

Uphill battle for farmers

NORTH Coast sugar cane farmer Gansen Moodley says the suggestion that farmers should diversify crops is easier said than done.

Moodley, 52, a medium-scale farmer who owns 280ha of land in Kearsney and Waterbosch, said agriculturists had advised them to venture into other fields, but this was not practical advice.

"They want us to opt for tree crops, such as avocado or nuts, where there is a niche, but it costs at least R250 000 to even start production.

"We simply cannot afford that. It's not feasible."

The other option, he said, was to grow vegetables.

"But that market is unfortunately flooded with vegetable farmers.

"Last year, 600 000 tons of sugar

was imported. The government needs to stop importation and support us. If this continues, we will be out of jobs and our livelihoods will be lost."

He said at least R6 billion had been injected into the government through the recent hike in sugar tax. "Surely something can be done to help us survive."

Moodley lives with his wife and three children on the North Coast, but doesn't live on his farm.

He sees no future for agriculture and farming for his children and has encouraged them to take different paths. In his case, "farming is all I know. I've been farming all my life. I have to work the land as hard as I can to get something out of it.

"Maybe when I pass on, the land shall be sold."