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TRAINING

Programme to boost KZN cannabis industry

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KWAZULU-NATAL cannabis growers have been promised they will have access to training and skills development to take their place in the global market.

Yesterday a public-private partnership between provincial government and Opulence Pharmaceuticals was announced to grow the cannabis industry in the province.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (Dard) and the Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (Edtea) will work with the company in a skills and knowledge transfer programme.

Training and essential skills on cannabis production will be provided to farmers, who will also be linked to the market and be prepared for exports.

Speaking during a visit to a cannabis processing plant in Verulam, Opulence Pharmaceuticals chief executive officer Duran Govender said he was excited about the agreement.

"We are a leader of cannabis production in our country and, being a black youth privately owned company in our province, we are excited to empower and educate our local emerging farmers with knowledge we have gained through trial and error that has led us to perfect this sector," he said.

Govender said their vision was to create sustainable jobs and to control the value chain in industrial hemp and medicinal

cannabis.

Edtea MEC Siboniso Duma said he took pride in knowing that the processing plant was established by an African for Africans.

"In the past Africans were being punished severely for cannabis and our parents could not trade. People were killed defending the sovereignty of this herb but now our people are receiving licences and permits," he said.

Duma said it was the province's vision to have at least six processing plants.

Dard MEC Super Zuma said the engagement provided a major platform.

"This establishment is premised on utilisation of technology to enhance the production of medicinal cannabis. This is a proud moment for the sector and the province at large, especially noting that this operation is aligned fully to the ANC government's economic transformation agenda."

Zuma said the commitment to embark on this journey was made with the knowledge of the economic importance and the potential it had to grow the economy of the province.

"Other sources are already predicting that the industry could be worth more than R107 billion. It's therefore an attractive investment option to help the government to clinically address the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality.

"The outcome of (Friday's) visit and engagement must be a public-private partnership anchored on providing a platform for expansion to launch other similar projects of scale," said Zuma.