



FUTA NEWS

AGRICULTURAL ENGINEERS CHART WAY FORWARD AT CONFERENCE IN FUTA

Nigerian Agricultural Engineers and other stakeholders in the sector have been challenged to do more to enable the country benefit from its huge potentials. Dr. Graham Hefer, Managing Director Okomu Oil Palm Company PLC, Edo threw the challenge in his key note address at the 15th International Conference and 35th Annual General Meeting of the Nigerian Institution of Agricultural Engineers (NIAE) which was held at the Federal University of Technology Akure. He identified inadequate agricultural activities, obsolete value chains, exploitation of local demand, the lack of technology and innovation capabilities, poor stimulation of private sector participation and dearth of infrastructure and energy access as factors limiting the transformation of the oil palm industry in Nigeria.

Hefer who hinged his presentation on the theme of the conference, "Agricultural Engineering Infrastructure for wealth Creation" noted that Nigeria which used to account for 80% of oil palm production in the 1960s currently suffers a deficit in its production in relation to meeting current demand, thereby rating Nigeria as responsible for less than 5% of total global production presently.

Graham who pointed out that poor and inconsistent government policies posed a huge challenge to the industry emphasized the gap caused by imposition of inflexible trade and tax rates alongside the use of outdated technology. He called for coordinated and integrated policies binding on the industry, stronger partnerships and linkages, more and freer flow of information and strengthening of the institutions closely related to the Industry like the customs, to check illegal imports.

Speaking on efforts made by Agricultural Engineers in the country to improve the sector, the National Chairman of the Institution, Professor Babatunde Adewunmi disclosed that the first water hyacinth machine developed in Nigeria was by a committee led by Professor O.C. Ademosun of the Federal University of Technology, Akure who is also an Agricultural Engineer. He noted that though experts from the field are few in the country their impact on the nation's economy is significant, adding that every Agricultural Engineer is a complete Engineer with knowledge from all walks of engineering which allows them to function across board. Earlier, the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Adebisi Daramola who was represented by the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic, Professor Adedayo Fasakin, told the conference that "if there is any profession that should be seriously challenged in the current state of our nationhood, it is the Agricultural Engineering profession. The simple reason for this is that despite the mass of arable land endowed this country; agricultural practice remains largely manual, thus making agricultural productivity persistently low. The implication of this is that Nigeria cannot feed itself, hence we have to depend heavily on the importation of various food items including rice and frozen foods". Professor Daramola explained that "our persistent dependence on imported foods has negative tolls on the country, as the potentials of agriculture to create wealth through employment remains largely untapped"

He said from the quality of the members of the association he was optimistic that the conference and AGM would provide a veritable avenue for impactful brainstorming for useful recommendations to governments at all levels, agriculture manpower producing Institutions and the general public.

In his speech, the President, Nigerian Society of Engineers (the mother body of the NIAE), Engr. Ademola Olurunfemi noted that the selection of the theme could not have come at a better time particularly in view of the negative indicators for this part of the world in the current world hunger and poverty report of the Food and Agricultural Organizations (FAO), adding that it sets the stage for the hosting of the World Engineering Conference on Sustainable Infrastructure by the Nigerian Society of Engineers in November this year.

While noting efforts by the Federal Government towards the achievement of food security, Engr. Olurunfemi opined that policy must be properly aligned to lead a condition in which citizens have access at all times, not only to enough food but to meet industrial needs of agricultural products and to accomplish and ensure food security which he stated as the "right of people to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecological sound and sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agricultural system"

In his welcome address, the Local Organizing Committee Chair, Dr. Philip Oguntunde recalled that the conference was last held in FUTA in 1995. He explained that the conference was to “provide a forum for deliberation and sharing of information and knowledge on current research developments, achievements and practical applications in all Agricultural, Environmental, Food and Bioresources Engineering related endeavours for Engineers and associated professionals”.

The highlight of the event was the conferment of Fellowship Awards on the Ondo State Governor, Dr. Olusegun Mimiko, the Osun State Governor, Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola and Aare Afe Babalola, SAN, who have remained front liners in the promotion of modernized agriculture at various levels.