

## Free State farmers in dire need of production financing

Nearly one million tons of animal feed are needed to ensure that livestock survives the drought in the Free State, according to a recent drought assessment survey by Free State Agriculture (FSA). A total of 600 FSA members took part in the survey, which concluded that 66% required production financing this year to make it financially.

in the province," Henk Vermeulen, CEO of FSA said in a statement.

Jaco Minnaar, Hennenman grain producer, said the state needed to consider support measures to keep farmers on their land and to ensure sufficient grain production in the 2016/2017 production season. For example, so-called soft loans from the Land Bank

plant this season could result in a marked increase in unemployment in rural areas and subsidised wages would go a long way to prevent this.

More than 11 000 people, including farm workers and their extended families, were financially dependent on these 600 farmers.

"The solution for farmers now lies in financing," Vermeulen said. Financing at low interest rates was vital to carry them through this time and ensure that South Africa did not end up with food shortages that could lead to riots.

Only nine of the respondents had received government assistance. FSA's structures have to date facilitated

financial support for 250 farmers. A total of 1 630 bales of feed, 38t of protein feed and 2 877 bags of pellets were distributed to 17 of the most affected agricultural associations, over almost 20 000km<sup>2</sup>.

Minnaar said the fact that the Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries did not deem it fit to declare the drought a national disaster indicated that the authorities underestimated its possible consequences.

"The FSA survey clearly showed the gravity of the situation. It seems as if the policymakers fail to grasp the enormity of the situation or that they simply lacked the necessary information," he said.

– Annelie Coleman

### IN THE FREE STATE, TOTAL LOSSES DUE TO THE DROUGHT AMOUNT TO ABOUT R3,4 BILLION

"These farmers will have to spend an additional R2,9 billion in feed until grazing has recovered sufficiently. Crop losses have been calculated at R443 million. This means that the drought resulted in losses of at least R3,4 billion

were called for, as well as government guarantees to enable producers to obtain credit from input suppliers, he said. Subsidies to keep farm workers on farms were also needed.

The fact that the majority of grain producers did not

## Government reports back on drought intervention

There were high levels of livestock mortality in drought-stricken areas despite attempts by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) and the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) to intervene.

This was according to Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Senzeni Zokwana, Minister of Rural Development and Land Reform Gugile Nkwinti, and agriculture MECs from drought disaster areas, who addressed the media in Pretoria recently.

About 5 000 head of livestock had been lost in Limpopo, but

interventions had stabilised the mortality rate, according to Limpopo agriculture MEC Joy Matshoge.

In the Eastern Cape, 3 731 cattle, 5 598 sheep and 3 056 goats had reportedly died due to the worsening condition of grazing since October 2015.

Another 17 456 head of livestock had also died as a result of water stress in Mpumalanga, according to a DRDLR report.

Nkwinti suggested that areas which are not prone to drought, be used to grow feed as safeguard against potential drought in the future. He said that some farmers in these

areas were, however, cashing in on the situation by selling feed to other farmers in need.

Nkwinti explained that the whole country could not be declared a drought disaster area as not every province had been affected by the drought. According to him, government had attempted to persuade communal farmers to move to state-owned land, as communal land countrywide was overgrazed. Government had also introduced veld management programmes to limit the damage caused by the drought.

"These farmers are sceptical as they have

a history of forced removals. I hope the drought created an opportunity for these [veld management] programmes to work," Nkwinti said.

Zokwana said that meetings with commercial farmers had indicated that they do not require financial assistance, but rather needed government to stand surety for them.

According to a report handed to the media and figures stated during the meeting:

- R20 million had been allocated in Limpopo to buy fodder and R21 million for water purchases. About 7 000 subsistence farmers had benefited from this

allocation and water storage tanks had been distributed to farmers.

- In KwaZulu-Natal, five million litres of water had been delivered to farmers and 780t of feed had been distributed.
- Firebreaks were also a priority to protect grazing and R3 million had been allocated to contractors to burn firebreaks.
- In the Free State, R39 million had been allocated for assistance of both commercial farmers and smallholders.
- Mpumalanga had received 10 000 applications for assistance.

– Gerhard Uys