

Small-scale dagga farmers in KZN prepare for green light on legislation

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WHILE the country awaits the National Assembly's much-anticipated decision on the legalisation of dagga, some farmers in KwaZulu-Natal are championing at the bit to start cultivation.

This comes after the Western Cape High Court in March found that laws prohibiting the use of cannabis and the possession, purchase and/or cultivation – in private homes and for personal use – were inconsistent with the Constitution and declared them invalid.

The judgment was hailed a major victory by some political parties and civil groups.

However, Parliament has yet to amend the legislation, a process that could take up to two years.

Eager to start farming, the Cannabis Council of SA had its first briefing session with farmers in Camperdown on Thursday, to dis-

cuss the way forward and forming an industry association.

About 150 small-scale farmers from across the province attended.

The council identified small-scale farmers who would be assisted in getting into the industry. They are in the Melmoth, KwaDukuza, Mandini, Winterton, Underberg and South Coast areas.

Founder of the council Krithi Thaver said it wanted to educate farmers on how they would be integrated into the model. He maintained that cultivating cannabis for either medicinal or other industrial purposes would be strictly controlled.

"The farmers will have to import the seeds from either Europe or China. If they are unable to afford the costs themselves, the council will help them find private-sector funding," said Thaver.

However, South Africa's Anti-Drug Alliance has criticised the



Dagga has been in the mix recently, and prospective growers claim to be ready to get growing.

intention to decriminalise dagga, saying public and professional awareness needs to be improved around the issue.

The alliance claimed that health practitioners, doctors specifically, had not been educated or trained on using cannabis as a treatment alternative and suggested that they needed massive education once its

production became legal.

Various groups, such as the Phoenix North Coast Cancer Support Group, said it was also gearing up to provide medical cannabis treatment at affordable prices for cancer patients, once legalised.

The group said it was busy forming strategic alliances with reputable companies to make its products affordable and available via the support group.

"Though not yet legalised, it seems patients are somehow sourcing medical cannabis.

"Patients need to be extremely careful of their source as if it is not medically manufactured, it could have adverse consequences," read the statement.

A commercial sugar cane grower, Noah Nyawo from KwaMbonambi, near Empangeni, said he had already presented his plan to the KZN Department of Agriculture.

"Let's be honest, people have been growing this plant for a long time ago, especially in the rural areas. Now there is a flicker of hope that this special plant may be decriminalised and we must be ready for that.

"I have reserved land to cultivate dagga. My business plan is with the department, this could change many people's lives, I believe it is just a matter of time," said Nyawo.

Department of agriculture spokesperson Khaye Nkwanyana said it had not yet prepared any plans on the cultivation of dagga since the matter was still waiting on Parliament.

"We have been receiving proposals and business plans from various farmers and organisation who have shown interest in cultivating cannabis. We accept their proposals but we have not made any plans and will wait until Parliament says something," said Nkwanyana.