



**KZN AGRICULTURE MEC THEMBENI KAMADLOPHA-MTHETHWA
ADDRESSES CANEGROWERS CHALLENGES**

As we lay a solid foundation for the District Development Model Presidential Imbizo, perhaps it's best that we pause and look back at the strides we have made as a province in our effort toward inclusive economic growth, farmer support and community development. It's also the time to chart the way forward together, and for us policymakers and administrators to seek counsel and guidance from the people who matter the most in every person's life...you as the farmers, the backbone of our nation as you produce the food that feeds the whole world.

ON CLIMATE CHANGE, this changing phenomenon continues to threaten our livelihoods. The sector's frailties are laid bare when Mother Nature is angry. In July, we fought veldfires that left a trail of destruction, claiming the lives of 14 people, killing scores of wild and domestic animals, and gutted grazing lands, crops, property and infrastructure worth millions of rands. Our Research Station in Kokstad was not spared from the blaze that continued unabatedly despite our efforts to douse the flames. Deputy Minister, Honourable Capa, you were also with us in Camperdown when we visited several farms plagued by the veldfires that threatened us for the better part of July. You had a first-hand experience of the harsh realities in the aftermath of the veldfires and you witnessed the magnitude of the workload on our shoulders as we battled the blaze, scrambled around to seek resources to mitigate the effects of the veldfires. As if that was not enough, on the 20th of September, we woke up to the news of the snowstorm that gripped areas adjacent to the N3 freeway. According to the reports, the snowstorm claimed one life and killed many animals even as far as Zululand, King Cetshwayo, and uMkhanyakude districts. This has had an adverse impact on the agricultural sector.

All this happening against the backdrop of domestic socio-economic factors such as severe hunger, poverty and the devastating effects of the floods, socio-political unrest, and global disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic, which have exposed vulnerabilities in food access and distribution. Hence, our stance for collaborative efforts between the National and the provincial government to strengthen the capacity of municipalities to provide social services and facilitate inclusive economic growth by attracting investment.



We are heeding the call by the President's led DDM which affords all social partners government, traditional leaders, civil society organs, labour, women, youth, persons with disabilities, business and communities an opportunity to collectively champion inclusive economic growth and job creation as committed by the Government of National Unity premised on actionable policy directives and main priorities which are;

- Inclusive growth and job creation.
- Reducing poverty and tackling the high costs of living.
- Building a capable, ethical, and developmental state.

DDM/OPERATION SUKUMA SAKHE

In line with DDM or KZN Premier Thamsanqa Ntuli's led Operation Sukuma Sakhe, we visited uMkhanyakude District to further streamline our provincial commitments with the district's four local municipalities. Farmers in this northern part of KwaZulu-Natal highlighted a number of challenges that are a stumbling block toward their development. Lack of water, access to market for their fresh produce and livestock and the shortage of dipping chemicals proved to be the most pressing issues. These are some of the challenges that are also being experienced across the province and are being attended to.

ON FARMER SUPPORT PROGRAMMES, we are forging ahead with farmer support programmes. Organizations such as the Agribusiness Development Agency (ADA) and the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) provide financial support to farmers and agribusinesses in KwaZulu-Natal.

This funding can be used to improve productivity, market access, and overall business growth. Recently, the department issued an open call for farmer support, and we are currently assessing and screening all applications for 2025/26. Our entity, Agribusiness Development Agency (ADA), is also processing applications for agricultural businesses.

We believe that the livestock industry remains a sub-sector that has not fully been exploited in KwaZulu-Natal, especially the potential that exists amongst communal farmers. The department provides through its animal healthcare programme dipping chemicals and vaccines to over 2 000 Diptanks across the province. Just recently, over R20 million was used to procure over 9 000 units of dipping chemicals currently being distributed across the province. Working with ARC,



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DARD promotes a genetic improvement programme in livestock. Farmers are supported with access to efficient issuance of branding certificates working with the National Department of Agriculture. The department runs state-of-the art veterinary laboratory services that perform various diagnostic tests for the provinces livestock farmers.

ON FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE, three of KwaZulu-Natal districts - Zululand, King Cetshwayo and uMkhanyakude - are still under restriction due to a Foot-and-Mouth Disease, which is forcing farmers not to trade their livestock beyond their districts due to movement control measures applied on affected diptanks. In the fight to contain the spread of Foot-and-Mouth (FMD), we have advised farmers within the three districts to contact the Department in case they wish to move their animals and be guided accordingly, the control measures are still in place and the clinical surveillance is still underway to ensure early detection of FMD.

We are conducting vaccinations across the province to ensure that animals are free from any tick-borne disease. In KwaZulu-Natal, the challenge is exacerbated and complicated by the FMD carrier status of buffalo populations in some game reserves in close proximity to communal livestock and borderline areas. FMD is a cause for concern as it has a negative impact on red meat production and its export prospects.

AGRIC TO GDP

Contributions to economic growth and development of the province remain a central priority for the department in its quest for a sustainable and transformed agricultural sector. The agriculture sector contributes close to 6% of the provinces GDP. However, inclusivity remains a stubborn challenge. Through our transformative agenda, a playing field has to be leveled in order to bring to the fore the previously disadvantaged farmers so that they, too, participate in the mainstream economy through agriculture.

DARD/SASRI EXTENSION VENTURE AGREEMENT

The sugar industry hasn't been fully back on its feet following large quantities of cheap imports in 2018, COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 to 2022, the July 2021 Civil unrest, and the 2022 floods in KwaZulu-Natal. In our efforts to mitigate these challenges, the Department of Agriculture entered into a memorandum of understanding with the South African Sugarcane Research Institute or SASRI in the form of an Extension Venture for five years (2021-2025). The main purpose was to



improve sugarcane production in the sugar industry by bringing together the strengths and capabilities of both partners through good communication. Conduct annual Small Scale Growers (SSGs) and Land Reform Growers (LRGs) Modular Courses. It's worth noting that this industry with 12 Millers and 25 thousand sugarcane growers, has direct employment estimated at 67 thousand jobs and 270 thousand indirect employment, which represents a significant percentage of the total agricultural workforce in South Africa.

ON RABIES VACCINATIONS, the Metropolitan area of eThekweni has the highest number of positive Rabies cases in the province and the entire country and that 99 % of rabies deaths in people around the world are caused by dog bites. From 2021 to date, the province has recorded seventeen (17) human deaths; EThekweni is leading with 10 human deaths and the majority of deaths being children between 2 years and 13 years. We are currently on the ground conducting vaccinations in our communities. In eThekweni alone, we have vaccinated over 240 thousand dog population, and the awareness drive is ongoing. I must also express my greatest disappointment that while we are making this moral duty, our vets and staff conducting vaccinations are being robbed of their vehicles and state property. We are in talks with police ministry to chart a way forward on how to act on this obligation without any hindrance. Such incidents are common in King Cetshwayo, uMgungundlovu, and eThekweni.

ON HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL SURVEY AND FOOD SECURITY, we have envisioned a green province with crops, fruits, and vegetables. The farms that are lying fallow and under-utilised must be brought back to full operation. In a recent survey on National Food and Nutrition Security commissioned by the Department of Agriculture, the Human Sciences Research Council's report revealed that the levels of food insecurity varied across districts. It said that 17 percent of the household in the province suffered from severe food insecurity, while 4,3 percent suffer from severe hunger. It further revealed that severe food insecurity was more prevalent in Zululand district, where 35% of the households were severely food insecure. Other districts also experiencing severe hunger are King Cetshwayo, Harry Gwala, and uMzinyathi. EThekweni alone, the percentage of people who are severely food insecure are 12 percent.

What's even more depressing, according to this report, despite these districts having relatively high levels of access to land yet have low participation of households in farming activities. While South Africa is considered food secure at a national level, recent data from the Human Sciences



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Research Council (HSRC) highlights that some pockets of food insecurity remain prevalent in various regions.

It has, thus, recommended the following: Promotion of domestic food production to ensure food security at household level A focus on employment creation through the agricultural sector; Investment in food markets and food banks at fruit and vegetable markets close to vulnerable households in all districts; Land redistribution and restitution with a rezoning strategy for land under traditional authorities so that some can be reserved for agricultural production.

Last month we launched the Provincial Planting Season in uMsinga where the Premier of the Province Honourable Thamsanqa Ntuli gave us his marching orders and I felt that it's important that I shared it with you because as the farmers you're central to it. Open quote: "The success of this multi-planting season will be measured by the greenery visible throughout KwaZulu-Natal. If we don't see green vegetables and crops along our highways, we will have failed the people of the province." Closed quote. A clarion call on us as policymakers, officials and administrators, more especially the farmers to help us achieve this as it's achievable.