



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE
AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

KZN FARMERS LAMENT PLIGHT AFTER DESTRUCTIVE VELDFIRES

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Agriculture Deputy Minister Nokuzola Capha and KZN Agriculture and Rural Development MEC Thembeni kaMadlopha-Mthethwa visited Camperdown as part of the government's fact-finding mission to monitor progress in so far as government assistance is concerned. Picture: Supplied

Durban — A KwaZulu-Natal farmer has expressed how recent veldfires in the province have destroyed their livelihoods.

The farmer was speaking when Agriculture Deputy Minister Nokuzola Capha and KZN Agriculture and Rural Development MEC Thembeni kaMadlopha-Mthethwa visited Camperdown, one of the hardest hit areas, to assess the extent of the damage after the runaway fires.

About 300 livestock farmers were affected, with Zululand, uThukela, Harry Gwala, and King Cetshwayo the hardest hit districts.



The majority of the farmers affected by the veldfires are subsistence (65%), and 16% are smallholders. Commercial farmers are 17%, while two are considered vulnerable.

Camperdown livestock farmer Msizi Madide was among the worst affected farSpeaking at his Hiltop Farm, Madide said that although his team is still quantifying the magnitude of the damage, thus far, it amounts to R1.6 million.

“Our farm has suffered huge amounts of losses. Our livestock, including cattle, sheep and goats, were not spared. Water tanks, pipes, and other infrastructure were also destroyed in the blaze,” Madide said.

Cappha called on farming communities across the country to work together in multidisciplinary teams to come up with strategies that will ensure an immediate response to veldfires and other challenges.

Last month veldfires fanned by strong winds wreaked havoc destroying crops, grazing veld, livestock and infrastructure resulting in the loss of about R93 million in damage.

Scores of farmers left devastated by the recent veldfires in KZN are still counting their losses. The fires left a trail of destruction, resulting in the loss of seven lives of the firefighting crew who succumbed to death while battling the raging blaze.

Commercial and emerging farmers also spoke about their challenges during the oversight visit.



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Another local farmer around Camperdown, Pat Werner, urged the government to come up with measures to bring an end to trespassing on their farms, saying it is worrying that farmers do not have the capacity to have adequate guards on their farms 24/7.

“We are hoping that the government can step in and do something about it, maybe put more security and watch these fires,” Werner said.

Capha added: “I am urging the farmers to embark on a programme that's going to be sustainable and ways in which disasters can be controlled immediately.

“It requires multi-disciplinary teams that are going to be with the farmers that would be trained in firefighting and to have firefighting trucks so that when the fires start, they respond at a co-ordinated level.”

KaMadlopha-Mthethwa echoed her sentiments, saying in efforts to mitigate the impact of the veldfires the department has put aside 1 300 bales to help farmers as a short-term intervention. “We visited affected farmers immediately



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after reports of the fires to offer our assistance. We also visited the families that lost their loved ones who were firefighters when they battled the blaze.

“We also collated data with the Disaster Management Team to further ascertain the exact intervention necessary. The Provincial Government has also requested that the area be declared a disaster area and is waiting for the declaration with National Cogta.”

Responding to Capha’s call for collaborative efforts, Madide embraced it saying it is high time they collaborated. “We have to work together as a farming community to ensure that we use all measures in place to fight the fires, ensuring that fire-breaks are in place and that we have drill boreholes and fire hydrants to put out fires.”