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Makhathini Irrigation Scheme Revitalisation Set to Boost Agriculture, Create Jobs in Northern KwaZulu-Natal

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Thembeni Madlopha-Mthethwa, KwaZulu-Natal's MEC for Agriculture and Rural Development, Jaconia Mngomezulu (DARD Head of Ministry), Jerry Mfusi (Agribusiness Development Agency CEO); and Dr. Fikile Qwabe (DARD Acting Head of Department) are upbeat about developments at the Makhathini Irrigation Scheme.

The revitalisation of the Makhathini Irrigation Scheme in northern KwaZulu-Natal is being positioned as a major catalyst for agricultural growth, rural job creation and food security in South Africa.

Located on the fertile plains near Jozini, the irrigation scheme spans 5,552 hectares of irrigated farmland and is undergoing rehabilitation through a programme led by the Agribusiness Development Agency (ADA).



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The initiative focuses on infrastructure rehabilitation, farmer development and the commercialisation of agriculture in the area. According to ADA, an investment of R24.7 million made in 2020 has helped unlock the productive potential of the Makhathini Flats, which are known for fertile soils, favourable climatic conditions and a reliable water supply from the nearby Jozini Dam.

ADA Chief Executive Officer Jerry Mfusi said the project aligns with the goals outlined in National Development Plan.

“In terms of the National Development Plan, this project has massive significance. It is the breadbasket of the entire country,” Mfusi said.

Chapter 6 of the plan promotes an integrated and inclusive economy through expanded agricultural activity, effective land reform and sustainable rural development.

At the centre of the irrigation scheme is a system powered by six pump stations drawing water from Jozini Dam, supplying thousands of hectares of farmland. ADA manages and maintains the infrastructure, which includes irrigation equipment, mechanisation services, electricity management, road maintenance and drainage systems used by farmers in the area.

The scheme currently supports a growing community of farmers producing vegetables, field crops and fruit. Crops grown in the area include beans, butternut, cabbage, calabash, castor beans, cotton, green pepper, chillies, amadumbe, mangoes, green beans, maize, peanuts, sugarcane, sweet potatoes and tomatoes.

More than 150 vegetable farmers are currently supported by the programme, while over 300 farmers have received training in modern farming techniques aimed at improving productivity, sustainability and profitability.

Produce from the scheme is already being supplied to the Durban Fresh Produce Market and Pietermaritzburg Fresh Produce Market, as well as major retailers including Pick n Pay and Shoprite.

ADA said its strategy focuses on assisting farmers to transition from subsistence farming into sustainable commercial operations capable of contributing to the regional economy.

The favourable climate conditions in Makhathini allow farmers to produce up to three vegetable cycles per year, increasing production levels and income opportunities.

Beyond farming, the long-term vision for the irrigation scheme includes the development of agro-processing industries to add value to locally produced crops and generate employment.



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One of the potential investments under consideration is the development of a sugar mill linked to expanded sugarcane production in the region.

Early projections indicate that agro-processing facilities linked to the scheme could create more than 2,000 jobs, while stimulating economic activity in areas such as logistics, transport, energy production and manufacturing.

Through its Farmer Development Services division, ADA continues to provide training and advisory support to equip farmers with technical and business skills required to participate in modern agricultural markets.

According to ADA, the revitalisation of the Makhathini Irrigation Scheme presents an opportunity to strengthen rural economies in northern KwaZulu-Natal while increasing the country's food production capacity.

As South Africa continues to face high levels of unemployment and food insecurity, the initiative highlights the role agriculture can play in supporting economic growth and job creation in rural communities.

With continued investment and partnerships, the Makhathini Flats are once again being positioned as one of South Africa's key agricultural production areas.