

# Agriculture, agro-processing dev't key to nation's economy

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ADDIS ABABA -- The Ministry of Industry said the government has been exerting effort towards the development of the agriculture and agro-processing which is key to the economic and social development of the country.

Opening an International Conference on Wheat, Flour and Pasta, Industry State Minister Dr. Mebrahtu Melese yesterday noted that over the last eight years the nation registered double digit economic growth in which agriculture played a leading role. However, the productivity of the sector is still low and thus, requires an immediate dramatic overhaul from its current level of productivity.

He further explained that though there is a vast opportunity for wheat production in Ethiopia the government is still striving to meet the demand gap through importing a lot. This needs to be reversed soon with committed efforts and using all possible interventions.

The entire wheat sector has to undertake transformation to provide the people of Ethiopia with adequate food. At the same time tremendous business

opportunities are emerging both in crop production and the agro-processing sector.

Representing Oromia State Government Abébe Deriba said that the State is characterized by diverse agro-ecology and it grows a variety of crops. For instance, in the previous year it produced 125.4 million quintals of grain which amounts to 50 per cent of the whole national grain production. In case of wheat the 2013/14 post harvest estimate showed that Oromia produced 23.1 million quintals which is nearly 62 per cent of the national wheat produce. The three largest wheat-producing zones of the country are found in the State. The wheat value chain development strategy is one of the transformation agendas which is underway in collaboration with the Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA).

He also said that in the State there is agriculture-based cluster which is engaged in agro-industrial sub-sector so as to interconnect and build value chain to address challenges and tap opportunities. The promotion of such clusters has various advantages for the sector.

The conference was organized jointly by the Ethiopian Miller Association and Ethiopian-Italian Cooperation.