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is ranching.

"We are aware that the Federal Government, especially the Ministry of Agriculture, has come up with what we call cattle colonies, and we want Kogi State to pilot this particular programme. We are very confident that with the peaceful co-existence in Kogi State, we are going to drive it and make it a model that other states and even other countries will copy from us. We will make it another form of agricultural activity for our teeming youths that are already engaged. Some are engaged, and we can engage them even more in the production of livestock dairy and the rest."

**Experts speak**

Dr Innocent Okuku, an agricultural consultant, said the cattle colony system was a welcome development. He said it would guarantee the health of the animals, beef quality, and better management of the population of animals, with a lower risk of conflict between herdsman and farmers.

Okuku said although he was not aware of a professional term in livestock farming called 'cattle colony', the explanation given by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development on its meaning and mode of operation showed in principle that it was a good model for the country. He, however, stressed that utmost consideration should be given to the social side of the programme.

He explained that in principle, cattle colony is very similar to ranching; the only difference is that in ranching, the farmer acquires the land, whereas for the colony, government provides the land. He advised government to work out a mechanism that would require the original owners of the land to either agree to let the land be available or get compensated, especially if that is going to affect their economic activity.

"If you look at the setting of our nation today, basically, the greatest asset any rural dweller would say they have is land, so that's why it's a sensitive subject. Government needs to find a way around it such that people whose land would be used for that purpose are sufficiently happy about it.

"The quality of beef from nomadic animals is poor. Because of the physical exercise the animals are involved in, their tissues are always tough; it's not steak beef.

"Nigeria is very big in fish production because we moved from capture to culture fisheries. It is the same thing in poultry because we moved from free range system to intensive broiler and egg production," he explained.

He stressed on the need for government to carry out a proper analysis on the level of

## Cattle colonies: How FG plans to end farmers-herders clash



■ Cows in search of food

subsidy required so that it doesn't become another burden like what we had in the petroleum sector.

The agricultural consultant also pointed out that for the programme to be effective, certain questions need to be answered, such as: "What is the time cycle? Are the owners of the lands giving them out on lease for the programme, and for how long? Is there a business model? Would the land be sufficient for grazing?"

He further explained that there's a ratio

of hectareage for grazing per animal, which is different from a situation where the animals are kept and fed in a pen. He, therefore, urged the Federal Government to properly iron out the mode of operation so that it doesn't become a source of conflict.

According to him, it is an enormous task that poses a great difficulty - being able to create enough colonies for all the cattle available in the country.

Dr Okuku further said the nomadic cattle rearing system involved border crossing;

hence all the cattle coming to graze in Nigeria's grasslands do not necessarily belong to Nigerians.

He asked, "How is the government going to conduct the right census for cattle; or what cattle should we actually think of creating colonies for? In other words, what cattle actually belong to the Fulani who are Nigerians? This is because the Fulani cut across several countries in West Africa, and the borders are not limited.

"If you create a colony system, what quantity of animals are you supposed to be responsible for as a government should every Fulani man agree to bring his animals to the cattle colony?"

He noted that proper evaluation should be carried out before such policy is put in place because livestock intensification relates to higher productivity.

Also, Dr Aliyu Ramalan, a veterinary medical doctor, urged the Federal Government to properly demarcate and authenticate the lands donated by the 16 states so that it won't be a source of future conflict between farmers and herders.

He said the technical requirement of maintaining cattle colonies was enormous, requiring a lot of work.

"First of all, you have to think about the area being donated and how much animals it can carry. You will consider wet and dry season grazing. You will also think of how much is required to improve the land. There's a lot of work to be done," he said.

He further noted that the whole process would take years; as such, for the programme to be successful, livestock owners, farmers and the general public have to exercise patience.

"To get 5,000 hectares in any area that is not inhabited by anybody is not going to be easy. But where that occurs, the procedure allows you to create enclaves. You can have farmers who can exist in the same grazing colony with livestock owners; but this is part of the future problem the Federal Government is going to face," he warned.

He said there was the need for cattle herders to interact with farmers and other people who have access to the markets.

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■ A herder moves his animal in search of grass in Nasarawa State