

## Congo Woos South Africa Farmers With Huge 10-Million-Hectare Deal

Written by Rudi Prinsloo  
Friday, 17 April 2009 05:01 -

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In the biggest land deal in recent African history, the Republic of Congo has offered 10 million hectares of farmland to farmers from South Africa.

South African farm union AgriSA told the German Press Agency dpa the government of the country also known as Congo Brazzaville wanted to improve food security.

Until now, Congo - which like the bigger Democratic Republic of Congo has been beset by political and ethnic tension in recent years - has had to import 99 per cent of its food, mainly from France, Theo de Jager, deputy president of AgriSA, said.

The South African farmers will be able to lease the land for 99 years for free, de Jager said.

Other enticements include a five-year "holiday" on corporation tax and the dismantling of taxes on the import of agricultural inputs, such as seeds, fertilizer and machines, de Jager said.

The farmers will be allowed to take all their profits out of the country and, although the project is being billed a food security initiative, are under no obligation to sell their output on the domestic market, he added.

But, de Jager assured, "there is little danger that a large part of the food produced will leave the country again."

"The food prices on local markets in the Congo are high. Hence, it will be more attractive for farmers to sell their products there," he said.

A delegation of five farmers is in the country for further discussions on the project, AgriSA said. Some 1,300 farmers have shown interest in transplanting themselves, the union said.

The first farmers are expected to settle in the country after June. Amongst other things, they will grow maize, soya, cotton and coffee. Poultry and cattle farms are planned as well.

If it goes ahead on the proposed scale, the project would take up a huge chunk of land in the country, which is a fraction the size of the better-known Democratic Republic of Congo. Similar projects involving respectively South Korean and Chinese companies in Madagascar and Zambia this year have caused controversy locally.

Congo Brazzaville's total surface area is 340,000 square kilometres. Ten million hectares is equivalent to 100,000 square kilometres or around 30 per cent of all land.

Source : Sapa-dpa /yj/clh  
Date : 16 Apr 2009 15:01