PREAMBLE

The Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) in its quest to ensure resumption in the export of dried Hibiscus Flower from Nigeria to Mexico occasioned by suspension imposed on import from Nigeria in 2017, convened a meeting of relevant stakeholders to brainstorm and agree on the contentious issue of appropriate fumigant to use in fumigating the flower.

The Mexican authorities had requested the use of Methyl Bromide (MB) as the fumigant for any Hibiscus shipment from Nigeria, though the chemical is a banned item in Nigeria. The various stakeholders involved in the hibiscus export chain had given different interpretation to the use of MB as a fumigant, with some rejecting the use while some are not opposed to it usage. This has resulted in various advertorial and litigation on the use of MB as a fumigant.

The NEPC’s bid to ensure resumption of export of Hibiscus to Mexico necessitated the need to convene a meeting of the stakeholders (public and private) to resolve the issue surrounding use of MB.

ATTENDANCE

The meeting was attended by representatives from NEPC, Nigerian Agricultural Quarantine Services, Nigeria Mexico Chamber of Commerce, Association of Hibiscus Flower Exporters, Federal Produce, Federal Ministry of Environment and other stakeholders. The Federal Ministry of Environment was represented by the National Ozone Officer, Engr. Idris Abdullahi (AD, Ozone) and Yaru Nurudeen, SSO (Ozone)

OPENING

- Members at the meeting were self-introduced.

- The Director Product Development NEPC explained the origin of the suspension of export of hibiscus flower to Mexico, resulting in presence of a specific pest in some consignment. The efforts of the Council, NAQS and other stakeholders to resolve the issue and the resulting agreement with the Mexican authorities were enumerated.
- The ED/CEO was represented by the Director Policy & Strategy, Mr. Sidi-Aliyu, who also highlighted the series of activities and efforts geared at ensuring that the export suspension is lifted. The remarks was concluded with a plea to parties to shelve their interest and put the economic interest of Nigeria as foremost, to ensure resumption of exports.

**DELIBERATIONS**

- The DG NAQS explained his constraint to delve further into the issue because of a subsisting litigation on the matter, as one of the parties had gone to court and NAQS is joined as a party.

- The President Nigeria-Mexico Chamber of Commerce enumerated the various activities embarked upon to ensure that export of hibiscus to Mexico resumes, this has culminated in the signing of an agreement between both parties. The agreement stipulates the protocols and steps that must be followed prior to shipment and specified the use of Methyl Bromide (MB) as preferred fumigant.

- Participants requested to know if fumigation with MB can be done at the destination end (Mexico) and prevent its usage at origin (Nigeria), it was explained that the Mexican were adamant that MB be used as fumigant from origin.

- There was suggestion that Aluminium Phosphide (phostoxin) commonly used in Nigeria as fumigant be used for fumigating hibiscus to Mexico. The meeting was informed that the Mexican rejected any other fumigant except MB.

- The representative of the National Ozone Office in the Federal Ministry of Environment (FME) explained the global issue with use of MB. It was found to be a depleter of the ozone layer, its usage was expected to be phased out completely by 2015, but was exempted with conditionalities and control for some LDC as a controlled substance whose usage must be under strict monitoring.

- On the issues of MB being a banned chemical by NAFDAC in Nigeria, it was explained that series of communication between the FME and NAFDAC has straightened out the matter with reference to the conditional use of MB under the Montreal Protocol.
- The Montreal Protocol specified the situation that allowed the use of MB as a fumigant and under strict supervision, this is also allowed for fumigation of Hibiscus flower.

- The DG NAQS emphasised that MB will only be used for shipment to Mexico, the guideline and protocols for it usage has being developed and agreed, it will be done in enclosed chambers with protective clothing for the officers.

- Members agreed that with the enlightenment provided by the focal point FMEnv, there is a better knowledge of the use of MB as a fumigant.

RESOLUTIONS

The meeting after extensive deliberations agreed and resolved as follows:

(i) The aggrieved party that instituted the court case should be identified and parleyed, this will allow for a resolution of the crisis, the case settled out-of-court and lay to rest the issue of use of MB.

(ii) The focal point on issues relating to the Montreal Protocol in Nigeria, which is the Federal Ministry of Environment should make an official pronouncement on the use of Methyl Bromide as a fumigant.

(iii) The NAQS as the Competent Authority be allowed to carry out its mandate and provide the certified hibiscus exporters and suppliers with the agreed guidelines for export of the product to Mexico.

(iv) Parties involved in the hibiscus issue should shelve their various interest and ensure the national interest prevails; export of hibiscus to Mexico must resume by the commencement of new export season (November 2019) when all contending issues are expected to be resolved.