

Daily Graphic, Thursday, December 15, 2005

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GROWING SAFE VEGETABLES

THE Food and Agriculture Ministry and the International Water Management Institute are collaborating to ensure that fresh vegetables produced in urban areas meet food safety standards.

Food safety is so crucial that any group of people who do not pay attention to it will be inflicting serious health problems on themselves.

The particular problem that prevails in our urban areas is that vegetable producers use polluted water to grow their vegetables without thinking about the hazards that they pose to the health of consumers.

Sometime back, Dr Leticia Obeng, an Aquatic Biologist, vehemently protested against the use of water from the gutters on fruits and vegetables planted in gardens along the major roads within the cities.

Significantly, it is said that urban agriculture produces about 70 per cent of vegetables consumed in the cities. This is all the more reason why particular attention should be paid to the safety of the vegetables.

Many of the gardeners know nothing about the implications of using the polluted water on their produce.

Little do they know about the harm that lead poison could cause the unsuspecting consumers.

Additionally, many of the vegetable pro-

ducers do not know that the application of agro-chemicals on their produce needs to conform to the manufacturer's instructions.

If they should be taught about the implications, especially the serious health hazard that the chemical deposit on the produce could cause the consumer, may be, they would be more predisposed to go by the manufacturer's instructions.

By all indications, the role of vegetable gardeners is expected to increase and every support must thus be given to them.

Perhaps, that explains why the Finance and Economic Planning Minister, Mr Kwadwo Baah-Wiredu, toured the gardens of some of the producers in Accra a couple of months ago.

It should be possible to produce fresh vegetables that meet international standards for both local consumption and for export.

Such effort will require the co-operation of all agencies connected with the venture.

District and metropolitan assemblies have a singular role to support the vegetable producers, just as agricultural extension officers have to help them undertake sound agronomic practices.

It will also be necessary for the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) to throw its weight behind the venture by setting the standards for the producers.

Certainly, the vegetable producers need money in their pockets for the work they are doing. However, the motive should not be on how to make money alone. The health of the consumer should be paramount and it should not be sacrificed.

Vegetables are essential to our diet. We deserve not just vegetables but safe vegetables, and nothing short of that.