

All set for 2017 Nutritious Food Fair

Attracting thousands of participants in the public and private sectors annually, the 2017 edition of Nutritious Food Fair will open on November 28 through 30 at Michael Okpara Square, Enugu, in partnership with Enugu State SME centre, Federal Ministries of Agriculture, Health, Education, Budget and Planning. Over ten thousand participants will attend this year's event to exhibit nutritious food products, strengthen business skills and linkages, identify new partners, communicate brands for enhanced marketing and participate in a host of competitions targeted at promoting the consumption of nutritious foods by Nigerians. Participants will include farmers, processors, marketers and consumers of nutritious foods. Others include food industries, seed companies, input dealers, research institutions and students. One of the objectives of NFF 2017 is to create 3000 new job opportunities in the nutritious food sector.

Today's food is highly essential for tomorrow's growth and we must begin to connect the dots between food, health and GDP growth for Nigeria, said Paul Ilona, the Country Manager for HarvestPlus. With increasing vulnerability to hidden hunger, a condition where people do not get enough essential vitamins and minerals in their daily diets, cases of disabilities associated with micronutrient deficiencies (poor immune system, low IQ, diarrhea, night blindness, anaemia etc) will continue to grow if not checked. In a country where about 50% of the population live in the rural areas, micronutrient malnutrition will lead to increased pressure on national health budgets and a weak labour force that cannot drive agricultural production to meet demands of the food and industrial sectors. The World Bank estimates that Nigeria loses about 450 billion naira in GDP annually due mostly to micronutrient deficiencies. HarvestPlus and partners in Nigeria are developing and promoting nutrient rich staple crops and foods as a complementary strategy to reduce micronutrient malnutrition.

According to Ilona, the nutritious Food Fair, which is gradually becoming the signature event in the food industry, has recorded a year-on-year 25 percent growth in the number of exhibitors, and some 50% growth in the number of participants during the past three years. This year's fair, which will feature exhibitions from different parts of the country, will contribute to increasing the production, value addition, marketing and consumption of more nutritious foods particularly those made from biofortified staple crops such as vitamin A cassava, vitamin A maize and orange sweet potato; and lay a foundation for the introduction of zinc rice, iron sorghum and iron millet.

In addition to showcasing the opportunities for engaging small, medium and large-scale investors in the country, the Fair will engage Master Trainers to mentor participants and provide post-training technical support. Participants will acquire new knowledge and business guides on best farming practices by commercial farmers, best processing practices by medium and large-scale processors, access to micro-credit by banks, access and use of inputs by agri-input dealers, product distribution by food industries and equipment use/maintenance by fabricators. Knowledge and business guides for sustainable and profitable investments will be articulated in specialized seminars for business enthusiasts.

The most attractive segment of the Food Fair is the fun to catch. Consumers will find a world of nutritious food and drink options, traditional and masquerade dances, including special events such as the grand finale of NutriQuiz competition for secondary schools, NutriYield competition for farmers and NutriCook competition for caterers. In addition, the largest nutritious cassava dish in the world will be unveiled for a Guinness record and a new platform for women called 'SMART MOTHER' will be launched to give women a voice in nutrition.

The Food Fair has become an annual flagship event of HarvestPlus Nigeria and one that many people nationwide look forward to. In due course, the annual food fair can be expected to enhance the Nation's tourism product and strengthen its culinary and hospitality sector. Everyone can be part of NFF 2017. Just register online at www.nutritiousfoodfair.org to attend for free.

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ABOUT US:

HarvestPlus leads a global effort to improve nutrition and public health by developing and disseminating staple food crops that are rich in vitamins and minerals. We work with public and private sector partners in more than 40 countries. HarvestPlus is part of the CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH) which helps realize the potential of agricultural development to deliver gender-equitable health and nutritional benefits to the poor.

HarvestPlus has worked closely with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD), Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH), International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI) and twenty delivery partners to release six vitamin A rich varieties of both cassava and maize currently cultivated by over 1,000,000 farmers. In addition, two varieties of orange-fleshed sweet potato (OFSP) and high-iron sorghum have been released by the International Potato Centre (CIP) and ICRISAT respectively to strengthen the nutritious food basket. In the near future, other staple crops like pearl millet, cowpea, plantain / bananas will be biofortified to further increase access to vitamin A and Iron to consumers.