

## **Keynote Speech by Minister Arefaine Berhe at the National Wheat and Maize Conference**



Mr. Chairman!

Honorable Ministers!

Honorable Governors!

Excellences Ambassadors!

UN Resident Coordinator and Heads of UN agencies!

Senior officials from ASARECA, VITA International, SSG, ICARDA and CIMMYT!

Deans of Colleges and High Government officials!

Distinguished participants from outside Eritrea!

Invited guests!

Ladies and Gentlemen!

All protocols observed!

At the outset I warmly welcome you all, and especially those coming from outside Eritrea, to this maiden conference on wheat and maize. However, as 2023 is the year of millets please allow me to digress a bit from the main theme. In the Eritrean context, the most cultivated and consumed crop is sorghum which is a relative of millets. The other widely and commonly used crops are pearl millet and finger millet. Millets, as we all know, have been an integral part of our civilization for centuries nourishing a large part of humanity. These humble grains are known for their nutritional value, adaptation to diverse climate with minimal requirement for water and inputs.

### Distinguished Participants

Coming back to the theme of today's conference on wheat and maize, the reason why we are focusing on these crops is because of their significant importance. Wheat and maize are undeniably essential grains serving as staples for millions of people, not only in our continent but all over the world. These crops play a vital role in food security, nutrition and economic stability. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that we address the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in the cultivation and utilization of wheat and maize.

### Distinguished participants

In this conference, we have the opportunity to delve into various topics concerning these crops. We will explore advanced farming techniques, innovative technologies and sustainable practices that can enhance productivity while minimizing the negative impact on our environment. Additionally, we will discuss the utilization of wheat and maize in diverse sectors such as food processing, animal feed and bio-fuel production.

One of the key issues we need to address is the impact of climate change on wheat and maize production. As we witness the changing patterns of weather and increasingly unpredictable conditions, it is crucial to identify resilient varieties, improve irrigation techniques, and promote climate-smart agricultural practices. Through collaboration and knowledge sharing, we can equip ourselves to mitigate the risks and adapt to new challenges.

Furthermore, we must embrace research and development to enhance the quality and nutritional value of wheat and maize. It is our responsibility to ensure that these crops not only meet the growing demand but also provide vital nutrients for a healthy population. By investing in research, we can fortify these grains with essential vitamins and minerals, combat malnutrition, and contribute to the overall well-being of humanity.

### Distinguished Participants

Another aspect we will explore is the role of technology in modernizing wheat and maize production. From precision agriculture to AI-driven analytics, technology holds the potential to optimize yields, minimize resource wastage, and enhance profitability for farmers. Let us embrace these innovation and empower our farmers with the necessary tools and knowledge to thrive in a rapidly evolving farming landscape.

Additionally, empowering small-scale farmers, particularly women and youth, is crucial for the future of wheat and maize farming. Providing access to finance, training, information, and resources will enhance their productivity, livelihoods and overall well-being. These farmers are the backbone of rural communities, and their success is intertwined with the success of the entire wheat and maize sector.

As we conclude this conference, let us remember that wheat and maize are not merely crops; they represent livelihoods, traditions, and cultures across the globe. By prioritizing sustainable practices, investing in research and development, and fostering collaboration, we can chart a path towards a resilient, inclusive, and prosperous future for wheat and maize production.

Together, let us commit to safeguard the legacy of wheat and maize, ensuring food security for generations to come, and building a world where no one goes to bed hungry.

### Distinguished Participants

As I mentioned in the introduction, wheat and maize are not among the primary staple crops in Eritrea. However, these grains are very important for commercial and household bread, almost throughout the country. Of course, the one important factor that should be taken into account is that they need, at least, supplementary irrigation, adequate fertilizer and proper cultural practices for good production of, at least, 6 tons per hectare.

At this point in time let me acknowledge the contribution of ICARDA for the initial introduction and development of several wheat varieties working very closely with our National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI). I would also like to recognize the Seed Systems Group (SSG) for their tangible contribution in wheat and maize development over the last three years. VITA international with its national counterpart EIDP have also played a significant role in wheat development. Self-Help Africa also made contribution in wheat development.

ASARECA's contribution in these two crops also deserves recognition. Sincere acknowledgements also goes to researchers joining us from Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Cameroon.

I also extend a special gratitude to CIMMYT for supplying the lines required to produce hybrid maize. Thanks to this collaboration, Eritrea through NARI and progressive farmers, is producing its own hybrid maize for the first time.

Distinguished participants

This maiden conference is bringing together outstanding researchers and practitioners from inside and outside Eritrea. During the next three days we expect stimulating presentations and discussion as well as field visits which will be the basis for articulating the policy and strategy on wheat and maize development in Eritrea.

In conclusion, I commend the organizing committee and Asmara palace management for a job well done.

I thank you for your attention

**September 20, 2023**

