

Source Xinhua le 27/02/2021

Feature: Malawi's cotton production affected by COVID-19



A farmer sprays pesticide chemicals in a cotton field in Chikwawa, Malawi, on Feb. 25, 2021. Cotton production in Malawi has gone down with the effects of COVID-19. According to experts, over 10,000 farmers in Malawi have abandoned cotton production this year due to lack of loans and last year's poor market prices influenced by COVID-19. (Photo by Joseph Mizere/Xinhua)

CHIKWAWA, Malawi, Feb. 27 (Xinhua) -- Cotton production in Malawi has gone down with the effects of COVID-19.

According to experts, over 10,000 farmers in Malawi have abandoned cotton production this year due to lack of loans and last year's poor market prices influenced by COVID-19.

Charles Zalimba, 44, who has been growing cotton since 2004 said that the practice has been going up and down for years but the situation worsened last year because he produced a lot of cottons but it was bought at a cheaper price.

According to him, despite a bumper harvest, many cotton buyers did not show up due to COVID-19 preventive measures which had restricted them from traveling into the country. Zalimba is worried that the trend may continue in this year's marketing season.

"Every year we hope for better prices, now that the pandemic's restrictions are still in practice, it is more likely that most farmers will just settle for the price like last year," he said.

"For example, last year, many farmers produced a lot of quality cottons but the produce was sold at a cheaper price than expected and other farmers sold their harvest on loans, a development which has discouraged many farmers to continue with cotton this year," he said.

Zalimba is one of the farmers in the Chikwawa growing cotton this year hoping that this year's cotton prices are going to be better just like every year.

Francis Mastara, Cotton Officer for Chikwawa District told Xinhua in an interview that the cotton industry in the district has been affected since last growing season in a context that market arrangement was highly affected because donors could not reach the buyers because of COVID-19.

According to Mastara, some farmers in the district are still keeping last season's cotton because they had no market.

"Many farmers have turned down cotton production because of the prices which buyers were offering per kilogram last year, most prices were lower below the gross margin, as a result, farmers were making losses," he added.

He further added that dissemination of information to the farmers was affected by COVID-19 traveling restrictions which also resulted in poor management of the crop.

"Since mass gatherings were restricted, farmers could not meet at one place to receive new information from Agriculture Extension Workers, this also has affected cotton production," he said.

Meanwhile, farmers are asking for more support from the local and international cotton buyers to come in loans and to set better buying prices considering the fact the cotton production is expensive and it involves a lot.

In his words, Antony Sinali, a cotton farmer in Chikwawa has asked Chinese investors to consider buying cotton in Malawi in order to expand the production of cotton in Malawi. Antony believes that Chinese buyers can bring a change in the market.

Cotton in Malawi is an important part of the agricultural history in the country. For years, it has remained an important earner of foreign exchange.