PRESS RELEASE

Eastern Africa Grain Council (EAGC) Uganda Launches 9 East African Standards for Staple Foods, among other 106 EAC harmonized standards

Intra-regional trade of quality grain expected to increase following the recent gazettement of EAC Standards for Staple Foods.

[Kampala, Uganda - 7th February 2018]. The Eastern Africa Grain Council, has today launched the 9 product standards for staple foods and 2 standards for sampling and test methods. The standards were handed over for implementation during the Council’s event, held at the Imperial Royale Hotel in Kampala. The Gazetted revised Standards are expected to become legally binding in all partner States four months after publication in the gazette.

The recent gazettement of the grain standards is expected to increase grain trade between Uganda and the East Africa region by reducing standards related Technical barriers, which had previously hampered such trade. “The EAC has been implementing the EAC Customs Union since 1st July 2005.” Indicated the Assistant Commissioner, Ministry of EAC Integration. This she said was an effort “To eliminate internal Tariffs on goods produced within our territories in order to promote intra EAC Trade, adopt a common tax policy on third party goods and eliminate all non-tariff barriers to trade.”

Speaking on behalf of the Executive Director of the Uganda National Bureau of Statistics, his deputy Mrs Patricia Ejalu emphasised on the Bureau’s plan to enforce compliance to the harmonised standards by tightening checks on grain quality parameters at the border check points to ensure that consumers feed on safe food.

Uganda will therefore be a key beneficiary of the harmonized standards, as the country remains one of the key exporters of maize and sorghum in the region. Speaking at the forum, the EAGC Executive Director, Mr. Gerald Masila averred that, “smooth adoption and application of the gazetted standards would see farmers accessing better and greater markets within the Region estimated at a population of 186,998,614 while consumers will be provided with safe and high quality food grain products.”

In his opening remarks, Yohannes Assefa the Director of Agriculture and Agribusiness at the USAID-East Africa Trade and Investment Hub said that:” The Hub as regional body has been supporting the development and implementation of grain standards for staple foods.” He added that the USAID has bilateral partners at the National Level who are mandated to build the capacity of grain famers enhance productivity and the utilization of quality agricultural inputs such as seeds for the production of safe food for trade.
EAGC plans to undertake capacity building and awareness forums in each country and to work with the EAC and National Bureaus of Standards to develop National standards implementation roadmaps as we call upon the EAC partner states to move with speed to ensure effective implementation” Lauded Mr Masila. “A scorecard approach and a regular market surveillance will be much needed as the next step as a mechanism to track overall implementation of the standards,” he added. The scorecard will ensure that the number of standards harmonized is not counted as a direct measure of success without looking at the impact on Regional grain trade opportunities, costs, or sector competitiveness. Mr. Masila further added that “the EAGC’s Regional Grain Trading system, which is a web, based /electronic system known as G-SOKO will also promote the adoption of the revised EAC standards through the certified warehouses which have a role of bulking grains that conform with the quality parameters”.

Representing the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tarde, Industry and Cooperatives, Mr Stanley Ahimbisibwe lauded that “the Uganda any other Eastern Africa Countries cannot increase productivity and be globally competitive without proper implementation of standards.”

The EAGC Executive Director appreciated the various partners and stakeholders who were involved in the harmonization and review of the grain standards led by the East African Community (EAC) Secretariat, including the Bureau of Standards for Kenya (KeBS), Tanzania (TBS), Burundi (BBN), Rwanda (RSB), and Uganda (UNBS). The USAID –East Africa Trade and Investment Hub (The Hub) supported the review of the Standards as well as the UKAID- Food Trade Eastern and Southern Africa (FTESA) who supported the Regional Standards Survey, National Consultations, Standards Awareness at farmer Level and Graders Training.

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NOTES TO THE EDITOR

- EAGC, with support from Development partners including Swedish International Development Agency, Sida, USAID, DFID/Food Trade, and CTA among others, has been collaborating with the EAC in the standards harmonization process for Cereals, Pulses, and their products since 2010, has mobilized, and committed resources, and grain stakeholder participation in the process.
- The East African Community Standards for Cereals and Pulses were first gazetted by the EAC in 2013. This was a critical step towards addressing key obstacles to formal structured trading systems that require consistency and standardization of products quality.
- Several challenges, with regard to the application of the standards, were however experienced soon after the adoption in 2014.
- To address the stakeholder concerns, EAGC embarked on investigation of the prevailing challenges affecting the 2013 standards implementation, and conducted a regional survey covering three components: review of existing technical gaps, grain laboratories benchmarking and cross border assessment.
- A number of gaps were revealed by the EAGC survey, which included safety and quality requirements/parameters, sampling and testing methods as key constraints limiting the realization of Structured Grain Trade within the Region.
Following the gaps identified in the study, a review process was initiated which has culminated to the newly revised harmonized 2017 EAC Staple foods standards.

The nine priority product standards reviewed were maize grain, wheat grain, milled rice, dry beans, dry soybeans, maize flour, wheat flour, sorghum flour and millet flour.

Among other parameters addressed through the revision of the standards were aflatoxin, moisture content levels and discolouration of grains.

For instance, the EAC standard for maize grain goes much further than the international CODEX Standard in setting tight quality parameters, providing for maximum limits for three categories of mycotoxin, moisture, and filth that apply to all maize grades together with specific limits on broken, pest damaged, shriveled, discolored, and rotten grains, and total grain defect for three grades of maize.

Grain that does not conform to the regional requirements or exceeds the limits for Grade 3 maize is described as unfit for human consumption and is technically illegal to buy or sell anywhere in the EAC except for animal feed.

Uganda is the second country in which EAGC has launched the revised harmonized standards following a similar event held in Nairobi, Kenya on 20th December 2017.

Plans are underway to launch the standards in all EAC countries to ensure a level playing field in the sector to minimize the risk of food shortage in the region by allowing easy movement of grains across states, as well as providing ready market for farmers in the region.

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).

For more Information, please contact the EAGC Secretariat:
Regional Manager, MIS & Communication– Jacinta Mwau
Tel: +254 733 444 035
E-mail: jmwau@eagc.org, grains@eagc.org