

## China serves as important tobacco market for Zimbabwe: official

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*Tobacco auction floor workers are seen during the opening of the 2024 tobacco marketing season in Harare, Zimbabwe, on March 13, 2024. (Photo by Shaun Jusa/Xinhua)*

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HARARE, May 16, 2024 (Xinhua) -- China remains an important destination for Zimbabwean tobacco leaves, accounting for more than 60 percent of the country's leaf exports worldwide, a Zimbabwean minister said on Wednesday.

Responding to a question from Xinhua on the sidelines of the inaugural World Tobacco Africa Conference and Expo, which kicked off in the national capital of Harare on Wednesday [15 May], Zimbabwean Minister of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development Anxious Masuka hailed China's contribution to the revival of Zimbabwe's tobacco leaf production over the past two decades.

He particularly praised Tian Ze Tobacco Company, a subsidiary of China Tobacco, for its efforts to boost tobacco leaf production in the southern African country.

The Chinese company started tobacco contract farming in Zimbabwe in 2005, with the purpose of helping to revive the country's tobacco output. Through its support over the years, Zimbabwe's tobacco

leaf output has gradually increased, surpassing the previous record of 231 million kg to reach a new record of 296 million kg in 2023.



*Workers harvest tobacco at Little North Farm in Norton town, Zimbabwe, on Jan. 8, 2024. (Photo by Shaun Jusa/Xinhua)*

"Tobacco production plummeted to below 50 million kg in 2004 as a result of the skills flight and new skills coming in as a result of the land reform program. It was at this stage that we introduced a dual marketing system, which allowed the contract system to be introduced and work alongside the auction marketing system," the minister said.

"Tian Ze came to Zimbabwe and started to invest in contract production, and they paid premium prices for the varieties, and that has resulted in an average annual increase in the prices paid to tobacco farmers, which has ensured that there is better profitability for tobacco farmers, and consequently attracted more farmers," Masuka added. "As a result, over 60 percent of what we produce is destined for this market, and so we see China as an important destination for our tobacco."

He said the Zimbabwean government is exploring discussions with Chinese tobacco buyers on the feasibility of adding value to some of the tobacco they import from Zimbabwe.



*A farmer checks on her tobacco before an auction at the Tobacco Auction Floors in Harare, Zimbabwe, March 9, 2023. (Photo by Shaun Jusa/Xinhua)*

This came as Zimbabwe is pushing for more value addition to tobacco leaves to boost revenue generation.

Tobacco is an important economic activity for the smallholder sector in Zimbabwe and some other African countries, where the majority of producers are smallholder farmers. Zimbabwe, known for growing highly flavored Virginia tobacco, has set a goal to increase production to 300 million kg by 2025.

There is an opportunity for Zimbabwe to further increase the volume of tobacco leaf output due to the current shortage of flavor styles in the world, Masuka added.

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