

INDIGENOUS FOODS CAN ALLEVIATE POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY, SAYS KZN MEC

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Amadumbe (taro roots) is one of the indigenous foods exhibited at the event : supplied

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has committed itself to creating a platform for empowering farmers with indigenous knowledge in respect of the production of indigenous foods.

This commitment was emphasised by Thembeni kaMadlopha-Mthethwa, the MEC for Agriculture and Rural Development, while addressing hundreds of people at the JB Madlala Sports Field in Ray Nkonyeni Local Municipality on the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast recently.

The visit to the South Coast comes as the country concluded Heritage Month.

Before her address, MEC KaMadlopha-Mthethwa conducted an inspection of agricultural indigenous foods on exhibit. Guests and locals were treated to goat meat curry and sausages, amadumbe, fruit and leafy green vegetables.

MEC KaMadlopha-Mthethwa has encouraged the public to use indigenous crops, saying they are known to be more resilient to drought and other environmental challenges. "They adapt and perform well in non-fertile soils and respond well to organic fertiliser. They require little to no chemicals. What is also fundamentally important is that their seeds can be preserved and replanted, which is essential in alleviating poverty and food insecurity."



KZN MEC for Agriculture and Rural Development Thembeni kaMadlopha-Mthethwa has committed to empowering indigenous farmers with traditional knowledge. Photo: Supplied

Nutritional Superiority of Indigenous Foods

According to the MEC, indigenous foods are nutritionally superior to commercial crops, which is why the Department is urging farmers to return to traditional methods of producing organic foods to reap their nutritional benefits.

MEC KaMadlopha-Mthethwa expressed her concern that despite an abundance of indigenous vegetables and fruit in KwaZulu-Natal, people continue to suffer from food and nutrition insecurity. “The consumption of indigenous foods such as jugo beans (*izindlubu*), cowpeas, leafy green vegetables (*imbuya*) and pumpkin leaves is declining.”

This decline has been attributed to several factors, including the westernisation of indigenous food diets because of the perception that wild vegetables are low-income foods and are associated with poverty. “This is merely a perception,” said kaMadlopha-Mthethwa.

Knowledge Transfer Gap

The MEC noted that a lack of interest in learning about indigenous foods, coupled with the absence of knowledge transfer regarding the harvesting, preparation and preservation of these foods, has contributed to the decline in consumption of traditional foods.

“We encourage you to use organic plants that aren’t mixed with anything. Research shows that when comparing nutrients between *amadumbe* (taro roots) and potatoes, *amadumbe* has 9% protein, while potatoes have 1.9%. Goat meat is the



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richest and healthiest of all livestock. And here, with goat meat, we have a system to support farmers so they can thrive with it and make it a business,” concluded MEC kaMadlopha-Mthethwa.