

Boost for mechanised agric

Story: Nehemia Owusu Achiaw, Tema

The country's quest to mechanise agricultural production has received a boost.

The President, Mr J.A. Kufuor, yesterday cut the sod for work to begin on a tractor assembly plant in Tema.

The project, estimated at \$1million, is expected to be completed by the end of the year and would create 100 jobs initially.

To be known as Farmtrac Tractors Assembly Plant (FAM), the venture is expected to assemble 10 tractors a day and about 2500 tractors annually.

The plant, which is a joint venture between Foundries and Agric Machinery (GH) Ltd and Escorts Limited of India, is programmed to market some of its products in other countries in the West African sub-region.

The plant, the first in Africa by Escorts Limited, a tractor and equipment giant in India, is expected to move from assembling tractors to the actual production of the equipment in Ghana in future.

Performing the sod-cutting ceremony, President Kufuor said although agriculture was the mainstay of the nation's economy, employing over 50 per cent of the population, productivity in the sector was seriously handicapped by lack of access to agricultural machinery, chemical inputs, credit, extension services and irrigation facilities.

In the face of those problems, the President said, much of the country's agriculture had remained at the subsistence level and that explained why many rural dwellers were poor.

The President said enhanced mechanisation would help to expand the area under cultivation, reduce drudgery and fatigue, make farming more appealing especially to the youth, and ensure food security for all.

Consistent with that objective, the President said, the government had

imported and sold over 3000 tractors to farmers at highly subsidised rates.

Additionally, 1600 pieces of lower capacity tractors and 326 power tillers have been imported from the Czech Republic and are currently being distributed in the country at a subsidised rates.

A further batch of 721 tractors is expected in the country by the close of the year.

President Kufuor said the Ministry of Agriculture was in the process of establishing mechanisation service centres across the country to improve farmers' access to tractors and other machinery.

In addition, he said, the reactivation of a Japanese grant would help the government to secure more tractors, power tillers, rice mills and water pumps at \$4million.

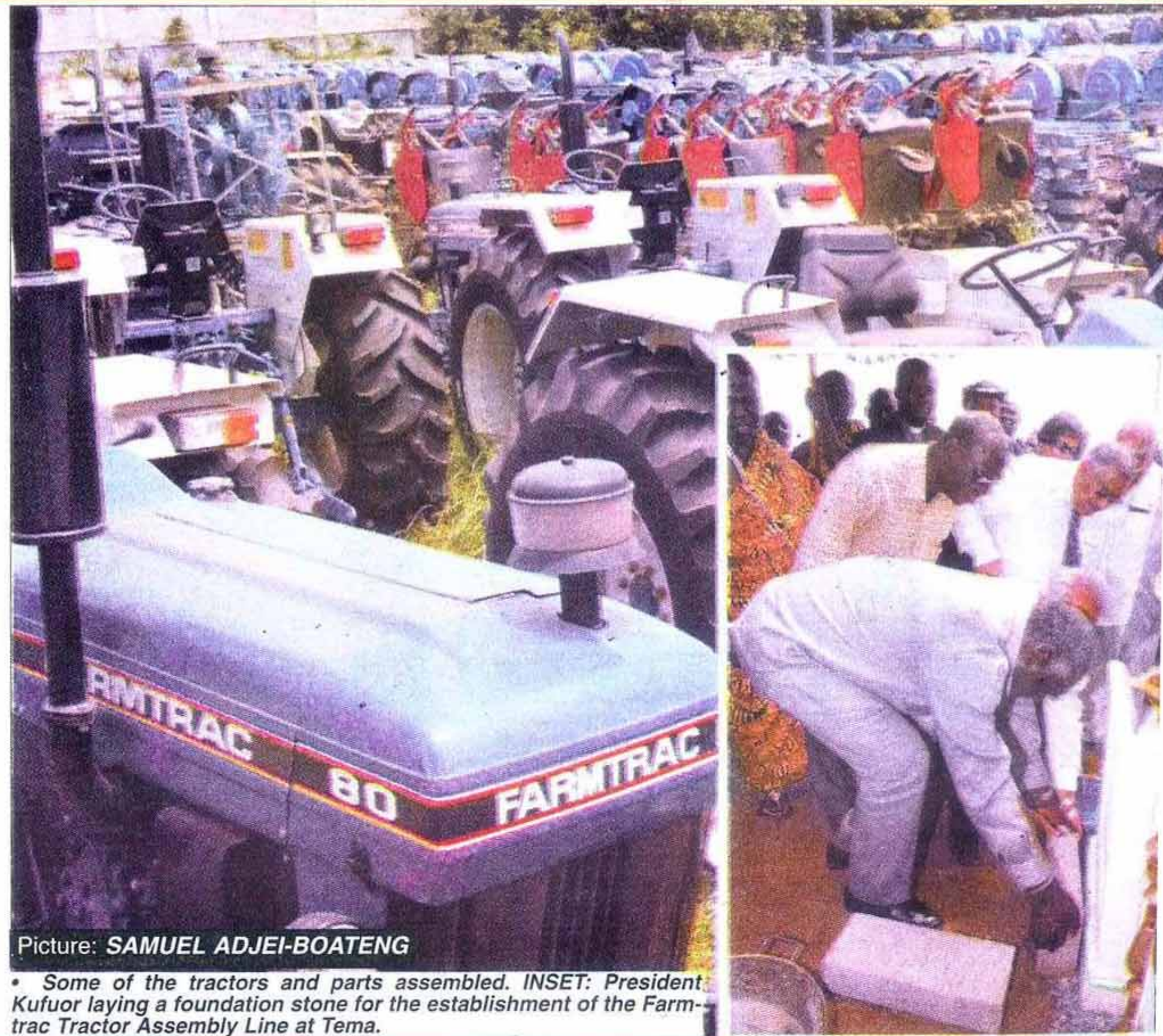
The Minister of Food and Agriculture, Mr Ernest Debrah, said the plant being established was a milestone in the modernisation of agriculture in Ghana.

He said climate changes being experienced in the world had made it imperative for the country to move quickly towards agricultural mechanisation.

The Managing Director of FAM, Mr Kamal Ram, said the establishment of the plant would pave the way for the setting up of technical capacity centres to provide small-scale metal fabrication and after-sale service to the public.

The Director of Exports of Escorts Limited, Mr R.K. Mehra, gave the assurance the company would establish a strong presence in Ghana and contribute towards the achievement of food security.

The Indian High Commissioner to Ghana, Mrs Ruchi Ghanashyam, said the project was a demonstration of the growing relations and co-operation between Ghana and India.



Picture: SAMUEL ADJEI-BOATENG

• Some of the tractors and parts assembled. INSET: President Kufuor laying a foundation stone for the establishment of the Farmtrac Tractor Assembly Line at Tema.

State burial fo