

Ondo Flags Off N1billion Commercial Agric Loans To Farmers

Ondo State on Monday became the first State in the Federation to benefit from and disburse to farmers; the N1billion large Scale Agricultural Credit Scheme put in place by the Federal Government for on-lending to States, to fast-track the development of the agricultural sector and boost food production in the nation.

Presenting the letters of offer to the beneficiaries from the 18 local government areas of the State in Akure, the State Governor, Dr Olusegun Mimiko disclosed that the Commercial Agriculture Credit Scheme was meant for the production of crops such as maize, cassava, vegetables adding that livestock, fisheries and agricultural processing activities were also involved.

According to Governor Mimiko, the Commercial Agriculture Credit Scheme offered to States by the Federal Government was to upscale productivity, employment generation, diversification of the revenue base and increase in foreign exchange earning capacity, as well as availability of raw materials for the industrial sector of the Nigerian economy.

His words: "In line with our strategy, the State has accessed the N1.0 billion Commercial Agriculture Credit Scheme Credit facility for on-lending to our farmers, the State Executive Council, as part of its implementation strategy, constituted both the Cabinet and Technical Committees working in collaboration with officials of the Central Bank of Nigeria, United Bank for Africa Plc (UBA) and other stakeholders to determine the modus operandi for the loan scheme. "Eligibility criteria for accessing the Commercial Agriculture Credit Scheme include among other things, genuine and practicing farmers, non-indebtedness of beneficiaries to financial institutions amongst others. The Commercial Agriculture Credit Scheme interest is 9% including all charges, maximum tenure of 2 years and moratorium period of 6 months. "I wish to say for the avoidance of doubt that the N1.0 billion

Agricultural Credit is guaranteed by the State Government because of its genuine interest in the well-being of our farmers and promotion of the agricultural sector. Every beneficiary must, therefore, endeavour to utilize the credit facility and pay back within the stipulated time frame. This would enable others to benefit from the facility if and when repayment schedule is duly honoured."

The Governor, who reiterated his administration's determination to alleviate poverty and put Ondo State on an irreversible path of poverty eradication, said that as part of the fulfillment of the covenant he made on his inauguration as Governor on February 24, 2009, "I stand before you today to address one of the challenges facing the development of agriculture in the State."

While positing that in real terms and in its compelling significance, agriculture had continued to retain a prominent position towards employment generation, economic prosperity and sustainable development in the State, Mimiko, however, regretted that in spite of these, however, the agricultural sector was replete with subsistence characteristics such as: low productivity, lack of credit facilities, storage facilities, relatively scarce mechanization infrastructure among others.

“This administration, in the quest to put agriculture in its rightful position has therefore ranked it first in its policy framework of “A CARING HEART.” Towards this, a budget of N2.998billion was approved in 2010 for development of agriculture in the State. Recently, I flagged off the Mobile Farm Service Centres to enable our farmers have unrestricted access to genuine and affordable agricultural inputs at subsidized rates. This effort is geared towards achieving food security in the State. It was the first of its kind in the State since its inception,” Mimiko, explained.

The Governor added that in his determination to continue to strengthen the efforts of farmers in the State with the provision of a conducive environment and facilities for increase in food production, his government’s mechanization strategy of acquisition of 100 tractors would be unveiled in due course, as soon as all the technicalities were sorted out with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture.

He further disclosed that the State Ministry of Agriculture in partnership with the Ministry of Economic Planning and Budget and other stake holders had embarked on a pilot scheme on tomato production in the State through the use of irrigation agronomy to make the State relatively self-reliant.

“Also, the Public Private Partnership Department in my office is widely consulting with foreign partners on prospects for the production of rice, sugar cane, vegetable and oil-palm in the State.

While the Ministry of Agriculture, in line with its mandate has organized participants into New Generation of Farmers. “The State Government in partnership with Leventis Foundation Nigeria Limited, established an Agriculture Training School at Ido-ani which had produced its first set of trained agriculturists, skilled in various agricultural activities. A group of Women in Agriculture made up of wives of State Executive Council members have made in-road into crop production and have planted over 30hectares of maize and prepared land for planting 30hectares of cassava. Some of the Star Projects of the Ministry of Agriculture are in various stages of implementation and would be commissioned in due course,” the Governor added.

The Governor who expressed appreciation to the Federal Government, State Cabinet and Technical implementation Committees, House of Assembly Committee on Agriculture, CBN, UBA Plc, the All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN), Nigerian Agricultural Insurance Corporation (NAIC) and other Stakeholders participated in the implementation and success of the scheme, “the end product of which you are witnessing today”, enjoined the first batch of beneficiaries to work hard to meet the food security expectation of the State. Saying: “It is with sense of pride and accomplishment that Ondo State is, by the event of today, the first State in the Federation to disburse part of the N1.0 billion credit facility to its farmers. We will continue to deliver on our mandate towards the upliftment of our farmers and in full consciousness of our responsibility,” Mimiko enthused.

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