PRESS RELEASE

EAGC Launches Initiative to Support Development of Standards for Hermetic Storage Technologies in Kenya

Grain Council Moves to save grain handlers from Substandard Storage Bags

[Nairobi, Kenya, 30th January 2018] The Eastern Africa Grain Council (EAGC) has today launched an initiative to support development of Standards for Hermetic Storage Technologies used in the grain sector in Kenya. This will be a very exciting journey as EAGC and the grain stakeholders who were present at the meeting will be the first team in the world to come up with the Hermetic Bags standards.

Hermetic Storage Technologies are insulated air tight storage devices (bags & bins) that do not allow air getting in or out, thereby depleting the oxygen and suffocating the insects and stopping their respiration and multiplication. It thus eliminates insect infestation without use of pesticides making it safer, environmentally friendly and cost effective in reducing post-harvest losses.

EAGC Executive Director, Gerald Masila underscored the effectiveness of the Hermetic Storage Technologies (HSTs) in protecting stored grains from pests, moisture penetration and protecting the overall quality of the commodities and as such, there is need for standards to control their usage in Kenya and in the region.

Post-harvest losses are a major constraint to development of the grain sector and they continue to exacerbate food security concerns. “Studies have shown that the HSTs have a major role to play in reducing post-harvest losses, currently estimated at 20-30% of grain production, which ultimately will boost food security in the country.” He remarked.

Stakeholders lauded the private sector in partnership with development partners, research organizations and Governments in responding to the challenge of post-harvest losses by developing hermetic storage solutions to protect the quality of stored commodities, noting that to date, famers have bought over 1 million units of hermetic bags and silos.

Mr. Masila added that, “As the HSTs become more popular amongst grain value chain actors in Kenya, it is becoming increasingly important to develop industry standards for such products in order to ensure their integrity and protect end-users from sub-standard products which would undermine efforts to mitigate post-harvest losses.”

Grain sector players welcomed the initiative arguing that the presence of standards for HSTs will protect users of hermetic storage technologies from sub-standard products, thus ensuring that the products on the market perform to expectations and reduce costs associated with usage of sub-standard products. Key areas in the development of the HSTs standards will be; clarity on product specifications, promotion of use of superior quality HSTs for storing grains as well as support to environment-friendly agricultural practices by reducing the use of pesticides and fumigants that are harmful to the environment.

The initiative will involve all stakeholders in the grain value chain to provide input to guide the process to its fruition. Once enacted, the quality standards for HST will provide a level playing ground for the manufacturers to compete fairly and will protect the farmers from buying substandard food items. Grain consumers will also benefit from products stored in HST without use of pesticides and rodenticides thus improving on overall health and safety of the people.

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About Eastern Africa Grain Council (EAGC)

The Eastern Africa Grain Council is a regional organization with membership drawn from across the Eastern and Southern Africa. Membership is drawn from grain value chain stakeholders currently with presence in 10 countries across Africa including Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, South Sudan, DRC Congo and Ethiopia. EAGC’s key products and services include promotion of structured trading system (STS) through the warehouse receipting systems (WRS), and Regional Grain Trading platform (G-Soko), Market Information Systems (MIS) offered through the Regional Agricultural Trade Intelligence Network (RATIN- [www.ratin.net ] and evidence-based Policy Advocacy and Training and Capacity Building through the Eastern Africa Grain Institute (EAGI).

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NOTES TO THE EDITOR

- Like most countries in Eastern Africa, Kenya faces a major problem with post-harvest management of food commodities, particularly grains. Post-harvest losses are typically estimated at approximately 20-30% of grain production is estimated to be lost within 6 months due to inadequate post-harvest handling and storage. This equates to over 1 million tons of maize annually (more than 11 million bags), worth over Kshs 33.5 billion.

- This means that post-harvest losses of food commodities, particularly grains, translate to lost revenue for farmers, traders and processors, and weaken food security in the country. Inadequate post-harvest handling also presents food quality and food safety risks by increasing the risk of spoilage and aflatoxin contamination, which presents a public health concern.

- Hermetic storage technologies are generally safer and potentially more affordable option to eliminate pest infestation compared to using chemical compounds and fumigants, which may again pose a health risk if not applied correctly.

- Hermetic Storage Technologies, particularly hermetic grain bags are a relatively recent development in Kenya. As such, proponents of the technology are investing significantly to promote awareness of hermetic storage as a suitable alternative to traditional storage means and solution to post-harvest losses.

- To date, approximately 1.5 million hermetic storage bags have been sold to date (USAID KAVES, 2017).

- This risk is exacerbated by the fact that there are neither the EAC nor the COMESA standards for HSTs for hermetic storage technology.