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DAFF to assist agricultural sector increase production

17TH MARCH 2017 BY: ANINE KILIAN - CONTRIBUTING EDITOR ONLINE

The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) plans to boost agricultural production, which was severely affected by the drought in recent years.

Addressing delegates at the Agricultural Research Symposium 2017 in Centurion, Gauteng, on Friday, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister **Senzeni Zokwana** noted that the drought had threatened to collapse the agricultural sector.

“The most vulnerable industry players are smallholder farmers who, through this catastrophe, lost their only dependable household income,” he said.

Zokwana pointed out that R212-million had been injected into the agricultural sector through a grant for drought relief.

He added that the grant was used to supply vulnerable farmers across the spectrum with animal feed, water infrastructure and other utilities.

“The drought . . . provided us with candid introspection. We are now more prepared and extra vigilant [to allow us to combat] natural

causes that have a negative impact on the sector, including foreign species that threaten our agricultural existence, such as the Fall Armyworm that has invaded crops throughout the [Southern African region],” he said.

He pointed out that a large number of small-scale and subsistence farmers had lost their maize crops to the pest, which wreaks havoc on crops if left to multiply.

Further, State-owned entities, including the Land Bank and the Industrial Development Corporation, will distribute R500-million to distressed farmers to manage their credit facilities and support soft loans.

Meanwhile, Zokwana pointed out that, through Operation Phakisa: Agriculture, which was launched by President **Jacob Zuma** in February, 450 black farmers will benefit from government’s commercialisation support programme and R2.5-billion will be made available for the provision of livestock feed and the refurbishment of boreholes.

Operation Phakisa: Agriculture will focus on agriculture, land reform and rural development. It is meant to enhance and transform the agricultural sector, while accelerating land reform.

The programme was launched under the theme ‘Transforming the Agricultural Sector towards an Inclusive Rural Economy’.

It previews existing producer support models as well as development finance models aimed at fast-tracking successful land reform to find workable solutions to the imperative of advancing land reform while not compromising food security.

“Government is committed to radical economic transformation and is especially focused on transforming the agricultural sector towards an inclusive rural economy.”

Zokwana noted that, although agricultural productivity had experienced low growth, it was showing positive signs of recovery.

“A lot of work has gone into ensuring South Africa unlocks its agricultural output,” he said.

He stated, however, that global political and economic trends had the potential to impair South Africa’s access to international markets.

“The furore over Brexit and the [uncertainty around the] African Growth and Opportunity Act are those nuances we should analyse,” Zokwana said.

He noted that he was positive that South Africa was increasing its access in these markets and that the improvement of trade among the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (Brics) member countries was fundamental to growing the industry’s exports.

“On average, South Africa’s agricultural exports to fellow Brics member countries is R2.7-billion, which is a comparatively small amount compared to agricultural imports by Brics countries into South Africa and Africa.

“I appeal to the sector to explore opportunities Brics member countries provide, Zokwana said.

He remarked that South Africa was recently granted an opportunity to export pigeon peas, pork, mangoes and persimmons to India. 🇮🇳

Phone: +27 (0)11 622 3744

Fax: +27 (0)11 622 9350

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