



agriculture & rural development

Department:
agriculture
& rural development
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

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KZN MEC FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, MR THEMBA MTHEMBU'S SPEAKING NOTES AT THE MEETING WITH TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP

VENUE: COASTLANDS ON THE RIDGE

DATE: Tuesday 11 October 2016

The Leadership of Contralesa

All Amakhosi Present

Thank you for taking the time to attend this meeting. I asked to see all of you because I want to cultivate a closer working relationship with the traditional structures in our Province.

We work together as the traditional leadership and government and you do have links with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, which we call DARD for short. However, I believe that we need to forge stronger ties to grow agriculture and the rural economy in this province. To succeed on this front, our Traditional Leadership has to be a critical pillar. You are on the ground and you know the social structures of the people of KZN. This closer working relationship will in turn, help us change to the lives of our people.

As a Department, we want to contribute a massive programme on food security. This is because research has shown that the top 10% of the richest households in SA account for over half of the nation's income. The other side of this coin is that half of South Africans do not have sufficient access to affordable, nutritious and safe food to meet their basic health requirements.

Recent statistics indicate that 46% of the population is food insecure. More than 28.3% of the population is at risk of going hungry, and 26% experiences hunger on a daily basis. Our food insecure citizens reside in working class communities such as townships and rural areas. These are communities that you know well. It is imperative that we put our heads together around this critical issue of food security.

KwaZulu-Natal has to grow more food but how do we do this when young people are leaving the rural areas. An important intervention is to begin to inculcate a culture of agriculture in our communities, so that it becomes a key part of our lives. Agricultural expert, Mohammad Karaan once said that apartheid's "biggest crime," was the detachment of African people from the land. He said, and I quote: "Now Africans can't farm profitably but it shouldn't be a surprise – they have lost 100 years of agriculture tradition and expertise."

Amakhosi, this is what we want to do to regain our agricultural heritage. We want to work with you to bring back our indigenous practises and to build on them in order to have our own agricultural identity. More importantly, we need this indigenous knowledge to survive under the current threat of climate change. You have all experienced the ravages of the current drought, you saw cattle and crops die before your eyes. Yet, KwaZulu-Natal has hardy indigenous Nguni cattle, goats and sheep that can survive these dry conditions. We have grasses and crops that can grow in dry conditions. There are farmers in our province who know of traditional methods of conserving water in this soil. We need to work together to unearth this traditional knowledge.

Even more pressing, is the need to work together to instil a love for the land especially among our young people. As Amakhosi, you can definitely help in this regard. Yesterday I had a meeting with the Principals of TVET Colleges. Many of them are offering agricultural courses so that we can get more skilled workers in this field, but the problem is that they do not have land where their students can get practical experience. This is frustrating the students who are not getting the chance to feel the soil run through their hands.

Similarly, the Colleges and the Universities need land where they can carry out experiments on indigenous grasses and crops. As custodians of the land you can offer plots that can be used for the short term to grow our indigenous knowledge.

The Department is currently in the process of launching the Province's planting season. This is another area of greater cooperation between DARD and the traditional leadership.

In future, we would like to see our traditional structures play a critical role in the programmes of the planting season. In fact, we want to work with you in formulating our programs. This is in keeping with our vision for radical agrarian transformation in KZN. This means that we want to reach out to all our people, more particularly the poorest of the poor in terms of our service delivery. This could range on a host of services from seeds, mechanisation, skills development and others that you may point out to us.

In fact at this stage, it may be best for me to stop, and hear your inputs on how we can build a strong partnership to radically transform agriculture in our Province.

