

Farmers need funding

National Treasury asked to allocate more money towards mitigation of ongoing drought

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MINISTER of Agriculture Senzeni Zokwana announced that his department will request additional funds from the national Treasury to assist farmers to deal with the current drought disaster.

This followed a media briefing held on Friday and attended by the minister, MECs and entities within the Department of Agriculture about the status of drought relief support.

Zokwana said that in a bid to try to mitigate the current drought situation, the government has secured a further R32m to assist farmers in drought-stricken provinces. This followed earlier government commitments where they made available more than R200m as a relief measure to crop and livestock farmers.

The department said more than 5 000 head of livestock have reportedly died due to drought in Limpopo alone, and that KwaZulu-Natal, Free State, North West, Limpopo, Gauteng, Mpumalanga, and the Northern Cape have already applied for drought relief loans.

He says a comprehensive plan has been designed to coordinate necessary relief to crop and livestock farmers of the affected provinces.

When asked if the current climate could be declared a national disaster, Zokwana said it was still early and they need sufficient proof before government could declare a national disaster due to the ongoing drought.

The minister also said rumours of alleged price fixing will be looked into as they are not sure of recent reports regarding manipulation of prices.

"More efforts are needed to address the situation as it is now a threat to food security and could scale down jobs in the agricultural sector, given that the



OASIS: The government has allocated more than R400m to help struggling farmers, but they say it's not enough. More than 5 000 livestock have died due to the drought in Limpopo alone. PICTURE: REUTERS

current situation will force the country to import both white and yellow maize," Zokwana said.

Rural Development and Land Reform Minister Gugile Nkwintini said his department had made available R187m through the National Disaster System for drought relief.

The South African Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Sacci) said it noted with great concern the state of drought in South Africa and the effects it has on farmers and agricultural jobs, and the ripple effect this will have on the

South African economy.

Sacci said it welcomed the commitment by government to work with business in ensuring better and impact relief and recovery from the drought situation.

"The announcement by the Agriculture Department of requesting the national Treasury for more funds to assist farmers to deal with the current drought will be appreciated. The majority of farmers are relying on getting production loans for the next season, this request by Agriculture Depart-

ment will come as a welcome relief.

"We encourage the government to continue pursuing economically viable arrangements that will allow importation of maize into the country," the chamber said.

Meanwhile, some reports stated that SA, the largest maize producer on the continent, may harvest 39% less grain in the 2015-16 season than a year earlier after the country suffered the lowest rainfall since records began because of the global El Niño weather pattern.

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