

KZN: MEC Zuma reveals big Agri budget moves

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The burning desire to demonstrate resolve in driving agricultural growth and rural development is evident in KZN MEC Super Zuma's budget plans for the province which has suffered greatly in the last few months. Sugarcane farmers are especially excited about a new dawn



KwaZulu-Natal depart of agriculture and rural development MEC Super Zuma has availed a budget of R2 515 153 billion for agriculture. Photo: Supplied/KZNDARD

The KwaZulu-Natal department of agriculture and rural development, MEC Super Zuma, has availed a budget of R2 515 153 billion for agriculture. Serious financial support is on the cards for agricultural hubs across the province.

Zuma delivered his maiden budget at the KZN legislature building in Pietermaritzburg and committed R153 million towards supporting agri-hubs introduced last year.

“Agriculture is one of those sectors, primed for growth and in constant need of our collective investment to secure both our food security and to stimulate socio-economic activity,” Zuma said. “With this budget vote, we hope to demonstrate our resolve to drive agricultural growth and rural development.”

Besides the budget for agri-hubs, Zuma said another R8.4 million will be used in planning and finalising specifications, and implementing agent agreements.

Agri-hub details

The five agri-hubs will cost the provincial government over R3 billion. Assessments regarding environmental impact have been approved and the MEC confirms that biotech studies have been completed on specified Agri hub sites.

The following agri-hubs are planned:

- Fresh produce hub
- Dairy hub
- Grain handling facilities
- Red meat hub focused on beef and another focused on pigs and sheep
- Hide, skin and wool processing facility
- White meat hub

Agricultural development interventions

The MEC availed R376.659 million of which R204.688 million will go towards providing comprehensive farmer support and R171.971 million he said would go towards food security interventions.

“Under the comprehensive farmer support, R74.751 million will be implemented by the Agri-Business Development Agency. [And] R99.887 million for agriculture support for farmers in the form of directly funded grants for infrastructure and inputs as well as credit and non-credit bearing training for farmers,” Zuma said.

Beaming sugarcane industry

Food security interventions, Zuma said include communal investments in boreholes, dip tanks and fencing among others, amounting to R57.186 million. Zuma said a further R80.785 million is budgeted towards mechanisation services and production inputs; R10 million for communal beef and goat improvements and R8 million towards township agriculture.

Also, the sugar cane industry will receive an allocation of R10 million to fund the Sugar Cane for Seed Cane Programme, which is said to assist “emerging black cane growers.”

Zuma’s intentions praised



Dr Siyabonga Madlala, the executive chairman of the South African Farmers' Development Association (Safda). Photo: Supplied/Food For Mzansi

Speaking to Food For Mzansi, Dr Siyabonga Madlala CEO of the South African Farmers Development Association applauded Zuma for his intentions on investing funds into the [sugarcane industry](#).

"This is a most welcomed intervention by the department. Safda receives this with gladness. It is hard for small-scale growers to access quality sugarcane. This intervention will expose small-scale growers to new varieties and quality sugar cane at their closest proximity," said Madlala.

A sweet welcome

Sugar cane farmer in the province, Lee Hlubi, told Food for Mzansi that she is pleased by Zuma's focus on the sugarcane industry. She said the R 10 Million comes at a time when the sugar industry is facing difficulties.

"A problem we had commonly is that the varieties that were recently developed did not reach us on time. We now have an opportunity to secure them up front and get them like everyone else. Hopefully, the industry makes sure that it truly happens so that when planting season comes, so that we have the funds," she said.

"Even though it will follow its procedure, I understand that it will not be now, but the fact that there is an accommodation that has been made for us black farmers, makes a huge [difference] for us. We are thankful that the MEC has remembered us because we are living through bad times. We as cane growers are in a dire situation, it's not easy at all, even to start and harvest."

Food security and the impact of food inflation

Meanwhile, Zuma raised alarm on the number of poor individuals in the province, adding that it would increase if not attended to. To this end, the department has over the past five years supported 60 806 households with food security interventions, translating to 206 740 people, Zuma said.

“A further 15 644 households will be supported in the current financial year. The department will strengthen food security interventions by intensifying distribution of seed packs to over 100 000 households in the current financial year,” he told attendees.

In the 2023/24 financial year, the department said it would also invest R131 million to support 41 projects with on and off-farm infrastructure, biological assets, and production inputs.