



Kwanalu: Admin processes are failing farming sector

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WITH KwaZulu-Natal in the crippling grip of the province's worst drought in 23 years, KwaZulu-Natal Agricultural Union (Kwanalu) director Sandy la Marque said yesterday that the "ongoing bungling" of the drought declaration on funds allocated to farmers "was most distressing".

"Livelihoods, animals and communities at large are being severely affected by the worst drought in years and simple administrative processes are failing the sector," she said. "We also wait with bated breath to hear that agriculture is included in the declaration and that a holistic approach to relief and sufficient funds are allocated to make a significant difference.

"Note is also taken that promises are being made for relief, however, at this time there has been no physical manifestation of any support to any farmers in any form."

She said they had only been included in the discussions regarding a R6 million scheme for communal livestock farmers but were unaware of any other schemes.

"Kwanalu has always been proactive and readily available to assist the department during administrative processes, assessments, providing constructive inputs and communicating the relevant information.

"Kwanalu will remain committed to participate in any processes in order to secure the best situation for agricultural producers in KZN," she said.

With farming communities across the province losing crops and livestock every day due to the drought, the KwaZulu-Natal Agriculture Department spokesperson Lel-ethu Manentsa said yesterday they had made a submission on relief as part of the request for the declaration.

"However, the department could not get confirmation of any relief from [the] national [department]. Nevertheless, the department has made funds available from its budget for relief to farmers."

He said they would also be investigating the possibility of using state land for grazing. "The department is proposing a scheme which will address issues like water and production inputs. We are also proposing a scheme that will allow farmers to procure inputs at a subsidised rate and at no time will money be paid to farmers."

Yesterday, a press statement sent by the DA said the party was concerned that "some provincial governments appear to have failed to gazette provincial disaster declarations".

The statement said KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Limpopo should immediately gazette the declarations and submit disaster funding requests to the National Treasury for funds to be released to alleviate the pressures caused by the drought.

DA shadow minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Annette Steyn said they

MEANWHILE Northern KwaZulu-Natal's farming community has been crippled by the drought.

The National Development Agency — a poverty eradication agency of the Department of Social Development — released a statement yesterday revealing the devastating affects of the drought on smaller farmers and their produce in recent months.

The agency's spokesperson Them-beka Khumalo said the agricultural sector is suffering setbacks in producing critical crops due to the drought "and changing climate conditions".

He said the Hluhluwe-based Akehlulwalutho Pineapple and Vegetable Farming Co-operative in the poor uMkhanyakude District Municipality has had critical setbacks to production.

An estimated 90% of the country's pineapple production comes from the area and was established in 2010 to combat the high unemployment rate in the area.

Akehlulwalutho Pineapple and Vegetable Farming Co-operative project co-ordinator Thobile Msezane said in the release that although pineapples require little water, the drought had "proven detrimental even for the substitute vegetables that we grow for cash flow whilst preparing the pineapple to fruit for market".

— Witness Reporter.

would be requesting an ad hoc committee to summon before it the departments of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries; Water and Sanitation; Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs; Rural Development and Land Reform; as well Finance to brief it on the extent of the drought, provincial funding requests and immediate action steps being taken.

"The purpose of the committee would be to make recommendations towards mitigating the damage this drought is inflicting on our communities.

"A statement released by the National Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) confirmed that it had received disaster declaration confirmations from the North West and the Free State. However it is astounding that no such declaration confirmations have been received from KZN, Mpumalanga and Limpopo.

"The implications of this have dire consequences for the farming and rural communities that desperately need aid to prevent the collapse of rural economies and livelihoods.

"It is time that government acknowledged that our nation's food security is now at serious risk," she said.

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