

MEC's master plan for farmers

Mthembu says farmer alliances are key in the development of an integrated system for the agricultural sector

SIBONGISENI MAPHUMULO

FARMERS in the province can relieve themselves of the burden of high live-stock feed costs by organising themselves into value chain interlinked business associations, agriculture and rural development MEC Themba Mthembu said at a meeting in Madundube area of Mbumbulu.

He addressed farmers who needed the government's help to subsidise their stock feed.

Mthembu was in Madundube to observe the progress made by Abaphumeleli Piggery, owned and managed by Sandile Mthethwa, a young farmer who initiated the project in 2012. The project was funded by the department with milling equipment, replacement stock feed, fencing and a slurry dam to the tune of R1.5m, two years ago.

Abaphumeleli Piggery has a monthly turnover of R200 000 by supplying more than 30 pigs a week to Darnall Abattoir and some through an online auction.

The business has four permanent employees and three casual labourers.

The farmers, mostly involved the poultry business, raised concerns that feed prices had escalated their input costs by more than 90%, with some saying that they were barely coping.

Mthembu said if farmers formed



COST CONCERNS: Farmers say feed prices have escalated input costs by more than 90%.

themselves into farmer business alliances to cater for each other's needs they could easily solve the cost problem, keep their overheads in check and stimulate the local economy.

He said it was easier for the government to work with business all

iances than individual cooperatives.

"If one farming business raises live-stock, another must grow crops for feed and others must go into processing businesses. In that way you can create local economy by occupying the whole value chain.

"The government can then help with the subsidisation of processing facilities such as mills and abattoirs," he said.

Mthembu said farmer alliances were more crucial now that the government was implementing the Provincial Agricultural Master Plan, which required all

stakeholders to give input in the development of an integrated plan for the provincial agricultural sector.

"The Agricultural Master Plan will require farmers and local councillors in each ward to give input in a five-year plan that determines the agricultural development direction for their area.

This will be a blueprint that will ensure that the department continuously delivers on its mandate, irrespective of any changes in executive or administrative leadership

This will be a blueprint that will ensure that the department continuously delivers on its mandate, irrespective of any changes in executive or administrative leadership," he said.

He said for the Plan to be output driven, create consistency and ensure synergy of efforts, the government was talking to amaKhosi to yield more land to local farmers for agricultural purposes.

sibongisenim@thenewage.co.za