

UAE and Uganda to establish one of the world's first agricultural free zones

The move will help bring investment to Africa and enhance food security in the Emirates



Charlie Mitchell
October 29, 2018

Updated: October 30, 2018 08:35 AM



The UAE and Uganda sign an agreement to create a free zone at the Agiscape exhibition on agricultural investments and food security in Abu Dhabi. Anna Nielsen / the National

The UAE signed a deal with Uganda yesterday to establish one of the world's only agricultural free zones in an attempt to enhance food security in the Emirates.

The 2,500-hectare free zone will allow private companies from the UAE to invest in agricultural production and development in Uganda.

Mariam Al Mehairi, Minister for Food Security, told *The National* it will also act as a launch pad for further investment into East and Central Africa. "There is a lot of potential to be unlocked in that area," she said.

The agreement was signed at Agiscape, a two-day exhibition in Abu Dhabi that convenes dozens of producers, suppliers and investors from across the globe. The deal will promote agribusiness between the two countries and lead to an increase in UAE imports of Ugandan crops and beef.

Food security – the accessibility of safe and nutritious food for all – is crucial in the UAE, where land is arid and water is scarce.

As a result, the

country imports about 90 per cent of its food and is therefore pursuing mutually beneficial opportunities in Africa and beyond.



Khadim Al Darei, deputy chairman of Aldahra, the headline sponsor of this year's Agriscapex exhibition. Anna Nielsen / the National

Talks began with the Ugandan government last year after the Gulfood exhibition in Dubai in February.

Since then, about 14 Emirati companies have expressed interest in investing in the African country, a spokesman for Uganda's agriculture minister told *The National*.

The UAE will look for similar, complementary investments in surrounding countries.

"Africa in general, from Uganda, Rwanda and South Africa to Nigeria and Zambia, is very promising," said Khadim Al Darei, deputy chairman of Al Dahra, the headline sponsor of Agriscapex.

"Currently only 5 per cent of African land has been utilised for agriculture and the consumers are also coming from Africa. Imagine if we find a way to tap into that.

"We would reduce speculation in prices and also feed the continent," he said.

"How can it be that 800 million are suffering from hunger, while we have 600 million people suffering from obesity?"

Food security has topped agendas all over the world as temperatures rise, but it is perhaps most pressing in Africa, where hunger is widespread and conflict and political instability deter investors.

With the continent's population expected to grow by 1.3 billion by 2050, farming yields will need to increase.

Read more:

Stronger regional ties could ensure food security, says minister

Forward-thinking plan served up to protect UAE's future food supply

UAE's emphasis on Food Security vital for country's social and economic development

Many Sub-Saharan countries feel international agricultural investment is the way to achieve that.

"We are here to sell an image of our country as a good investment," said Emmanuel Mulilo, a minister from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

He said although the country was racked by conflict, it could feed its population, bolster agricultural production and start to export with agribusiness investment, bringing jobs and wealth.

Delegations from South Africa, Ghana and Nigeria were also present at Agriscape

The UAE has been one of Africa's biggest investors; last year imports from Africa were valued at \$21 billion (Dh77.13bn).

Dubai's DP World runs ports in the DRC at Matadi and Boma and in March won a concession to develop the Banana port on the Congo's Atlantic coast.

RELATED ARTICLES



FOOTBALL

Memory lane: When Spurs played Barcelona in the 1982 Cup Winners' Cup



UAE

Boy burned after setting fire to lawn of abandoned villa



CARTOON

Cartoon for December 11, 2018

HEALTH

Abu Dhabi summit told governments have a 'moral duty' to tackle preventable diseases