



MORE THAN 40 000 CATTLE HAVE BEEN LOST IN THE DROUGHT

Mass loss of cattle

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AN ALARMING 40 000 head of cattle have died in KwaZulu-Natal where farmers are battling the worst drought since 1982.

With some areas bone dry while others having been given a lifeline of just 120 days, it is feared that there will be a sudden drop in meat prices as farmers resort to culling, followed by huge price increases.

Red Meat Producers Organisation (RPO) CEO Gerhard Schutte confirmed that in KZN alone, thousands of cattle had died.

"More than 40 000 cattle have died and serious losses of livestock are currently being experienced in the emerging sector countrywide," Schutte said.

Schutte said the mass slaughtering would likely result in a temporary oversupply of red meat and lower prices in shops.

Although KZN was the hardest hit province, the North West, Limpopo and Free State have also been hit hard.

Free State RPO chairperson Neels de Villiers said between 10 000 and 20 000 cattle have died in the Free State due to the drought.

Schutte said provision of water for

livestock was now a crisis situation because dams, marshes, springs, fountains, rivers and boreholes were drying up.

"New boreholes are drilled at high cost and with limited success. In some cases water is driven in, in some places as far as 15km," he said.

In the heat, cattle consume between 40 litres and 50 litres of water per head per day, which renders the logistics of water supply very difficult.

Farmers have already scaled down to nucleus herds and high costs are being incurred for feed and water supply. The maize price has already risen by more than 40%.

Schutte said that when the country started recording normal rainfall figures, it would take commercial producers between three and four seasons to recover economically.

"It has a very negative impact on the 1.2 million households that own cattle, sheep and goats and it has a serious impact on income and food security."

The countrywide drought comes after a poor 2014 season in most parts of the country. At least six weeks of the growth of natural grazing has already been lost and crop residues will be limited during the coming winter.

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Cattle suffering from the drought.