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Feed the Flock: Msambachi Calls for Soybean Surge at Tanzania Poultry Show

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The Tanzania Poultry Show 2024, held on October 18th and 19th at the Mlimani City Conference Centre in Dar es Salaam, showcased vital developments and innovations in the poultry industry. A pivotal moment of the event occurred during the panel discussion on October 19th, where Abdallah Msambachi, Program Manager for the Tanzania Sustainable Soybean Initiative (TSSI) at the SAGCOT Centre, provided critical insights into the growing role of soybeans in Tanzania's agricultural landscape shared insights on soybeans as they continue to emerge as a vital component in Tanzania's efforts to strengthen its poultry industry and enhance food security.

He noted that TSSI is relatively young, having been launched officially last year, but it is not new in concept. As Msambachi reminded the audience, SAGCOT has been involved in the soybean sector since 2012. "We have been working in the soybean sector for over 12 years," he said, reinforcing the depth of SAGCOT's experience and commitment.

Soybeans have long been identified as a crop with immense potential in Tanzania. Still, it is only through strategic partnerships and sustained focus that this potential is beginning to be realized. "We developed a strategic partnership back then, which has gained further momentum under the Tanzania Sustainable Soybean Initiative," he explained. The TSSI represents a critical evolution in SAGCOT's work in the sector—one that aims to address long-standing challenges while seizing new opportunities to propel the industry forward.

Collaboration at the Heart of TSSI

Msambachi emphasized the importance of partnerships in making the TSSI a reality. "This is a program we are implementing with four main partners," he explained, highlighting the diversity and strength of the collaboration. Apart from SAGCOT, the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Aspires Tanzania, and the World Food Programme (WFP) are the key players driving the initiative forward. "These four organizations form the core of the Tanzania Sustainable Soybean Initiative, designed to address the challenges and opportunities in the soybean value chain," he said.

In this context, collaboration is not just a buzzword but a foundational pillar of the TSSI's success. Each partner brings its expertise and focus areas to the table, creating a holistic approach to tackling the complexities of the soybean sector. IITA, with its global reputation for agricultural research, offers cutting-edge insights into improving soybean yields and resilience. With its focus on agricultural policy, Aspires Tanzania helps ensure that the sector operates

within a supportive regulatory framework. WFP, through its Farmers to Market Alliance (FTMA), brings market access into sharp focus, ensuring farmers can grow soybeans and sell them at fair prices.

Challenges in the Soybean Sector: Identifying the Gaps

As Msambachi reflected on his participation in the Tanzania Poultry Show 2024, he noted that many of the challenges facing the soybean sector have been discussed at various forums for years. “This is about the fourth panel this year where I have heard discussions on the availability of protein-rich livestock feed,” he remarked. Protein sources for livestock, particularly poultry, are critical to the success of Tanzania’s agricultural sector. Yet, despite years of conversation and planning, progress has been slower than expected.

“We have stakeholders, policies, farmers, and demand. We understand the standards and quality. So why aren’t things happening?” he asked, posing a question that resonated with many in the audience. According to Msambachi, the slow progress pace could be attributed to several factors, but one key issue stood out: the lack of accurate, timely, and context-specific information. “One reason why things might not be moving is the absence of correct information at the right time, in the right direction, and within the correct context,” he suggested.

Baseline Survey: Shedding Light on the Soybean Sector

To address these gaps, the TSSI undertook two fundamental studies to provide a clearer picture of the soybean sector in Tanzania. The first of these was the baseline survey. “We conducted a baseline survey to analyze the sector deeply and identify the root causes of the problems,” Msambachi explained. The survey revealed significant insights into soybean production, markets, and farmer engagement. Msambachi invited stakeholders to access the findings digitally. He informed them that the documents were available for free to stakeholders. Download here-<https://agcot.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/SOYA-BEANS-REPORT-APPROVED-2.pdf>

The baseline survey provided an in-depth look at the various factors holding back the soybean sector. Still, it highlighted the immense opportunities that could be unlocked with the right interventions. Msambachi noted that before this survey, the most recent public information on soybeans dated back to the mid-1990s. “The most recent report was from 1995, conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture, with the involvement of the late Mzee Malema and Mzee Kirenga. Later, in 2002, FAO produced another report,” he said. Since then, little has been done to update the data, leaving policymakers and farmers to rely on outdated information.

Farmer Profiling Report: Commercializing Soybeans

The second study conducted by TSSI, known as the Farmer Profiling Report, took a closer look at how farmers view soybeans, particularly regarding its commercial potential. “After the baseline survey, we realized that soybeans are primarily a commercial crop,” Msambachi said. The report delved into the challenges farmers face when growing soybeans as a commercial enterprise and the opportunities for turning soybeans into a more profitable crop.

One of the key findings was that while soybeans have the potential to become a food crop, the processes involved in making them suitable for human consumption are more complex and less appealing to farmers compared to other crops like maize or beans. “Transforming soybeans into a food crop requires processes that are not as appealing to farmers as those for other crops,” he noted. As a result, soybeans continue to be viewed primarily as a commercial crop, with limited use as a staple food.

Msambachi encouraged stakeholders to use both the baseline and profiling reports better to align their strategies with the realities on the ground. “These two reports are critical. If stakeholders study them carefully, they will understand how to align their actions for better outcomes,” he said.

SAGCOT’s Approach: Public-Private Partnerships for Shared Goals

One of the key themes of Msambachi’s speech was the importance of collaboration between the public and private sectors. SAGCOT is a public-private partnership. He explained that this partnership aims to unite stakeholders to process accurate information and achieve shared goals. This partnership model allows for a more coordinated approach to problem-solving, as both sectors bring unique strengths to the table.

Through its regulatory and policy frameworks, the public sector provides an environment that enables the soybean sector to thrive. The private sector, on the other hand, offers innovation, investment, and market access. Together, they create a synergy that can drive the kind of growth and transformation that TSSI aims to achieve.

Key Objectives: Increasing Productivity and Yield

The primary objective of the TSSI is to increase productivity and yield in the soybean sector. “The first objective is to increase productivity,” Msambachi emphasized. This focus on productivity is directly linked to the input markets, particularly seeds, which are crucial for improving yields. “We realized that seeds are the critical pathway. If you improve seeds, you can increase productivity by 40% to 50%,” he stated.

The importance of seeds cannot be overstated. Without quality seeds, farmers cannot hope to achieve the yields needed to make soybean farming a profitable venture. Msambachi explained that TSSI has been working closely with research institutions such as the Tanzania Agricultural Research Institute (TARI) and the Tanzania Official Seed Certification Institute (TOSCI) to develop new seed varieties better suited to Tanzania’s growing conditions.

Improving Seed Quality

Msambachi highlighted the work being done to improve seed quality, essential for achieving higher yields. “We worked with research institutions such as TARI and TOSCI to develop new soybean seed varieties,” he explained. However, due to the nature of soybean seeds, which degrade over time, it was necessary to purify them to maintain their quality. “Soybean seeds degrade over time, so we had to clean up the seeds and maintain their genetic integrity,” he said. As a result, two varieties, Uyole 2 and Uyole 4, are now available in the market.

These new varieties represent a significant improvement in yield potential, allowing farmers to increase their productivity dramatically. Msambachi noted that in trials, these seeds have shown the potential to increase yields by up to 50%. “With these new seed varieties, we can transform the productivity of soybean farming in Tanzania,” Msambachi stated confidently, underscoring the transformative impact of quality seed varieties. “The productivity increase is not just theoretical. Trials with these varieties have already demonstrated the potential for farmers to increase their harvests from 4 bags per hectare to as much as 15 bags per hectare,” he emphasized. This threefold increase in productivity would profoundly impact farmers’ profitability, especially in a market where demand for soybeans—driven by the poultry industry and human consumption—is steadily rising.

Brazilian Soybean Seeds: Expanding Opportunities

Msambachi also revealed that TSSI is exploring new opportunities in seed development by looking beyond local varieties. “We are also working on Brazilian soybean seeds, which have shown promise in processing due to their larger grain size,” he said. Brazilian seeds are beautiful to processors because their size makes them easier to work with in machinery designed for soybean processing.

The ongoing research into these seeds, in collaboration with TOSCI, is expected to yield results by October or November. “By the end of the year, we hope to have completed the certification process for these Brazilian seeds. This will offer farmers even more options for high-quality seeds,” he explained.

Market Development: Creating Access for Farmers

While increasing productivity is crucial, Msambachi stressed that productivity alone is not enough. Farmers must also have access to markets to sell their soybeans at fair prices. “The second key area of focus for TSSI is market development,” he said. Markets for soybeans are already developing, thanks to increasing demand from the poultry industry. However, there is still much work to be done in terms of structuring these markets to ensure that farmers can benefit from their hard work.

“In terms of markets, the key is establishing market protocols,” Msambachi explained. These protocols define the market's requirements regarding quality, quantity, and timing. TSSI has already made significant progress in this area by engaging with 18 major buyers, known as off-takers. “We have engaged 18 off-takers, and they have committed to purchasing 200,000 metric tons of soybeans,” he said, adding that this level of market commitment provides a stable foundation for the sector's growth.

The Power of Regionalization: Connecting Farmers with Buyers

One of the innovative approaches TSSI has implemented is the regionalization of soybean production. This approach links specific regions with strong off-take capacity to the farmers in those areas. “This approach, which we call regionalization, is designed to connect regions with off-take capacity, enabling us to grow the commercial side of the soybean sector,” Msambachi explained.

For example, farmers in Dodoma and Morogoro have already entered into direct agreements with buyers, creating a win-win situation where farmers can reliably sell their crops, and buyers can ensure a steady supply of high-quality soybeans. “We have already seen farmers in Dodoma and Morogoro entering into direct agreements with off-takers,” Msambachi pointed out. This regionalization strategy helps grow the soybean sector and creates a ripple effect, stimulating local economies and improving livelihoods.

Utilization: Aligning Production with Demand

The third pillar of TSSI's strategy is utilization—ensuring that the produced soybeans are aligned with market demand. Soybeans are a versatile crop that can be used in many ways, from animal feed to human consumption, but the key to unlocking this potential lies in aligning production with the market's needs. “In terms of utilization, we are aligning production with the needs of both the poultry industry and human consumption,” Msambachi explained.

This alignment is essential for the poultry industry, which relies heavily on soybeans for feed. “Soybean feed is critical to the poultry industry, and we are working to ensure that the production of soybeans can meet the growing demand for feed,” he said. However, the benefits

of soybeans extend beyond the poultry industry. “We also need to align soybean production with human consumption,” Msambachi added, noting that soybeans are a rich source of protein and can significantly improve nutrition in Tanzania.

Policy Alignment: Creating an Enabling Environment

Msambachi also touched on the importance of policy alignment in ensuring the success of the TSSI. “In addition to production and market development, we also need to focus on policy alignment,” he said. Policies supporting the growth of the soybean sector—whether through subsidies for inputs, research support, or market regulation—are essential for ensuring the sector can thrive.

SAGCOT’s role in this process is to facilitate dialogue between the public and private sectors, ensuring that policies are supportive and practical. “We work with our partners in the public sector to ensure that policies are aligned with the realities on the ground,” Msambachi explained. By creating an enabling environment, SAGCOT aims to remove the barriers historically holding back the soybean sector.

SAGCOT’s Public-Private Partnership Model: A Blueprint for Success

Msambachi’s emphasis on collaboration throughout his speech highlighted the importance of SAGCOT’s public-private partnership model. “SAGCOT is a public-private partnership. Through this partnership, we aim to bring stakeholders together to process accurate information and work towards shared goals,” he said. This model has proven highly effective, allowing SAGCOT to leverage the strengths of both the public and private sectors.

Through its regulatory and policy frameworks, the public sector provides the enabling environment needed for the soybean sector to thrive. The private sector, on the other hand, brings innovation, investment, and market access. Together, they create a synergy that can drive the kind of growth and transformation that TSSI aims to achieve.

Collaboration with research institutions such as TARI and TOSCI to develop improved seed varieties is one example of how this model works in practice. By working together, these institutions have developed new seed varieties that offer farmers the opportunity to dramatically increase their yields, thereby making soybean farming a more profitable and sustainable venture.

The Future of Soybeans in Tanzania

As Msambachi noted. “With accurate information and the right strategies, we can unlock the full potential of the soybean sector in Tanzania,” he said. The TSSI is not just about increasing productivity and improving market access; it is about creating a sustainable future for the entire soybean value chain.

The work being done by SAGCOT and its partners in the TSSI is paving the way for a brighter, more sustainable future for soybeans in Tanzania. Through strategic partnerships, innovative approaches to market development, and a focus on increasing productivity, the soybean sector is poised to become a key driver of economic growth and improved livelihoods in the country.

A Roadmap to Success: What Comes Next?

Looking ahead, Msambachi highlighted the next steps for TSSI. “We are continuing to work on improving seed varieties, expanding market access, and aligning production with the poultry industry and human consumption,” he said. The commitment to ongoing research and

development is clear, as is the focus on creating a more structured market for soybeans.

The regionalization strategy will also continue to play a vital role in connecting farmers with buyers and ensuring that the benefits of soybean production are felt across Tanzania. “Through regionalization, we can ensure that every region with off-take capacity is linked to farmers, creating a sustainable commercial ecosystem for soybeans,” Msambachi said.

In addition to these efforts, TSSI will continue working with policymakers to ensure that the regulatory environment supports the sector’s growth. “Policy alignment is crucial to our success, and we will continue to engage with the public sector to create an enabling environment for the soybean sector,” he said.

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