

Regulars

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Strategy NCPB has diversified its activities to trade in an array of grains such as wheat, rice, beans and sorghum

What is NCPB doing to ensure food security in the country?

This week, **Mr Joseph M. Kimote**, the Managing Director, National Cereals and Produce Board (NCPB), answers your questions. Compiled by **Walter Menya**

What explains the recent reduction in the buying price of maize in NCPB depots from Sh2,700 to Sh2,500 yet farmers incur high production costs since the government no longer offers fertiliser subsidies? Kibet Brian, Moi's Bridge

The maize that NCPB is currently buying is for its commercial function and not for the government's National Food Reserves. However, at the onset of the current purchase of maize, farmers were offered Sh2,500 for 90kg bag. Following an elaborate market survey, the market price then was higher than the Sh2,500 and so the Board decided to offer Sh2,700 to motivate farmers to bring their maize to NCPB. The price still remains at Sh2,700 for a 90kg bag.

On the issue of fertiliser, the government is still supplying farmers with subsidised fertiliser but under a new arrangement—the e-voucher programme—in which farmers registered in the programme can access subsidised fertiliser through the vouchers. NCPB is participating in this programme, which is being co-ordinated by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Cooperatives.

NCPB started purchasing maize from farmers from early February, 2021. What measures have you put in place to ensure that only farmers deliver maize to the cereals board and not traders and are paid their money without delay? Edward B. Wekesa, Bungoma

All those who sell maize to NCPB depots on a commercial basis are farmers who are duly registered. The registration is done by the county governments and the updated registers are provided to the depots, which are then used to ensure that only genuine farmers deliver their grains to the Board.

All farmers who sell maize to NCPB are paid within 24 hours upon delivery of their grain. The quantity a farmer can sell to the Board has been limited to 1,000 bags per farmer. In addition, an elaborate identification and verification process is in place at all purchasing depots and a monitoring system instituted to ensure that a farmer does not deliver above their stipulated quota. The payment is either through electronic funds transfer (EFT) or M-Pesa for those who are registered in this platform.

In the push and pull to disband the Strategic Food Reserve Trust Fund Board, NCPB has been sucked into the centre of these machinations and the Board actually says that NCPB, despite its not very rosy history, will be the biggest beneficiary inheriting some Sh10 billion. What can you say about this tussle and NCPB's involvement? In your view, would it be in the country's benefit to disband the Fund? Felix Were, Syokimau

The NCPB/SFR Reforms, that have seen the Strategic Food Reserve (SFR) placed as a division under NCPB and renamed as National Food Reserve, were informed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Cooperatives' Agriculture Sector Transformation



National Cereals and Produce Board Managing Director Joseph Kimote. FILE | NATION

and Growth Strategy (ASTGS) 2019-2029 that aim at transforming the agriculture sector in Kenya and ensuring that there is national food and nutritional security. NCPB is, therefore, implementing the reforms as directed by the government.

In addition, the governance and management of the Strategic Food Reserves will now be informed by well-researched data as will be provided by the Food Balance Sheet Committee and not on short-term interventions that have proven too costly to the Exchequer over the years.

The institution you head has been in the limelight for all the wrong reasons, ranging from corruption allegations, to delays in paying farmers and a leadership equivalent of a 'revolving door'. How can the image of this institution be salvaged? What is the greatest challenge at the moment? Komen Moris, Eldoret

The image of the Board has greatly improved and we are currently enjoying a lot of goodwill from government and all our stakeholders, including the private sector and development partners in the grain sub-sector. NCPB has spruced up its corporate image and we are continuing to work on its brand acceptance by stakeholders to restore public confidence and trust in the organisation.

The Board has embarked on an effective communication strategy which relies on effective multi-channelled approach aimed at reaching out to our varied stakeholders with clear specific positive messaging. The greatest challenge at the moment is to

strengthen our commercial trading division by pursuing value adding partnerships and promote institutional agility to respond to customer needs and preferences effectively.

What strategies have you put in place to ensure that food security as one of the President's Big Four Agenda is ring-fenced and achieved sustainably? Komen Moris, Eldoret

NCPB has diversified its commercial activities to trade in an array of grains such as wheat, rice, beans green grams, sorghum and millet. In addition, it offers affordable farm inputs like fertilisers to cereals as well as horticultural farmers to boost food security which is under the Food and Nutrition Security of the Big Four Agenda.

Under the reformed NCPB, the National Food Reserve (NFR) division will handle many types of foods like maize, powdered milk, canned beef and fish.

The Board has also availed its warehouses to both the private sector who deal in food crops for safe storage as well as those dealing with farm inputs for distribution. Our role is to promote efficient and cost-effective post-harvest activities in order to significantly reduce losses as enshrined in the Agriculture Sector Transformation and Growth Strategy (ASTGS) and Vision 2030 medium term plan.

It is said that we lose 30 per cent or more of cereals produced in our country due to poor post-harvest handling. What measures have NCPB introduced or is introducing to help farmers curb such

losses? Samuel Njakai, Nairobi

NCPB offers affordable grain post-harvest services to farmers to reduce on post-harvest losses. The services offered are grain drying to reduce moisture, warehousing—regular warehousing and Under Warehouse Receipt System (WRS), grain grading, aflatoxin testing, pest control services, spraying and fumigation as well as weighing services. To bring these post-harvest services closer to the farmers, the Board is in the process of procuring mobile dryers.

It has been reported that as part of the reforms, NCPB plans to venture into cereals buying and milling and will no longer be a strategic grains holder as we currently know it. Could you kindly elaborate on this? Githuku Mungai, Nairobi

Under the NCPB reforms, there will be NCPB Trading and National Food Reserves (NFR) divisions. NCPB Trading Division is the commercial wing of the Board that will handle all the commercial activities. These include trading in commodities like fertilisers, grains and offer post-harvest management services including warehousing and storage services, as well as clearing and forwarding services. On the other hand, the NFR division will continue to be in charge of the strategic food stocks on behalf of the government.

The board recently opened five new aflatoxin testing laboratories, bringing to six such facilities in the country. Would you say that the aflatoxin problem is now behind us? What has been the cost of aflatoxin to NCPB and farmers? Githuku Mungai, Nairobi

Aflatoxin is still there but testing helps to monitor its presence in grain. By testing, farmers will know its prevalence and take appropriate action to mitigate its effects, for example, by using Aflasafe and practising good post-harvest management. Farmers suffer when their grain is rejected; aflatoxin contaminated maize has no use and can only be destroyed through incineration. The aflatoxin testing services are available in all our major silos and depots including Nakuru, Eldoret, Nairobi, Machakos, Meru, Moi's Bridge and Kitale and are open to the public at a modest cost of Sh1,740 per sample. Plans are underway to establish more labs in Migori, Narok and Bungoma.

Farmers can reduce the prevalence of aflatoxin in the harvested crop by using a product called Aflasafe while the crop is in the field. The application of this product reduces the aflatoxin contamination by the 80 to 90 per cent in maize and if combined with proper drying and handling, it can reduce the post-harvest losses significantly. NCPB distributes Aflasafe to farmers across the country.

As part of your transformation agenda at the Board, how do you intend to handle issuance of licences for maize importation to safeguard public safety and our taxes? Jonathan Kipsang, Elburgon

NCPB does not issue importation licences. In the reformed structure, National Food Reserve division will be advised by government with the advisory of the Food Balance Sheet committee (FBSC) on the steps to take in case of any deficit. The FBSC is a statistical arm of the NFR and will gather data on the food situation in the country and advise on its availability and accessibility or lack of it.

NEXT WEEK



**Ms Betty Maina,
Cabinet Secretary
for Industrialisation,
Trade and Enterprise
Development**