

BRINGING BALANCED FERTILIZERS TO THE NIGERIAN MARKET: POLICY AND INVESTMENT IMPLICATIONS OF SOIL AND CROP-SPECIFIC FERTILIZER BLEND-BASED TECHNOLOGIES. A SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, CHIEF AUDU OGBEH, AT THE POLICY DIALOGUE, HELD AT BOLTON WHITE HOTEL, ABUJA, ON THURSDAY, 6TH APRIL 2017.

The Chief of Party for the FtF Nigeria Agricultural Policy Project and Head of IFPRI Abuja Office, Dr. George Mavrotas, The Country Representative IFDC, Mr. Mohammed Salasi Idris, The USAID Representative, Ms Roseann Casey, Director, office of Economic growth and environment, The Chief of Party for the Feed the Future Nigeria Agro Inputs Project, IFDC, Dr. Kofi Debrah, Dr. Hiroyuki Takeshima, Senior Research Fellow, IFPRI HQs, Washington DC, Dr. Ajala Irede, Senior Technical advisor to the Minister of Agriculture, President, All Farmer's Association of Nigeria (AFAN), Arch Kabiru Ibrahim, Group Head, Commercial Services, NOTORE, Dr. Innocent Okuku, Prof. O. Ojowu Chief Consultant, Prppcom-Maikarfi, Director FISS, Engr. O.B Jatto.

Captains of the fertilizer industry, Farmer associations, Civil Society Organizations, Print and Electronic Media, distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

I wish to congratulate the Feed the Future Implementing Partners: IFPRI and MSU, IFDC, CRS, Chemonics and NEXTT for organizing this First Policy Dialogue on Bringing Balanced Fertilizers to the Nigerian Market: Policy and investment implications of soil and crop specific fertilizer blend-based technologies.

I am reliably informed that the workshop will discuss the policy and investment implications of promoting blended fertilizer-based productivity-enhancing technology packages in Nigeria. And that the outcome will provide a better understanding of the policy and investment implications as well as recommendations on ways to effectively coordinate the on-going related interventions by several partners.

Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen, recognising the need to support the realisation of the genetic potential of our increasingly high-yielding crop varieties being adopted by our numerous farmers with appropriate fertilizer, we have commenced the promotion of soil-specific fertilizer formulations in collaboration with IFDC Feed the Future and Agtho Fertilizer company based in Lafia, Nasarawa State to be used on the basis of the data available from our national soil fertility maps. This is because both genetic attributes and right soil nutrients needs to go hand-in-hand for optimal crop yields. Supplying the appropriate fertilizer blends in the desired dosage and on time is still a major challenge that we need to overcome.

We are therefore concerned about ensuring farmer access to fertilizer blends, improved seeds and other productivity-enhancing technologies at good prices. As part of our strategy, we want to bring the blending facilities close to the end users to reduce transaction costs and the ultimate prices of the fertilizer blends.

Our intervention is expected to stimulate farmers demand for special fertilizer blends and improved seeds, as we undertake aggressive enlightenment to teach farmers the imperative of supplying improved seeds suitable for the various agro-ecologies in the right quantities and on time to help farmers make good returns. Accordingly, the role of the National Agricultural Seed Council (NASC) in regulation and capacity building for the seed industry operators is crucial. Their interface with the private seed companies, research centres and other stakeholders will make a whole lot of difference.

I am pleased to be here with you today on the meeting of the First Policy Dialogue titled “Bringing Balanced Fertilizers to the Nigerian Market: Policy and investment implications of soil and crop-specific fertilizer blend-based technologies.” This gathering is an indication of the responsiveness of critical stakeholders to the policy of the federal government aimed at revolutionising soil fertility management and the fertilizer industry, with the ultimate goal of achieving sustainable food security and nutrition in Nigeria.

The Earth institute, Columbia University USA, with support from Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, has also established the African Soil Information Service (AFSIS) to create a digital soil map of Africa. This will make it easier to precisely determine soil health status of vast land areas to improve soil fertility management interventions. Nigeria has established the Nigeria Soil Information System (NISIS) as a complement to the African Soil Information System, (AFSIS) and a vital database for National development.

My Ministry is also partnering with Columbia University on the use of Soil Doctor – a revolutionary technology in the introduction of soil doctor into the Nigerian farming system. SoilDoc (Lab in a box) is a revolutionary new tool that will enable extension workers to make on-the spot diagnosis of soil constraints, allowing targeted recommendations to advise farmers in real – time. It uses state of the art battery-powered miniaturized instruments similar to those used in wet-chemistry labs. Results are sent to a virtual soil laboratory through SMS with an android tablet or phone, allowing targeted recommendations to advise farmers in real-time. In this way, farmers will be advised on the best management of their farm to increase production and apply costly fertilizers only where needed.

I’m much delighted to inform you that the Nigeria Institute of Soil Science (NISS) ACT was signed into law on 3rd of February, 2017 by the Presidency. The Institute is charged with the responsibility for regulating the profession of soil science and related matters. It is my

expectation that the Institute will serve as a “one stop shop” to coordinate all soil fertility/fertilizer-related interventions and data generation in the soil fertility space across Nigeria.

Today’s gathering should be a precursor to greater meetings that would establish a national platform for assembling stakeholders to discuss their various soil health projects

The current hike in price of fertilizer is as a result of security concerns as criminal elements are using its components to make bombs and other explosives. We are moving past that hurdle now. Government is already encouraging local blending through the Presidential Special Fertilizer Programme for local blending of one million tons of NPK blends. We are encouraging blenders to add secondary and micro-nutrients (SMNs) to their blends to satisfy the needs of crops and soils in different agro-ecologies. As these development takes place, it is expected that NASC as seed industry regulator and FEPSAN jointly with the National Fertilizer Technical Committee in their own capacity in the fertilizer industry to exercise their constitutional mandates on quality control.

Our role as a government is to facilitate the fertilizer value chain financing in collaboration with BOI, BOA and NIRSAL. We will rise above the present funding constraints for the industry and fertilizer will be in abundance for the farmers. We are convinced that we are not only aiming at satisfying Nigerian farmers’ needs, we will also make provision for our neighbouring countries that depend on us for agricultural inputs.

While we appreciate the work of our development partners, it is our hope that they will continue to fund the implementing partners to work with us at the federal and State levels in the areas of fertilizer and seed quality control, farmer education and agro-dealer capacity building. I am particularly pleased to learn that the implementing partners have sustainability in mind as they work with us and I encourage them to continue in this regard.

I am optimistic that the outcome of this policy dialogue here today will support our robust efforts to achieve abundance of food and sustainable livelihoods in the agricultural sector.

With these remarks, it’s my great honour and privilege to declare open the first edition of the **“Feed the Future Implementing Partners’ Policy Dialogue Series” with theme, “Bringing Balanced Fertilizers to the Nigerian Market: Policy and investment implications of soil and crop specific fertilizer blend-based technologies.**

I wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank You.

Chief Audu Ogbeh, OFR.