



agriculture & rural development

Department:
agriculture
& rural development
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

DEBATE BY THE MEC FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT BONGI SITHOLE - MOLOI IN THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES 25 JULY 2019

Madam Speaker

Honourable Members

I rise to address honourable members during this important month - July.

This is a historic month in our calendar as the country where all leaders of society; ordinary members of various communities across all racial lines, come together as part of efforts aimed at preserving the legacy of our first democratically elected President of the Republic of South Africa – Nelson Mandela.

Tata Madiba is synonymous with the fight against injustices and inequality. He dedicated his life to create a better life for the people of this country across all the racial lines. Importantly, Tata Madiba used the public service as an instrument to transform society. He believed that resources of the state had to be used to uplift the ordinary members of society out of abject poverty.

Honourable members, in this house, members have debated unemployment figures and have also reflected on the issue of food insecurity. All honourable members have agreed that agriculture is one of important sectors in terms of job creation and ensuring food security. Accordingly, as KwaZulu-Natal Province we have undertaken to embark on the agriculture revolution. We have planned to intervene to stimulate the growth of the entire agriculture industry.

Agriculture as a sector has not only proven to be relatively labour-absorptive, but also has the potential to be expanded to strategically position KwaZulu-Natal as leading supplier of agricultural products for

domestic consumption and for export.

KwaZulu-Natal Province has a total of 6.5 million hectares of land for farming purposes. The research indicates that there is an unrealized potential in agriculture in the province to the tune of 366% of present production. The demand for agricultural products world-wide creates investment opportunities.

In agreement with a view of the Hon. Minister Didiza, in her budget speech regarding the support and building capacity to agricultural colleges. The Agricultural Colleges are critical national assets and need to be better positioned to make a real impact in rural communities. The spatial distribution of Agricultural Colleges covers all the agro-ecological zones of our nation and is also fairly distributed in most provinces.

The graduates are also ideally suited to make the Land Reform Programme a success, as the majority of them are from historically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Whilst there are competing national priorities with the current fiscal situation, the role of the Agricultural Colleges can be even more significant if the issue of governance and financing models are clear. It is therefore imperative that Agricultural Training Institutes:-

- Be recapitalized and adequately resourced in terms of infrastructure
- Build a strong governance and become semi-autonomous
- The students from colleges be the champion of agricultural transformation and form a solid base of future commercial farmers in the Republic.
- The Work Integrated Learning (WIL) offered by agricultural colleges be used as a strategic tool to capacitate farmers in particular in special field such as agro-processing and value adding.

Honourable members, escalating fuel prices have also caused a drastic increase in food prices. These higher prices, together with high interest rates, have reduced the purchasing power of households and have exposed millions of people to food insecurity.

In view of this, we undertake to work with the national government to

ensure support to both fully fledged commercial and emerging farmers. The area we want to focus on as KZN Government is the mechanization programme. We want to ensure that there is adequate distribution of farming equipment to the emerging farmers and those involved in subsistence farming.

We want to assist many emerging farmers that have been driven to bankruptcy by lack of farming skills and experience. Others have collapsed due to the high cost of inputs such as fuel, fertilizers, electricity and water.

With regard to irrigation, we will assist these farmers by developing 2500 hectares of new irrigation schemes over a five year period. In addition, we will ensure the rehabilitation of 1500 hectares of existing irrigation schemes over the same period.

We also have emerging farmers that are battling because of non-availability of finance for farming operations and lack of access to markets. In all honesty, in our assessment we have not come across emerging farmers that have collapsed because of the lack of passion for farming. There are many people who have approached us, including the youth, who are interested in farming.

Honourable members, we must pause and pay tribute to His Majesty. Bayede Hlanga Lomhlabathi!!!

We appreciate the support and guidance from Isilo Samabandla.

As KZN Government we acknowledge the role of His Majesty is ensuring the effective utilization of land. His Majesty has over the years, ensured that indigenous farming knowledge is utilized to ensure food security.

Isilo Samabandla has offered to assist government during this term of office to mobilize communities to produce food for domestic consumption. He has also offered to ensure that the entire institution of traditional leadership plays a leading role towards the agricultural revolution.

We salute His Majesty for being an advocate of partnerships involving elected public representatives and ordinary members of society. Without the institution of leadership, we know that as KZN Government we will never achieve targets set out in our Agriculture Master Plan.

In terms of our plan, we want to increase the value of agricultural contribution to the provincial economy from R 18 billion to R 23 billion by 2020. We have also planned to create 40 000 jobs over the next five years. These are targets which the Premier has presented on many platforms.

Critically, honourable members, over the next few months we will have urgent meetings in order to ensure harmony between farmers and farm workers including farm dwellers. We are concerned about the violation of human rights of farm workers.

We undertake to attend to ongoing human rights violations on farms. This government is the only hope for millions of people especially the vulnerable members of society and we must never abandon them. There are farm workers whose livestock have been killed and at times confiscated by farmers.

There are also complaints of illegal deduction from the salaries of farm workers. As government we must never fold our arms when people are subjected to such inhumane treatment at the hands of the farmers. As a province, we strongly believe that the reorganisation of departments will assist us in this regard and clarify the role of the provincial government in as far as the plight of the farm workers and farm dwellers are concerned. On the other hand, resolving land disputes between the Communal Property Associations (CPA), Trusts and Traditional leaders especially in traditional communities.

Honourable Members, as I draw towards the conclusion I wish to indicate that as KZN government we will be revisiting the programme of Agri Villages. Since 2014 we have been looking into this matter which dates back to 1992.

In 1992, a new term of Agri-villages was presented to the Natal Agricultural Union (NAU) Congress. Agri-villages were presented as plots of land laid out in the form of rural village on a separate subdivision of land; the subdivision may accommodate the farmworkers of one or two farmers.

The motivation for the establishment of such villages was that they will provide workers with the security of tenure and the ability to own their own houses and that such village will maximize the provision of bulk

services at low costs. However, the concept was not embraced by the farmers at the time.

In KZN there has been a great response from farmers and farmworkers.

We are calling upon the farming community to work with the government to ensure that we develop Agri Villages in order to ensure that farmers and farmworkers have access to basic services such as electricity, water, houses, schools, and clinics.

We believe that Agri Villages will bring about stability in the farming community and ensure that there is a certainty.

KZN government is calling for a joint venture between different government Departments such as Department of Human Settlements, Land Affairs, Rural Development, Health, Education, farm owners and municipalities. Let's work together to unlock opportunities in the agricultural industry.

The agricultural potential of KZN, the diverse topography, climate and soils of KwaZulu-Natal virtually make this Province a "world-in-one." As stated earlier, KZN can produce sufficient agricultural products for own consumption and export. However, South Africa remains a net importer of many agricultural products. This sector, which once was a major creator of jobs has consistently shown decline. We appreciate that the national minister in her Budget Speech has announced bold steps to turn it around.

To borrow from our Hon. Minister Didiza - forward with the spirit of 'Fix, Re-imagine and Renovate' Forward.

I thank you