2008, but it was not until February, this year that the company planted its first seed on an 85- acre land.