

Dear Ladies and Gentleman,

On behalf of the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture & Innovation and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Cairo, I welcome you all to the Seminar “Rice Straw to Business”.

Economic ties between Egypt and the Netherlands have strengthened considerably in foreign direct investment (FDI) and trade in recent decades. The Netherlands holds the 4th FDI position of all EU countries and the 7th position worldwide of investors in Egypt. FDI is concentrated in sectors such as agriculture, horticulture, water, logistics and transport, oil and gas.

The Netherlands belongs to the top 4 EU investors in Egypt and in FY 2009/10 trade volume topped \$2 billion, making the Netherlands the 6th largest EU trading partner with Egypt. Dutch exports to Egypt are concentrated in sectors such as machinery and transport equipment, chemical products, food products and live animals, metal ore and wastage, office equipment and automation. The main import products from Egypt are mineral fuels and agricultural products.

Both countries have developed very good ties in the agriculture sector over the years, but with changing needs and new challenges facing the agriculture sector in Egypt and Dutch innovative technologies that can be utilized in a Government To Government or Business to Business approach, the current seminar presents a good opportunity to develop these new opportunities.

Ladies and gentlemen

Today’s seminar is jointly organised by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Egypt, and Wageningen University in the Netherlands. In addition, support for the seminar was given by the Egyptian Academy for science research and technology and other Egyptian knowledge institutions and organisations.

This seminar forms part of the Policy-supporting research programme of the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture & Innovation.

Within this programme, small grants provided for 1 – 2 year projects. The projects are intended as seed money to initiate larger projects for collaboration between the Netherlands and other countries, including Egypt. The present project started in 2009 with a large seminar on an overview of current and promising ways of beneficial use of rice straw. The initial wish was formulated by the Ministry of Environmental Affairs in order to tackle the infamous “black clouds” resulting from uncontrolled rice straw burning in the Nile Delta. Since the initial seminar, together with several partners from institutes, universities and the private sector, the research team at Wageningen University, under the leadership of Dr. Rob Bakker, was working out promising path ways, which will be presented today.

The objectives of this seminar are threefold:

1. To share the results of the Research project “Alternative concepts and technologies for beneficial utilisation of rice straw”, carried out by Wageningen UR,
2. To review other potential applications for rice straw within Egypt and abroad,
3. To accelerate knowledge transfer and commercialisation of new technologies by facilitating greater exchange among private sector involved in for agricultural waste management.

Much of the agricultural by-product streams in Egypt are not used economically. Probably the most prominent example of this is rice straw which when burned is simply creating an economic waste and a lot of environmental pollution.

An integrated approach on the farmer’s level is needed by which a closed system is pursued in order to make optimal efficient use of agricultural produce and byproducts.

In view of the actual rising food prices, high population growth rate, and higher energy prices in Egypt, efficiency and improvement of the whole production chain process becomes more important. In this

context, the beneficial re-use of agricultural waste will be economically profitable for both the farmer and the industry, environmentally sound by better use of biomass (bio-based economy), and socially rewarding as human health quality is improved due to reductions in large scale rice straw burning leading to lower air pollution in Cairo and other areas.

Ladies and gentlemen

There are many potential sustainable solutions for rice straw, such as converting it into building materials, biofuels, compost, feed, and mulch. On all these, and other, solutions more information will be presented at this seminar.

Linking traditional Knowledge, science and new research and innovation is very important to generate new ideas and technological breakthroughs

The Netherlands can be a reliable partner in the development and implementation of agricultural waste management.

I want to refer you to the Dutch embassy website where you will find the grants and technical assistance instruments offered by the Dutch Government.

I wish you all a very fruitful and successful seminar.