EU launches 7.5m euros .......

By NKOLE CHITALA

THE European Union (EU) has launched a two-year agricultural project valued at 7.5 million euros (K51 billion equivalent) to improve food production in Zambia.

Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives Brian Chituwo said the project will help mitigate the impact of soaring prices of agricultural commodities on the production capacity of small-scale farmers.

Dr Chituwo said the project will support 58,000 small-scale farmers in five provinces to increase agricultural productivity and production through the adoption of conservation farming.

He was speaking at the launch of the stakeholders’ workshop of the “Farmer Input Support Response Initiative (FISRI)” to rising prices of agricultural commodities in Zambia in Lusaka yesterday.

Dr Chituwo said Government has also expanded coverage of beneficiaries of the farmer input support programme as a response to rising food and commodity prices.

He said enhancing agricultural production, increasing farm income and accelerating agricultural growth through conservation agriculture are critical given the challenges facing the world in general and the Zambian community in particular.

The minister also thanked EU and the FAO for the support given to small-scale farmers.

He assured stakeholders that MACO would effectively execute its roles in the implementation of the project to ensure that it attains its set goals and objectives.

And EU delegation leader, Derek Fee said the commission is committed to supporting Zambia’s agricultural sector and Government’s diversification programme.

Dr Fee said the project will complement the ongoing support to MACO extension services in Western and North-Western provinces including conservation farming projects financed by the Royal Norwegian Embassy.

Dr Fee said the farmer Input Support Response Initiative (FISRI) will be implemented by the FAO and Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MACO).

The programme is aimed at improving access to agricultural inputs and services by local farmers, promoting conservation farming and developing small-scale irrigation.

He said through the use of input vouchers, the project will also strengthen the private sector involvement in input supply. This will be a pilot for other input support programmes to be introduced by Government.

“This project is key to us, FAO and MACO and we will monitor it closely,” Dr Fee said.
EC has allocated 16.3 million Euros to Zambia out of which 7.5 million would be used for the FISRI, 3 million euros for non-state actor and 5.8 million euros through additional budget support.

The two-year programme will be implemented through the FAO and MACO and aims at improving access to agricultural inputs and services, promoting conservation agriculture and developing small-scale irrigation.

Meanwhile, FAO representative Noureddin Mona said his organisation is committed to working with Government to ensure success of the project.

Mr Mona said the project will address soil erosion, declining soil fertility, lack of working capital and training in improved agricultural systems such as conservation agriculture.