

Key takeaways

Rwanda was the first African country to adopt a national Circular Economy Action Plan, hosted the first World Circular Economy Forum held in Africa (both 2022).

Agri-food is Rwanda's largest economic sector, accounting for 25% of GDP and 43% of employment. Agro-Processing is the largest manufacturing subsector, with export revenues of USD 839 million in 2023.

A project-initiated Multi-Stakeholder Platform is key to integrate circular economy principles into the country's governing agricultural strategy.

New national standards for previously undefined circular products, such as organic fertiliser and Black Soldier Fly inputs, are opening market access that product quality alone could not secure.

Circular Economy Adoption in Rwanda's Agri-food Sector: Policy Levers and Lessons for SMEs



Rwanda's agri-food sector is the backbone of the national economy. The sector is characterised by high informality, reliance on imported chemical inputs, and limited value addition within domestic value chains. These structural conditions — combined with significant volumes of organic waste and agricultural residues — make the agri-food sector a strategic entry point for circular economy development. The findings and recommendations presented draw primarily on in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in Rwanda's agri-food ecosystem. For further detail and a comprehensive analysis, please see the [full case study](#).

Strong policy intent

Rwanda has established a strong policy foundation for circular economy, with circular economy principles embedded across national and sector strategies, [Rwanda's National Circular Economy Action Plan](#) (2022) targets the agrifood sector through five interventions spanning the full resource loop: subsidising organic fertilisers and biological inputs, valorising organic waste and reducing post-harvest losses, integrating urban and peri-urban food systems into national planning, equipping farmers with circular farming guidelines, and promoting cleaner, more circular water use across agriculture and industry. The agriculture sector's governing strategy ([PSTA-5](#)) sets its own targets, calling for PPP models that apply circular economy concepts — including insects, food waste, and hydroponics — as alternative sources of animal feed, and circular economy models that use animal waste integrated with plant production to provide affordable fish-feed.

Ecosystem collaboration

Rwanda's circular agrifood ecosystem is supported by a diverse set of internationally funded programmes. [Multi-stakeholder platforms](#) and sector coalitions play a critical role in linking policy and implementation by creating spaces for direct engagement between MSMEs, government, and development partners. [Research-led initiatives](#) have piloted and commercially validated innovations such as Black Soldier Fly processing and cassava peel valorisation. On the finance side, dedicated [green investment facilities](#) and [revolving loan funds](#), developed with international development partners, have opened new funding pathways for circular enterprises. Standards support programmes have reduced certification costs for smaller producers. Together, these programmes address the main barriers MSMEs face — access to finance, technical capacity, certification, and market development — though they remain largely donor-dependent and time-limited in design.

Certification and market dynamics

Standards and certification have proven a pivotal lever for circular agrifood market development in Rwanda. The Rwanda Standards Board has developed organic fertiliser standards and a Black Soldier Fly operating procedure directly in response to gaps identified through the CIRF multi-stakeholder platform. The standard support programme ([ZU programme](#)) has significantly reduced compliance costs that had previously placed certification beyond the reach of most MSMEs. The most consequential remaining constraint is structural rather than technical: as long as mineral fertiliser subsidies keep conventional inputs artificially cheap, certification alone cannot make circular organic products price-competitive — a gap the Circular Economy Action Plan anticipates but which has yet to be reflected in PSTA-5.

Emerging circular economy practices in Rwanda's agri-food sector



From pilots to policy

Rwanda's experience demonstrates that circular economy transitions in agrifood systems can advance when multi-stakeholder platforms, standards development, and policy reform reinforce one another — with platform-driven engagement already translating into new certification pathways, stronger MSME support, and mainstreaming of circular principles into the national agricultural strategy, offering a replicable model for other developing economies pursuing similar transitions.

This case study is taken from a longer study: African Circular Economy Network: Rotter, M., Esslinger, V., Nijman, E., Mutezo, G. (2026). [Circular Economy Adoption in Rwanda's Agri-food Sector: Policy Levers and Lessons for SMEs](#). See the DCED website for more resources on green private sector development: www.enterprise-development.org.