



Farmer faces charges

Award-winning female farmer accused of cruelty to animals at piggery

NOKUTHULA KHANYILE

SOUTH Africa's top commercial woman farmer for 2015 could again face multiple criminal charges for cruelty to animals.

Hlengiwe Hlophe's award-winning farm in Winterton, Ukwanda Farm Ltd, which she co-owns with her husband Mike Mjiyakho, was raided by the National Council of SPCA's Farm Animal Protection Unit last week following major welfare concerns.

After numerous visits to the farm earlier this year, the NSPCA said it obtained a warrant to remove the last remaining pigs from the farm because warnings about animal welfare were not heeded.

According to LinkedIn, Hlophe is the managing director of Ukwanda Farm, which was founded in 2009.

The NSPCA said Hlophe had in excess of 60 000 layer hens and approximately 600 pigs when she purchased the farm.

The farm specialises in egg production and the running of a piggery, according to her profile, and supplies chain supermarkets and all City Lodge Group Hotels around Gauteng.

The South African Pork Producers Organisation (Sappo) told *The Witness* that it had been alerted of the problems at the farm.

Johann Kotzee, CEO of Sappo, said last month the organisation had offered to give Hlophe support through mentorship and veterinarian services. "We offered to have a chat with her



SA Ukwanda Farm Ltd co-owner Hlengiwe Hlophe could find herself in hot water. **PHOTO: TWITTER**

and see what is going on ... The response we got was that she will invite us when she wants us there.

"Unfortunately a lot of people do not accept help. They want to carry on doing their own stuff. If they don't want the services we render, we can't force ourselves into individual businesses."

Kotzee said they fully support the welfare standard of the NSPCA, adding that the law should take its course. "It's sad because it's not portraying the pork industry in good light," he added.

The NSPCA said it was still busy with investigations and that charges in terms of the Animal Protection Act will be laid against the owner.

NSPCA spokesperson Grace de Lange said they tried their best to assist where they could, but the condition of the pigs was "absolutely shocking".

De Lange said the pigs were emaciated and some showed signs of malnutrition.

The NSPCA said in a statement on Friday that 18 sows had to be euthanased to end their suffering.

The NSPCA said it had contacted the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) to advise them of the pending criminal case against Hlophe after she was given the award in 2015, however, the award was not retracted.

Hlophe received the award after she won top honours at the provincial Female Entrepreneur Awards the same year.

The national Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries directed all questions to the provincial department, which said it was still investigating allegations against Hlophe.

De Lange said water samples that were taken from the farm and tested were also found to be positive for *E.coli*.

"Even if the pigs were going for consumption, that wouldn't have been good either," she added.

She said while they have not had any formal responses from Hlophe, last week they were contacted by her attorney. "We haven't had anything from her or her legal representative since," De Lange added.

Hlophe is under investigation for the second time by the NSPCA after it was called to the farm in June 2014 and found that livestock was dying of thirst and hunger and was housed in cruel conditions.

An urgent order was then granted by the Pietermaritzburg high court to sell all the pigs and hens. The money was to be used to pay for the costs of the feed and care of the animals until they were sold.

Ross Braithwaite, chairperson of the Winterton Farmers Association, said although Hlophe was not a member of the association, anyone who is not farming properly and ethically should not be farming.

The Witness made several attempts to get comment from Hlophe on the allegations, but calls were declined and SMSes sent to her were unanswered. nokuthula.khanyile@media24.com