

SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY WILLIAM RUTO, DEPUTY PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA, DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE 2nd NATIONAL CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE CONFERENCE AT SAFARI PARK HOTEL ON TUESDAY 17TH APRIL 2018

Distinguished Guests

I am delighted to join you for what I know is one of the most important conversations of our time. The reality of a changing climate means all of us and especially those of us who work with nature must be kinder to the planet even as we make our livelihoods from it.

This is why this conversation is so important. We need more productivity and higher incomes for every farmer in the country, but we must also be fair to the environment. It is my hope that the deliberations that will unfold here over the next two days will mark a significant milestone in the success of Conservation Agriculture in Kenya.

When the success story is told in future, I would like it to indicate that the 2nd national conference on Conservation Agriculture was the moment that lit the match; the moment that changed things forever. I know that the gospel of Conservation Agriculture has not travelled everywhere or reached every farmer, but I hope that increasing uptake is one of your key agenda items.

Research among small-holder farmers show that those who adopt Conservation Agriculture enjoy up to double the yields they used to with conventional agricultural methods.

As a farmer, I can tell you that we believe by seeing; evidence of the success of the Conservation Agriculture is the strongest message and the surest way to increase its adoption.

I know there are case studies all over the world, Brazil, North America, South Africa and even a few here in Kenya, in Makueni and Bungoma. These stories are the ones we need to hear and see.

Conservation agriculture is advantageous in reducing input use, saving energy, soil preservation and preventing land degradation, carbon losses, chemical load through pesticides and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

To truly reap the dividends of Conservation Agriculture we need a minimum of 10% of farmers countrywide to adopt the practice. County Governments are the perfect partners in this endeavor.

This conference brings together knowledgeable and diverse actors and gives us an opportunity to exchange ideas and generate innovations to boost the contribution of conservation agriculture to our national output.

The conference theme- **Scaling up Conservation Agriculture to Sustainably contribute to Food, Feed and Nutrition Security in Kenya**— speaks directly to the government's Big 4 agenda and naturally, my expectations are appropriately elevated. Conservation Agriculture is itself an innovative approach to agricultural production, which embeds ecological conservation into agricultural sustainability.

In turn, this conjunction of agriculture and conservation should foster a tradition of fruitful innovation to ensure that productivity always outstrips dwindling resources, finite means of production and population pressure on land.

Ideas generated from this conference are therefore eagerly awaited and welcomed to add impetus to the Big Four agenda, which is aimed at expanding Kenya's productive possibilities in a manner that sustains continuous economic growth, employment creation, improved social services and greater national competitiveness.

In a world where resources are overstretched and overwhelmed, innovation is no longer the best way out; it is the only way out.

At its present output, agriculture's contribution to national growth is tremendous. Yet, we are far from producing at the optimal rate. We urgently need to accelerate productivity and intensify linkages with manufacturing, research and innovation and ICT to locate agriculture at its pride place in the development agenda.

Scientists, farmers, agri-dealers, marketing agents, technology and service providers gathered here need to understand the importance of and urgent need for their contribution at the national level. This country needs each one of us to up their game.

I therefore challenge you to brainstorm and produce solutions that will promote, enhance and upscale the uptake of this method among farming and pastoral communities throughout the country. I also challenge county governments to embrace conservation agriculture as a vehicle for sustainable productivity.

The conversation here is so important-it is about productivity, income and sustainability.

It is also a conversation about our future; by 2030 our population will have hit 65 million at the time we hope to achieve middle income status. Food security is critical to this transformation and improved agricultural productivity is therefore a necessity. Conservation agriculture holds tremendous potential across all farm sizes and ecological systems.

The **Big Four** is all about scaling up. It's about scaling up agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare to all and affordable housing to create a transformational effect in our economy and society.

A few years ago we used to say Agriculture is the backbone of this country. I am here today to tell you that despite a more diversified economy; agriculture is still the backbone of our society. We just need to make it stronger to carry a bigger load. Agriculture still employs the most people directly and indirectly in Kenya-40% of the population and 70% in rural areas- and our dream of industrialization relies on agriculture for provision of raw materials. That is why it was the first thing we put in the Big Four Agenda and why we are sparing no expense to maximize on agricultural productivity.

Conservation Agriculture is essentially about scaling up. It's about getting more using less and doing so while keeping the soil in the best shape possible. Its principles include less or no tillage, soil cover and crop rotation.

The government will continue to support farmers access to affordable inputs, tax-free farm machinery and equipment in order to enhance productivity.

We have invested KES 4.3 billion to procure 119,400 metric tonnes of more soil friendly fertilizer to subsidize farmer prices and maintain them at KES 1500 per 50kg bag during this season. Agricultural Mechanization Services and Agricultural Technology Development Centres continue to give farmers access to new technologies and location-specific advisory services to achieve greater intensity, timeliness and precision in agriculture.

To anchor this innovative approach to sustainable productivity, I challenge the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation to formulate sound policies and a viable implementation framework. Similarly, the principles and practices of conservation agriculture should be mainstreamed in national agriculture policies.

The livestock sub-sector is rising towards its potential. It contributes KES 450 billion from the sale of various products besides creating employment, enhancing food security and supporting manufacturing. Increasing earnings by farmers need to be sustained through the incorporation of this method in pasture and fodder production.

Allow me the opportunity to thank FAO, the European Union and the Ministry of Agriculture for keeping the promise to organize a follow up discussion on conservation agriculture in Kenya after the first national conference.

Finally, I commend the conference organisers, county governments, conference speakers, exhibitors and all stakeholders who have participated in putting together this magnificent event. You have done well; keep it up. I now declare the 2nd Kenya National Conservation Agriculture Conference officially open.

Thank you.

