



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

VELDFIRES DEVASTATE KZN FARMS, DAMAGE KEY RESEARCH STATION

<https://www.foodformzansi.co.za/veldfires-devastate-kzn-farms-damage-key-research-station/>

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Veldfires in KwaZulu-Natal have destroyed 700 hectares of grazing land and damaged crucial power infrastructure, impacting farmers and a key research station. The local community and authorities are urged to take urgent fire prevention measures



KwaZulu-Natal agriculture and rural development MEC Thembeni kaMadlopha-Mthethwa surveys the damage at the Kokstad agricultural research station following devastating veldfires. Photo: Supplied/Food For Mzansi

In a devastating turn of events, veldfires swept through the Greater Kokstad area of KwaZulu-Natal, leaving a trail of destruction in their wake. Farmers and the provincial department of agriculture and rural development have been left reeling from the impact, with essential power infrastructure and valuable agricultural resources severely damaged.

The fire, which broke out in the early hours of Friday morning, inflicted significant damage on a substation that powers the agricultural research station in Kokstad, located in the Harry Gwala district.

The flames also engulfed two adjacent farms, with approximately 700 hectares of grazing land and 58 bales of hay destroyed. In total, the affected farms and research station suffered a combined loss of 56% of their agricultural resources.



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This latest incident adds to a worrying trend in the region, with the Greater Kokstad area experiencing three major fires in July alone.

These fires have resulted in agricultural losses estimated at R22 million, highlighting the vulnerability of the local farming community to such disasters.

In response to the devastation, MEC Thembeni kaMadlopha-Mthethwa has called for urgent action to prevent future fires.

“We need to erect a mini fire station in the district to fight against these fires because they come without any warning. It is important for us to prepare ourselves to fight against the veldfires in our research institutions,” kaMadlopha-Mthethwa stated.

She also urged the community to refrain from discarding cigarette butts or starting fires near agricultural institutions, emphasising the negative impact such actions can have on research outcomes and food security.



Damaged infrastructure at the Kokstad agricultural research station following the devastating veldfires in KwaZulu-Natal. Photo: Supplied/Food For Mzansi

Firefighters face daunting conditions

The battle to contain Friday’s fire saw firefighters from the Working On Fire crew, response teams, and the Kokstad disaster management unit deployed to assist the local farming community.

Winds, reaching speeds of 27 km per hour, exacerbated the spread of the fire, which was eventually brought under control later in the day. However, the incident has underscored the region’s challenges, including a shortage of staff to combat fires and ongoing issues with suspected arson attacks.



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This latest blaze is the second most devastating fire to hit the area since 2019, with the farming community expressing deep concern over the recurring threat. While no casualties or livestock losses have been reported in this incident, authorities are continuing their investigation into the cause of the fire, with arson remaining a strong possibility.

Last month, six firefighters tragically lost their lives while battling a blaze in Boston near eMpophomeni in the Midlands, which resulted in an estimated R93 million in losses from dead livestock and burnt feed.

KaMadlopha-Mthethwa commended the efforts of the disaster management teams and the Working On Fire crew for their swift action, which prevented an even greater disaster.

She also called on locals to play their part in ensuring the safety of the farms, noting that unattended candles used in cultural and religious rituals have been observed as a potential fire hazard in the area.