



## agriculture & rural development

Department:  
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PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Communication Services

Daily News – Page 1

Title: Farmer's grave denial - Requests forensic team, slams community's claim

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# Requests forensic team, slams community's claim

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**N**O CRIMINAL case has been opened against Kranskop farmer Carl Gathmann, who has been accused by the local community of desecrating graves.

"It is dangerous for people to open a criminal case knowing that the allegation is false," he said.

It was against such allegations that Gathmann's Assicht Farm in Kranskop, outside Pietermaritzburg, was attacked recently and R1 million worth of timber and grass bales were torched. His farm manager's home was also petrol-bombed.

"The police arrived from Greytown 35km away and three hours after the first fires were set. Our local police, only 6km away, arrived later," Gathmann said. "No arrests have been made."

He has had to step up his security measures, including an extra R36 000 a month for guards.

Agriculture MEC Themba Mthembu visited the area and held several meetings, including an emergency gathering, attended by the Sgedlana community.

The community chased Colonel Caroline Minaar, the commander of the local police station, from the meeting, contending she had colluded with the farmer and alleging that criminal charges they had tried to lay against him had been ignored.

Phathisa Mnsuyo, the MEC's spokesperson, said Mthembu would brief Premier Willies Mchunu and the cabinet about the issue this week. The cabinet was then expected to make recommendations.

Mthembu had visited the area with Brigadier-General Bheki Langa. Gathmann said he had urged Langa to send his best forensic team to determine if any of the eight graves in question had been disturbed.

Gathmann was yesterday still waiting to hear if a forensic team would be sent.

The Daily News also sent questions about the issue to the police last week, but spokespeople at the KwaZulu-Natal police media centre yesterday said they were still awaiting a response.

Gathmann said an excavator had been brought in to remove weeds, bramble and to clear other rubbish, and a girl – whose grandmother was buried on the farm – showed the operator which areas to avoid.

"Not a single grave was touched," Gathmann said.

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Gabriel Crouse, a writer commissioned by the Institute of Race Relations – a think tank that promotes political and economic freedom – visited the farm, and wrote that four workers had reported that those who sided with the farmer had received death threats.

Crouse wrote that a few days before the attack, Gathmann had called in a qualified surveyor to resolve a boundary dispute with neighbours, led by a community leader, Skhumbuzo Zondi.

Hearing about excavation going on near the grave sites at the same time was "conceivably an opportunity not to be missed as a distraction from their own infraction", he wrote.

Another reason for the attacks was a plan to take his land, inspired by calls for land expropriation without compensation.

The ward councillor, Mbangiseni Yengwa, is reported to have said: "If the government is serious about the expropriation of land without compensation, this is the first farm that should be expropriated in KZN."

Yengwa yesterday confirmed his statement. "It would be better if the land was given to the people... although I am aware that there are laws."

He said another meeting would be held on September 15.

Zondi yesterday told the Daily News that the community wanted the farmer off the land.

The SA Human Rights Commission was also sent questions last week, but had not responded at the time of going to publication.

Gathmann's family have been on the farm for 60 years. He is the biggest producer of broccoli and cauliflower in the country. He employs 140 people – 60 of them indirectly, who work for a black timber contractor.

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