

## Fish production up and increased investments oriented aquaculture practices

Rwanda's fish output increased in 2018 on account of increased investments in modern and commercially oriented aquaculture practices.

The latest industry outlook, by Rwanda Agriculture Board (RAB), shows that there was a significant rebound in fish output since 2016 after sustained years of hardship.

In 2016, the country produced just 26,581 tonnes of fish before increasing to 31,465 and 43,632 tonnes in 2017 and 2018 respectively.

The outlook demonstrates that strategies to increase the country's fish stocks as it seeks to trim imports and tackle malnutrition are paying off.

However, even as there was a rise in production, Rwanda still imports an estimated 15,000 tonnes of fish every year in order to cater for the rising demand.

This reflects a significant shortage in fish supplies compared to demand.

Gérardine Mukeshimana, the Minister for Agriculture and Animal Resources, told Members of Parliament last week that government had eased the process of acquiring licenses for aquaculture, which has attracted more investments in the industry.

More and more farmers are adopting cage aquaculture, which deploys enclosed netting material that secures the fish while allowing relatively free water exchange with the surrounding environment, and enables the feeding of the fish in a controlled area.

The minister said that investors in the fisheries industry are facilitated to obtain fishing concessions, water use permits as well as empowered with technical support on the production of fingerlings among other interventions.

Fingerlings are young fish that have developed to about the size of a finger.

The industry boasts 26 big investors who use floating cages, which has boosted fish stocks in Lake Kivu, Lake Muhazi, Lake Ruhondo and Lake Sake, the ministry says.

At an average of 2.5 kilogrammes every year, capita fish consumption in Rwanda is still low compared to the East African Community average of six kilogrammes.



The country has about 1,424 fish ponds of which 731 are effectively productive, 569 semi-productive, and 125 which are not utilised.

## Challenges

“The main challenge that farmers are exposed to is lack of funding to make their ponds more productive,” the minister said, adding that government was exploring various funding options for fish farming.

Celestin Simarinka, a fish farmer in Karongi District, said that although fish production has increased, illegal fishing practices were still rampant, which threatens the sustainability of the industry.

“Protecting lakes from fish poachers who use illegal snares should be a priority,” he said. He said that some fishermen use mosquito nets that capture fish eggs, which hurts the survival of fish stocks.

Currently, a kilogramme of fish is between Rwf2,500 and Rwf3,000.

Getting fingerlings was also one of the major challenges, but the minister said that this was addressed through setting up of fish hatcheries.

Government has two big hatcheries with capacity to produce 4.5 million fingerlings per year.

The Government also distributed eight small hatcheries in different districts of the country. Rwanda targets to produce 112,000 tonnes of fish every year by 2024, according to the fourth strategic plan for agriculture transformation, which runs from 2018 to 2024.

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