



The Mercury, 26 January 2015 – Front page

# Farms hit hard, but food supply 'not at risk'

Nokuthula Ntuli

KWAZULU-Natal farmers have lost millions in revenue as production is hit by the drought that continues in the province.

However, Agri SA and the KZN Department of Agriculture are adamant that food security is not threatened.

Siyabonga Madlala, of the Mansomini Co-operative in Glendale, north of Stanger, said they were more than R6 million below their average sugar cane crop.

"Our vegetable crops also failed dismally. Thousands of cabbages rotted before maturity due to the severe heat," he said.

They resolved to temporarily stop planting cane and vegetables owing to persistent dry and hot conditions and low water levels in the rivers. They risk losing next year's cane harvest if they do not

resume planting within the next two weeks, but their hopes depend on the availability of water.

"The reopening of school poses another challenge because we supply Enterprise Iembe with fresh produce, which is distributed to schools for their nutrition programme," said Madlala.

Eshowe's Zululand Nurseries managing director, Gareth Chittenden, said: "Preparing new seedlings is a challenge because we do not have water for irrigation and our customers are not buying seedlings because there is no rain."

He expects their revenue to go down by 50% for the 2014/15 season.

Beekeepers have also been hurt: "Drought conditions impact on the bees negatively, in that if the plants are unable to produce nectar, because of the dry conditions, they have a shortage of food," said Craig Campbell, the chairman of the KZN

Bee Farmers' Association.

He was unsure how wild bee populations were faring, but said the African bee was good at reproducing, and would recover when the conditions returned to normal.

Rob Symons, of Broadleaze Farm near Pietermaritzburg, anticipated that their hay production might drop by more than a third.

"Irrigation is no substitute for rain. We need good rains. The next two months are critical," he said.

Mandla Buthelezi, the National African Farmers' Union of SA chairman for KZN, said members had lost millions from their cattle and vegetable crops dying.

"As a cattle farmer, I harvest hay so my stock have something to feed on throughout the year. But for grass to grow, we need water."

The dairy farms were also losing out as they could not milk "starving cows, especially when the calves

don't even have grass to nibble on".

Buthelezi said most land restitution beneficiaries were badly affected by the drought because they had no experience in dealing with it. He called on the government to desludge dams while the water levels were low.

Kosie van Zyl, an adviser at Agri SA, said he would not call the situation a drought: "There has been rain, even though it has not been enough... I think even coastal areas should start getting good rains soon and some of the crops will survive."

Provincial Department of Agriculture spokeswoman, Nalini Naidoo, said the financial impact of the drought on the sugar industry, and particularly small cane farmers, had been severe.

"Meetings are being held with farmer and commodity associations to design appropriate support mechanisms," said Naidoo.



BUCHAN

## Farmer and evangelist Angus Buchan leads prayer for rain

Bongani Hans

**CHARISMATIC** KwaZulu-Natal evangelist and farmer Angus Buchan led a prayer for rain at a meeting of farmers and town-folk in Ballito on Friday.

"This is what we call a green drought, – it looks, to the eye, like everything is all right, but underground

there is nothing," said Buchan, who farms near Greytown.

The drought had badly affected his home town, with the neighbouring Msinga area out of grazing.

"We are concerned that come winter there will be no grass for the cattle."

He said farmers in Ballito had already felt the pinch of drought.

"The issue of drought in South Africa... is critical. The sugar mills are

about to close down, which means people will have no work," he said.

However, he said, with Jesus the situation could be reversed if people regularly gathered in large numbers to pray for rain. After the prayers he assured people there would be rain and farmers would be able to plant.

"I cannot say when it is going to rain, but it will," he said.

Nigel Slevin, who farms near

Shakaskraal, outside Ballito, said the rainfall in the area had dropped by 50%.

"We cannot last. We need rain now. Dams are shockingly low."

Department of Water and Sanitation regional head Ashley Starkey said R352.4 million would be used to implement water restrictions in the affected municipalities.

"The drought's devastating effects are quite palpable," he said.