

Governors want bloom back into pyrethrum crop

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Kenya - A number of incoming governors are taking steps to revive the once rosy pyrethrum sector even as more firms seek the regulator's permit to set up operations in Kenya. Leading are Nakuru and Nyandarua, whose governments pledge to encourage more farmers to go back to the crop.



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Nyandarua governor Francis Kimemia has assured investors that his government will set aside land for the construction of a pyrethrum factory for those interested.

"I want to revive the cash crop in the county as this crop is capable of employing thousands of unemployed youth while at the same time earning farmers good money that would improve their livelihoods," said Kimemia.

The governor said besides direct employment on the farms, the cash crop is capable of creating numerous opportunities along the value chain in transport, processing and export.

Another pyrethrum growing county, which has indicated its willingness to help farmers troop back to the farms is Nakuru. Governor Lee Kinyanjui has called on members of the county assembly to address the woes facing the sector and come up with winning strategies. "This is a very critical sector and if well nurtured it has the potential to employ and improve the economy of the country," said Kinyanjui.

The governor said research has shown that the region has the potential to grow enough pyrethrum for local and international markets. "My government will work closely with the Pyrethrum Processing Company of Kenya in Nakuru, investors and farmers to make sure they get clean planting materials," said Kinyanjui.

The government has started issuing licenses to private processing firms in a bid to fill in the gap left by the underperforming Nakuru factory.

Welcomed move

Pyrethrum Processing Company of Kenya (PPCK) acting Managing Director Paul Lolwerikoi welcomed the move to bring in more players in the sector. He, however, noted that the regulator should level the playing field. "We believe the high standards set by PPCK shall be maintained by all the new entrants to make sure Kenya regains its top position in the international market," said Lolwerioi.

Since devolution of agriculture, there has not been much effort by pyrethrum growing counties to revive the lucrative sub-sector. To the few surviving farmers scattered across the country, the fruits of devolution are yet to trickle down.

The crop once referred as the black gold of Kenya as it used to earn the country in excess of Sh10bn in foreign exchange a year is still in the intensive care unit. During its heydeys, more than 200,000 farmers were planting the crop producing 20,000 metric tonnes of dry flower earnings them Sh8bn.

At least more than three million people benefited from the venture and 3,000 workers were employed directly by the defunct Pyrethrum Board of Kenya (PBK) processing company in Nakuru. However, today less than 20,000 farmers are engaged in the venture producing a paltry 300 metric tonnes annually while the largely dormant Nakuru factory is struggling to sustain 200 workers on its payroll.

The diminishing number of farmers who are stilling hoping that the crop will blossom again are crying for clean planting materials.

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