



MEDIA STATEMENT

AZOWEL PROJECT RECOVERING AFTER SEVERE HAIL STORM DAMAGE TO CROPS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

23 April 2023

KZN farms have suffered severe losses due to continuous inclement weather in the past two years and some farmers have not been able to resume production.

Those who have, are making progress even though the threat of hail storms and floods lurks in the air as a result of climate change.

On Tuesday, MEC Super Zuma visited Azowel Project, a farm in Camperdown which was heavily affected by the 2021 unrest and a hailstorm in 2023.

Azowel produces 20 000 tonnes of tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers combined in hydroponic tunnels and supplies to various markets. The business received funding to the value of R3,6 million from the KZN Department of Agriculture and Rural Development through its agency the Agribusiness Development Agency (ADA).

The company was originally located in KwaDukuza but operations came to a halt in July 2021 during the unrest. This led to at least 10 workers losing their jobs.

While the project was in its initial stages of recovery, the Province experienced flooding in April 2022 and Azowel was not spared. The business lost all its tunnels and vegetables and was left with no option but to relocate. Azowel then moved its operations to Camperdown in 2022.

The farm in Camperdown currently has 21 tunnels. Maximum capacity of each tunnel is 900 plants and 10 tunnels are currently in full production. The farm has received 4 500 peppers as well as 2 400 seedlings of tomatoes from the Department.

Welile Gumede, owner of the project, said the initial flooding in 2022 caused damage estimated to at least R2,9 million. During the unrest, she lost at least 10 staff members.

“At the time, we had managed to erect 20 tunnels at full capacity that were producing peppers. Just when we were trying to rebuild, the 2023 hail storm wiped out all our efforts. The damage last year set us back as we were unable to start with the production of cucumbers. Our tomatoes were completely damaged. Although we have made great progress at our new premises, we are hoping to maximise production by erecting a pack-house that will also assist with waste management at



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the farm. We are also in need of an irrigation system. But we are grateful to the government for the assistance we have received,” said Gumede.

MEC Zuma said the Department would continue working with Azowel until they were fully within commercial farming.

“I am pleased by the hard work that I see. We will do all we can to ensure that you reach your full potential,” said MEC Zuma.

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For inquiries, please contact:

Lethu Nxumalo, Media Liaison Officer: 073 031 9293

Vusi Zuma, Head of Communications: 082 419 2887

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