

SPEECH BY THE PERMANENT SECRETARY FOR LIVESTOCK DEVELOPMENT MR KENNETH LUSAKA, EBS, DURING A RABBIT EXHIBITION AND LAUNCH OF RABBIT BREEDERS ASSOCIATION OF KENYA HELD AT THIKA STADIUM ON 27TH JANUARY 2010.

The Director of Livestock Production
The Director of Veterinary Services
Government officials
The chairperson, Rabbit Breeders Association of Kenya,
Farmers,
Exhibitors

Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen.

I am happy to be with you during this occasion that brings together different stakeholders in the livestock industry. I wish to take this opportunity to welcome all of you to this event that seeks to foster enhanced rabbit production and marketing for sustainable agri-business and food security.

Africa has a vast potential in agricultural production more especially in the Livestock sector. It is the largest sector and a strong backbone of the vast and stable economy of the African Continent. In Kenya, Livestock production contributes significantly to food security. Current statistics show that livestock contributes up to 10% of the Gross Domestic Product and 30% of the farm gate value of agricultural commodities of which a substantial portion of the income arises from trade both local and international. The livestock sector also provides raw materials for the local dairy, meat, hides and skins wool and hair processing industries.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Livestock Production is a lucrative enterprise that has enormous untapped wealth. One such gap lies in the rabbit production industry whose growth is enormous due to its demand in both local and international markets. I am happy to affirm that since 2004, the organizers of today's exhibition have been able to earn about Ksh 875,000/= per month from a total of 20,000 rabbits, in addition They have also formed a self help group in order to strengthen their ability to source markets and to bulk the commodity for the market. Despite this potential, the industry is faced with numerous challenges which impact negatively on production. These include: recurrent diseases, lack of breeding material, high cost of commercial feeds, poor husbandry practices and socio-economic biases in production and consumption. Other important factors that influence rabbit development besides animal management related issues include inadequate infrastructure, and poor marketing channels.

In order to support livestock keepers, the Government has continued to invest substantially in livestock disease control. Appropriate measures have been taken to control major livestock diseases through massive vaccinations,

disease surveillance, livestock movement quarantines, and public education and awareness creation to mitigate the adverse effects of the diseases and minimize economic losses attributed to reduced trade in livestock and livestock products. I therefore direct the Director of Veterinary Services to address the various diseases that are associated with rabbit farming so as to boost its production.

The Government is committed to improve rabbit production in the country. In conjunction with the National Agriculture and Livestock Extension Program (NALEP), the Government has promoted rabbit rearing since its inception in the year 2000 as a market oriented enterprise with potential. Though initially the opportunities were reluctantly picked, today majority of the farmers can attest to the gains made within a short period. Further, I am happy to note that Plans are underway to include rabbit production into the Livestock Management System so as to enable farmers to know the cost of rabbits in various parts of the country; this will prevent unscrupulous business persons from exploiting rabbit production farmers.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

My ministry, in the national livestock policy seeks to promote the production of rabbits all over the country. Though rabbit production is currently at 600,000 rabbits nationally, we would like to see this production increased. We are in the process of expanding our multiplication centres to Central and Rift Valley Province so as to provide the breeding material that is required to establish and maintain the enterprise. Stakeholders are also invited to start individual production centers that can be a source of breeding material. I therefore challenge this group to work together with my staff to develop breeds that would be able to survive in our environment without having to import animals from other sources. In order to breed better rabbits, I would also like to challenge the new organization being launched today to look into ways of registering the rabbits with the Kenya Stud Book so as to enhance breeding of rabbits in the country.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Emphasis on rabbit rearing is in line with the Vision 2030 which looks at agricultural production being the engine to industrialization of the country. There are many uses of the rabbit which would be exploited to make rabbit keeping an industry worth investing in. It is worth noting that leather products of skin origin have been sent to turkey to explore opportunities for export. This is a step in the right direction. With more skins then establishment of a tannery would be able to provide and generate employment for the youth in our country.

Forums such as these create opportunities for learning and interaction within the farmers themselves and the stakeholders in their field. In addition they enable farmers to learn about a wide range of new technologies and skills necessary for transforming livestock production from subsistence to

agribusiness. It is therefore very important to have many of such activities throughout the country if we expect the agricultural sector to continue growing as it has done in the last few years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Demand for livestock and livestock products are increasing faster than the production. It is therefore important for farmers to transform their subsistence farming into agribusiness in order to tap into this potential. This will require use of new technologies which will improve the efficiency of the farmers to produce livestock. In this relation, I wish to challenge the youth in this region and the country over to embrace livestock production more especially rabbit keeping so as to establish their economic base instead of indulging in un healthy activities. Rabbit production should not be perceived as a hobby for boys' and 4-k clubs resultant from the negative cultural beliefs and religious taboos, but should be regarded as generative to the country's economy.

I would like to thank the farmers who have prepared their animals and brought them for the exhibition. I have seen that they have done some good work. I would request that they share their successes with the new entrants to facilitate their successful entry into the enterprise.

I wish to call upon the people of this area to take advantage and start value addition to their produce either individually or as groups through establishment of cottage industries or small processing plants. This way your income will be enhanced and jobs will be created to the benefit of the rural community.