Collaborating Agencies To Boost Grain Storage

FROM NKECHI ONYEDIKA, ABUJA

A multi-agency collaboration is underway, aimed at fostering the adoption of an improved method of cowpea storage in Nigeria in which about 600,000 cowpea farmers are targeted to benefit.

The arrangement, known as PICS-RIU-ADP collaboration, now in its first year, is expected to grow in its impact to about one million farmers in the second year.

Under the collaboration, 200 communities in six northern states are to adopt the Purdue Improved Cowpea Storage (PICS) method, which has already been extended to 20 states in the country.

Parties to the collaboration include two international development programmes, namely, the Research Into Use Programme funded by the United Kingdom's Department For International Development (DFID-UK) and the Purdue Improved Cowpea Storage (PICS) Programme funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in partnership with the Purdue University in the United States. Other parties include the Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs) from Bauchi, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano and Katsina states, and selected private sector actors.

The PICS specified triple bagging method is a non-chemical method of cowpea storage which effectively protects cowpea from weevil infestation.

Under the collaboration, the production and supply chain for the specified PICS storage bags would be carried out by the private sector; the rural extension and awareness campaigns will be carried out by the respective ADPs through 120 extension agents who are to be selected and trained in the selected states.

The ADPs will also designate desk officers to supervise and monitor the adoption of the storage method and collect data as required by both the PICS and the RIU programmes. The RIU-Nigeria programme will cover the cost of training 20 extension agents in each of the selected states, as well as the cost of replicating the training in ten communities by each extension agent. The 120 extension agents are
additions to the 1,000 extension agents already trained under the PICS programme which is currently running in 20 states. The PICS Programme is implemented in Nigeria through the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Kano station.

These plans were disclosed by Dr. Utang P. Ugbe, the Country Coordinator of the RIU Programme in Nigeria at a meeting attended by representatives of the selected state ADPs, the PICS Programme, and private sector actors in Abuja on Thursday.

Citing reported cases of human fatalities and other serious public health issues that have resulted in previous years from the use of chemical preservatives on stored cowpea in the country, Dr Ugbe argued that "there are strong economic, environmental and public health objectives for promoting the large-scale adoption of effective non-chemical storage and preservation of harvested cowpea in Nigeria."

He pointed out that "RIU-Nigeria believes that the triple bagging method developed at Purdue University in the USA is a worthy research output which should be put into use in order to prevent the economic losses to cowpea farmers and marketers from weevil infestation". He added that small-scale farmers are pivotal partners in the effort to alleviate poverty, sustainably manage renewable natural resources and promote local economic development by boosting agricultural productivity in Nigeria. "Post-harvest losses in cowpea storage," he said, "must be eradicated in Nigeria if all it takes is a simple, non-chemical storage method which is affordable, reusable and locally produced".