

How Zambia could achieve breadbasket status

According to Jervis Zimba, president of the Zambia National Farmers' Union (ZNFU), "The only way we can achieve the status of being a breadbasket is to zero rate agriculture."



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ZNFU are the owners of the upcoming Agritech Expo Zambia which is set to take place at the Gert Research Centre in Chisamba from 27-29 April.

In the run-up to the fourth edition of the massive open air farming exhibition in the heart of Zambia's farming hub, Zimba says the main challenge facing farmers today is the cost of production that is becoming higher while returns are becoming lower.

"The farmers have no control over the prices and therefore their returns are always diminishing," Zimba explains, "and we are engaging with government how to reduce the cost of production. And we have always told government, if you want agriculture to be the mainstay of the economy, then instead of introducing this tax and that tax, they need to zero rate agriculture completely. If there is a zero rate for a couple of years, we will see investments coming through. We are hoping that in the next budget perhaps they can lend us an ear. The only way we can achieve the status of being a breadbasket is to zero rate agriculture."

Slight surpluses

The ZNFU president says the region has struggled for the past two seasons because of the drought, adding "but this year we seem to have a good season and therefore I think in terms of maize, which is our staple crop, we should be able to have some surpluses for exports. Of course, generally, the outlook for the region seems to be good as all the countries might post slight surpluses or reduced imports from markets that we have been importing before."

Passion and patience for agri

Zimba, who has been a full-time farmer since 1992, says he inherited his love of farming from his parents, who were also teachers. "Agriculture is purely a passion," he adds, "If you have no passion for agriculture, and patience, you can never, never like it."

The ZNFU president encourages farmers of all scales to visit the Agritech Expo at GART, to which entry is free: “We as ZNFU are pushing the agenda of diversification. Most of our farmers are small scale, and they want to grow maize, cotton and soybeans. But now we are seeing that our farmers are trying to diversify to other crops. And we are looking at the issue of mechanisation, getting away from the old traditional way of doing our work.”

In the heart of Zambia's agri-hub

Agritech Expo at GART in Chisamba will once again offer free, interactive workshops offering practical advice as well as live demonstrations to help farmers combat challenges such as the armyworm, explore new technologies such as aquaculture as well as learn from experts on improving efficiency of operations and yields on their farms.

Last year, the event drew 17,605 visitors. This year even more small-scale, emerging and commercial farmers are expected to descend on the GART research centre where the latest farming products and services will be showcased. The three-day expo will furthermore feature an even greater international presence with international pavilions from Germany, Zimbabwe, Czech Republic, the Netherlands, the UK and France already confirmed.

For more info, go to www.agritech-expo.com.

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