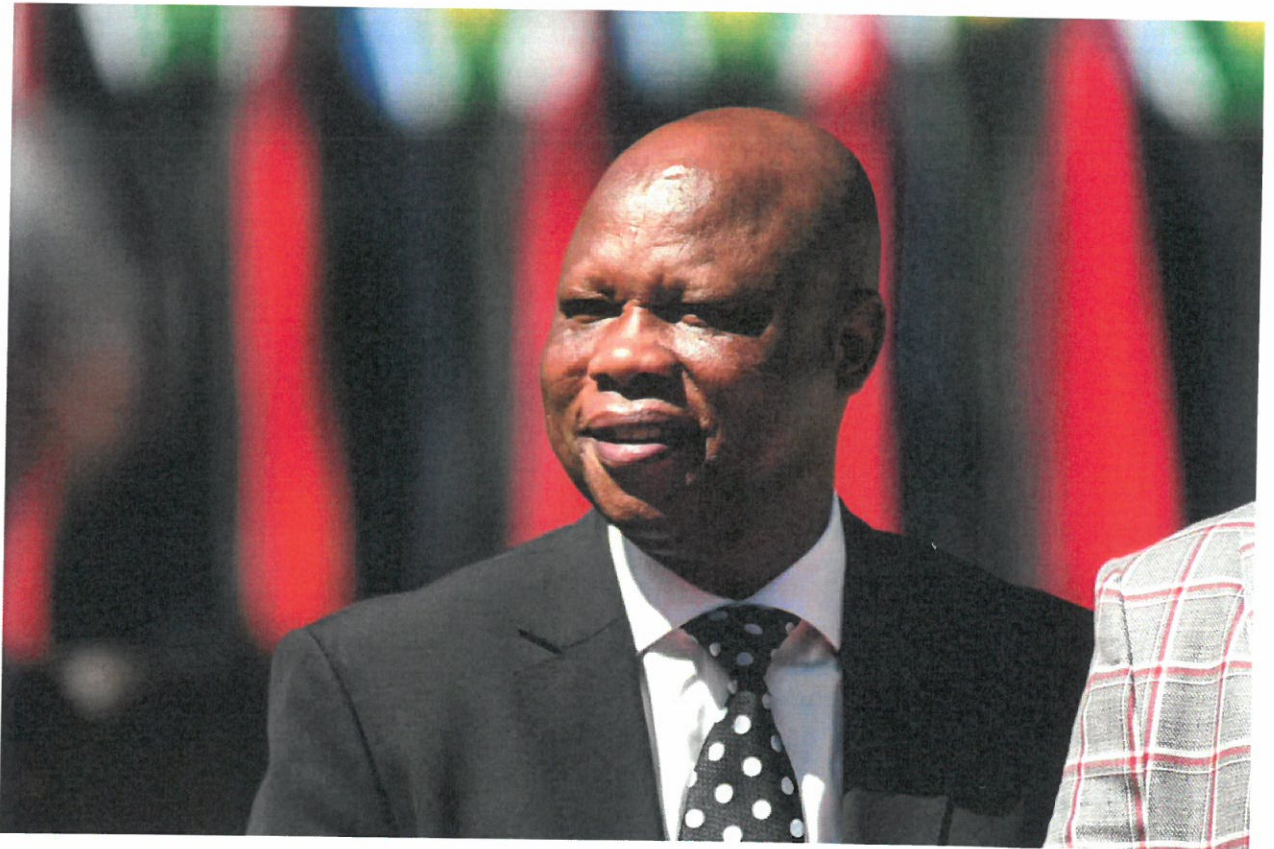


KZN Agriculture Department launches initiative to help farmers

Farmers affected by the devastating floods last year will be assisted by a construction unit to speed up their recovery.



The KwaZulu-Natal Agriculture and Rural Development Department has launched a construction unit to assist farmers in rebuilding infrastructure damaged by the floods.

Tabling the department's budget at the provincial legislature on Thursday, Agriculture and Rural Development MEC Super Zuma said the unit, which already has cutting-edge equipment, would help speed up the agriculture sector's recovery process following last year's floods

"The construction unit will focus on dip tanks, boreholes, dam construction and rehabilitation and farm road construction and maintenance.

"The department, which plays a key role in KZN's economic recovery programme, following shocks caused by Covid-19, the 2021 July unrest, the recent floods and other factors, has been rolling out programmes to mitigate the impact of high food prices on the province's citizens."

The department's programmes, Zuma said, were mainly designed to protect the province's most vulnerable, whose lives were constantly under threat due to food insecurity.

"To this end, the department has, over the past five years, supported 60 806 households with food security interventions, translating into 206 740 people. A further 15 844 households will be supported in the current financial year.

"The department will strengthen food security interventions by intensifying distribution of seed packs to over 100 000 households in the current financial year," he said.

The agriculture sector

Challenges within the province's agriculture sector have been exacerbated by the country's energy supply crisis.

Farmers are currently having to contend with rising costs as they seek to mitigate the impact of load-shedding.

Funds meant for production and expansion, Zuma said, were currently being spent on generators, fuel and solar panels.

"As a province, we therefore support the energy plan for the agriculture initiative that the Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Thoko Didiza, is driving to have the sector exempted from load-shedding [as well as his] support for alternative energy sources for farmers."

Zuma told MPLs that the department has noted the significant impact of climate change on farmers.

"In some instances, the timing and amount of rainfall has become unpredictable, making it difficult for farmers to plan and manage their cropping programme.

"To address the issue of food security in the face of climate change, the department is promoting more resilient crop varieties, conservation agriculture and improved water management practices," he said.