

Land-claim farms productivity probe

Community trust farms included

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THE KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (Dard) has started a programme to find out how many farms received through the land restitution programme are currently not productive.

MEC Themba Mthembu said this assessment would extend to farms held in community trusts.

"Through this we want to see what we can do as the government to make that land productive as part of our food and security programmes," said Mthembu.

Mthembu said while the department had not yet made significant progress, the pro-

gramme was still treated as urgent because they wanted to know sooner to be able to maximise the province's land agricultural use.

The department said it had not only received complaints on the matter, but had seen for itself that many of these farms were not productive.

Huge difference

"If we turn this around and make the land productive, there would be a huge difference in the province and country's economy," said Mthembu.

Once the assessment had been completed, he said, the money that would be required to support these farms would be a form of investment that would stimulate the economy and increase the country's

gross domestic product.

Professor Gerald Ortmann, a University of KwaZulu-Natal agricultural production economics expert, said the government's move to assist emerging farmers was a welcome one.

"The idea is sound and good. Getting the expertise to manage the farms for the successful land claimants could be a way of going about it initially.

"In that time the community could learn from them and gain experience and confidence to take over ultimately."

Ortmann said while there currently was no study to prove this, land restitution settlement projects were not known to be adding any major value to the agricultural sector economy.

"In fact, their unproductivity is a deduction from value."

Agriculture economist and chairperson of the KwaZulu-Natal Rural Farmers Association Mfundo Thango said they hoped for a programme that could go beyond just the land redistribution programme beneficiaries, and "expand the majority of farmers at ground level".

"For the land restitution programme to have had a greater impact in agriculture, it should have focused on those who were already involved in farming at subsistence level, as that is a sign of interest," said Thango.

The KwaZulu-Natal Rural Farmers Association is an agriculture sector education and training authority accredited by the AgriSETA to provide training and mentorship to rural-based farmers.

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