



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE
AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
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Tackling the pressing challenges faced by KwaZulu-Natal farmers

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During a consultative forum with MEC Thembeni kaMadlopha-Mthethwa, agricultural experts from KwaZulu-Natal convened to address the urgent challenges confronting farmers and propose viable solutions.

In welcoming the tabling of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's budget policy statement, agricultural industry experts shared the challenges they are facing and solutions with MEC Thembeni kaMadlopha-Mthethwa in a consultative forum held in Durban on Thursday.

South African Farmers Development Association chairman Dr Siyabonga Madlala applauded the department for the R30 million support for small-scale farmers. However, he said the sugar industry is facing many challenges.

Kwanalu's chief executive officer, Sandy La Marque, said they are dealing with serious challenges.



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"I think more than anything else is the economic viability of farmers, whether you're a small farmer, whether you're a large farmer. If you're unable to produce your crop viably, sustainably, profitably, it means that farmers won't exist," La Marque said.

She said some issues are not only within the department but also across departments.

La Marque explained that their relationship with the Department of Transport is important because farmers are unable to transport their produce to the market if there are no roads or bridges. Rural infrastructure is critically important, which does not stop at roads and bridges.

She said water is an important source for farmers, and they need to address water challenges. Not just water access, but water quality. She said electricity was also important. The province had many losses because of a lack of electricity supply, for instance.

Provincial Livestock Board chairperson Nontobeko Mthethwa said there is a shortage of dip tanks.

"Many affected by the disease do not use the dips daily, which causes conflict with those who use the dips daily and those who do not use them," Mthethwa said. "We hope the department intervenes and urges the importance of taking livestock to the dip tanks."

Milk Producers Organisation chairperson, Luke Gibbs, said that training, the land care programme, and foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) stood out for the dairy sector in the MEC's budget.

"When it comes to training, I would like to encourage that it goes hand in hand with the land care program. We use commercial dairy farmers to upskill our young people. So that when they leave our commercial dairy farmers, they can go into rehabilitated land and start dairy farming," Gibbs said.

"I think it's important that if we look at foot-and-mouth, it's been a disaster. And it's even more of a disaster for the dairy industry, because when it comes to animal welfare, dairy cows are at risk of lesions on their udders and then actually suffer if they get foot and mouth. If we can look at proactively protecting the national dairy herd before it gets the virus."

Gibbs added that KZN could look at securing its vaccine and all production thereafter.



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During a consultative forum, KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development MEC Thembeni kaMadlopha-Mthethwa discussed challenges and solutions presented by agricultural experts.

Addressing some issues, kaMadlopha-Mthethwa said the water licence issue has disturbed many farmers.

She also said the department was aware of the issue of economic non-viability.

“We need to have a farmers’ indaba, where I think I need to invite the national minister, national DG, so that we come and say these are our problems, especially with the FMD and with the issue of the tax that is imposed by the US,” kaMadlopha-Mthethwa said.

The MEC said she understood the money given to farmers was insufficient. She has spoken to Premier Thamsanqa Ntuli, alerting him to the high demand because of FMD.

On the matter of dipping tanks, kaMadlopha-Mthethwa said there are 77 dipping tanks within the FMD area. She said that since becoming MEC, she has built over 45 water tanks. However, they will build more.



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“Because they (national) were ordering medication from Botswana, they have stated that we are now going to have one factory within the country, and it will take some time due to the necessary research and processes involved,” kaMadlopha-Mthethwa said about vaccines..

“Commercial farmers have said that if we can get medication, they are willing to vaccinate so they can protect before it starts.”

KaMadlopha-Mthethwa also pleaded that agriculture must be taken as a business. She urged farmers to register their businesses because the department is a business.