



Produced by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development

March 2024 | ISSUE. 11

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Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



LAND RIGHTS ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO HUMAN RIGHTS

Nontembiso Kgatle and
Phathutshedzo Madoba

In the intricate tapestry of human rights, few issues resonate as profoundly as the question of land rights. At its core lies a fundamental inquiry: Are land rights intrinsic to human rights? This question delves deep into historical injustices, societal structures, and the quest for equality and justice.

The struggle for land rights in South Africa is deeply rooted in a history scarred by oppression and injustice. Centuries of colonialism and discriminatory laws have left a lasting imprint of inequality in land access and ownership. From the Natives Land Act of 1913 to the Group Areas Act of 1950, and the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970, Black South Africans have

been systematically marginalised and dispossessed of their ancestral lands through these historic laws, policies and practices.

The Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR) was established in recognition of these historical injustices, mandated to address the wrongs of the past. Through the Restitution of Land Rights Act, 1994 (Act No. 22 of 1994), progress has been made to redress the imbalances caused by apartheid-era policies and those of the colonial government.

The CRLR National Research Unit (NRU) plays a pivotal role in this endeavour as it is tasked with providing technical support

PEO (THE SEED) is the newsletter of the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development • Private Bag X250, PRETORIA 0001.

It is published by the Chief Directorate: Strategic Communication • Private Bag X144, PRETORIA 0001.

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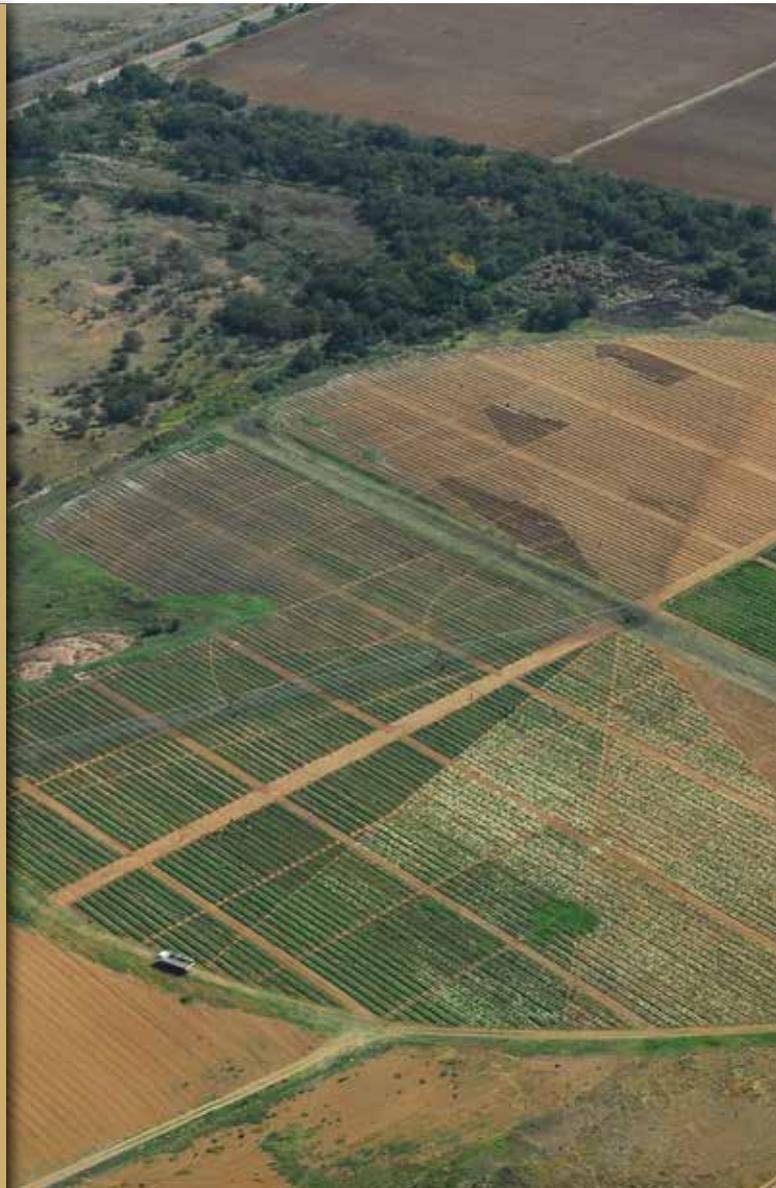
and research training to officials of the Regional Land Claims Commission (RLCC). Recognising the importance of thorough and accurate research, the NRU, through the training sessions, seeks to ensure the quality and effectiveness of land restitution processes.

The objective of this training is to equip officials with the skills necessary to expedite the production of high-quality research reports. Ms Mmadira Mathete, Deputy Director of the Research Unit, emphasised, “At NRU, our focus is not merely on increasing the volume of research reports, but rather on ensuring that project managers and officers produce reports of impeccable quality capable of withstanding scrutiny in a court of law. This training endeavours to impart knowledge and techniques that will facilitate officials in executing their research tasks with ease.” Additionally, Mr Sello Masola, Assistant Director of the Research Unit, noted, “The NRU has also developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and new business processes that colleagues are being instructed to adhere to during their fieldwork.” This training aims to assist officials in expediting research reports on claims for the restitution of land rights.

The research process for land restitution involves several key stages. Initially, the commission receives land claims and evaluates them against specific criteria, including submissions before the cut-off date of 31 December, 1998, as well as classifications of family, individual, or community claims. Preliminary investigations are then conducted to verify the legitimacy of claims based on criteria outlined in the Restitution of Land Rights Act. This is followed by various other validation and research processes concluding in an announcement of the claim in the Government Gazette.

However, the research and processing of land claims encounter significant challenges, such as competing claims, particularly among communities, clans and families, that often lead to prolonged settlement processes requiring judicial intervention.

As Mr Vhutshilo Ndiitwani, Deputy Director of the Research Unit, underscores, “Our forefathers were displaced from fertile lands to barren ones; this imbalance must be rectified for equitable land ownership.” This sentiment is echoed by Ms Mmadira Mathete, who acknowledges the profound impact of land dispossession on generational wealth and human dignity.



FARM DWELLERS AND LABOUR TENANTS RECEIVE TITLE DEEDS TO THEIR FARMS FROM PRESIDENT RAMAPHOSA

Ndivhuwo Thenga



President Cyril Ramaphosa with one of the recipients of title deeds.

“It can only be this government that gives title deeds to labour tenants.”

Emalahleni —Ululations and cries of joy reverberated on the stage when a group of 13 jubilant labour tenants’ families from Ehlanzeni, Gert Sibande and Nkangala districts of Mpumalanga received their title deeds from President Cyril Ramaphosa during the 12th District Development Model (DDM) Presidential Imbizo held at Ackerville Stadium on Thursday, 7 March.

A labour tenant is defined in Section 1 of the Labour Tenants Act, 1996 (Act No. 3 of 1996) as a person who: (a) is residing or has the right to reside on a farm; (b) who has or has had the right to use cropping or grazing land on the farm, referred to in paragraph (a), or another farm of the owner, and in consideration

of such right provides or has provided labour to the owner or the lessee; (c) whose parent or grandparent resided or resides on a farm and had the use of cropping or grazing land on such farm or another farm, including a person who has been appointed a successor to a labour tenant in accordance with the provisions of sections 3(4) and (5), but excluding a farm worker.

The recipients of the title deeds came from three different districts. The Aretshwaraneng Trust, Vuka uzenzele CPA, Tswaranang Trust and Stone Heaven Trust are from Ehlanzeni District. Others like the Siyaphambili Trust, Sisonke CPA, DE and CG Mnculwane, TA Vilakazi and the Masina/Thwala and Makhanya families came from the Gert Sibande District. From the Nkangala District were the Cimane Trust, Makgwale Ngwenya, Ngosi Family Trust and Simunye Trust. Siyaphambili Trust received two properties, which are Portion 17 of the farm Bloemkrans 121 IT and Portion 4 of the farm Tolderia 128 IT.

All the properties amount to a total hectareage of 2 933,5278 ha of land

Minister Thoko Didiza, amid applause and cries of joy, read out the names as family representatives ascended the stage to receive their title deeds and certificates from President Ramaphosa. “It can only be this government that gives title deeds to labour tenants,” said the president as he concluded the presentation of title deeds and certificates.



Premier Refilwe Mtsweni-Tsipane, Minister Thoko Didiza and President Cyril Ramaphosa posing with title deeds recipients.

NKANGALA DISTRICT LABOUR TENANTS ULULATE FOLLOWING TRANSFER OF TITLE DEEDS



Deputy Minister Skwatsha, with the beneficiaries of title deeds in Mpumalanga.

Samuel Kgatla

The lives of labour tenants at some farms in the Nkangala District of Mpumalanga have changed for the better after they were handed title deeds to land that has been transferred into their names.

The Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), Mcebisi Skwatsha, handed over five title deeds to the beneficiaries who expressed their delight and gratitude to the department for granting them security of tenure. These labour tenants were delighted because they now have the full ownership of the farms on which they were once merely workers—and that the wait for title deeds was finally over.

The title deeds were given to Skosana and Motimonye for Portion 4 of the farm Driefontein No. 377 JT measuring 218,4453 ha, Amagoje Shabangu Trust for Portion 4 of the farm Gevonden No. 398 JT measuring 256,9596ha, Jubaya Betty Msiza for Portion 8 of the farm Kwaggaskop No. 359 JT measuring 91,1436 ha, the Mahlangu family for Portion 5 of the farm Vlaakplaats No. 317 measuring 171,3064 ha, and lastly, the Dladla Family for Portion 17 of the farm Zwartkoppies No. 316 JT measuring 21,6274 ha. All the farms are based in the Emakhazeni Local Municipality.

DALRRD spent R9,6 million on the purchase of the land for all the above-mentioned farms. Furthermore, the department committed to spending more money to improve the infrastructure at some of the properties.

The three families say they used to live in constant fear of eviction as the former landowners used to threaten them with eviction until the department intervened and bought the whole farm for the families.

One of the beneficiaries and recipient of title deeds, Ms Betty Msiza, thanked the government for giving her the title deed. “This has brought me great joy and a great sense of relief when we finally received the title deeds. Our Government is really working, and I am just happy to have witnessed everything while still alive,” exclaimed the excited Msiza.

Deputy Minister Skwatsha said that the process of giving title deeds is a long one, however, government had come up with some good news for those waiting for title deeds. “Government has taken serious steps to make sure that land is transferred to the relevant people. The process has its own terms and conditions and that is why the department embarked on a Ministerial Imbizo on State Land late last year. Government must help farmers and I am asking for patience from farmers so that we can build a legacy for them. The beneficiaries of title deeds must work together on the land,” he concluded.



Deputy Minister Skwatsha and MEC Shiba handing over a title deed to one of the farmers in Mpumalanga.

MINISTER THOKO DIDIZA IMPRESSED WITH PROGRESS MADE AT KLEINWATER FARM



Farmer Moniwa Skosana and his son Andile in their kraal where they keep their Bonsmara and Nguni cattle. The cattle will soon be separated to prevent cross-breeding.

Ndivhuwo Thenga

Emalahleni—The Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Thoko Didiza, was impressed with the progress made by farmer Mr Moniwa Skosana of Kleinwater Farm since the property was leased to him by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) on a 30-year lease agreement in 2011. It is for this reason that she has promised that the department would allocate it to him if his rental payments are up to date. “If you pay the department the rental debt you have, I can give you the title deed because of the jobs that you have created,” said Didiza. She visited the farm on Monday, 4 March as part of the ministry’s stakeholder engagement before the District Development Model (DDM) Presidential Imbizo which took place at Sy Mthimunye Stadium, Emalahleni, Mpumalanga.

Kleinwater Farm was acquired by DALRRD through the Pro-Active Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAAS) in November 2010. It comprises Portions 2, 8, 9, 11 and 15 of the Farm Kleinwater 301 JS located in Emalahleni and is a mixed farming enterprise that produces maize, soya and livestock. In 2021, a total of R4 887 800,00 was spent in a land development support project to acquire cattle worth R3 620 000,00, build cattle handle facilities for R450 000,00 and purchase machinery for R250 000,00.

A tripartite agreement was entered into between Mr Skosana, DALRRD and the National Emergent Red Meat Producers’ Organisation (NERPO) to assist the farmer with red meat production and market access. Beside investments made by the department into the farming enterprise, the farmer has spent millions of his own money to purchase equipment. For example, a John Deere 9430 tractor that his son Andile affectionately calls “The Beast” cost the business R3 million and a planter was bought for over R1,1 million.

Mr Skosana plans to plant 2 500 ha of maize and soya crops, which will require access to more land. He has appealed to the minister to assist him to get more land. He is also partnering with other farmers to increase their production capacity. He has also purchased a bigger tractor from Durban that will soon be delivered. He is confident that the capacity of the new tractor will make it easy to achieve the set target. There are 250 Bonsmara and Nguni cattle on the farm and they will soon be separated to prevent cross-breeding. There are also 69 goats made of different breeds and some will be sold as the intention is to specialise in Boer goats only. The farm employs 20 permanent and four seasonal employees.

According to Mr Skosana’s young son Andile, farming is not easy, and it requires commitment and sacrifices. It involves waking up as early as 04:00 and putting in long hours of work in a day. His father echoed his sentiments and urged young people to get involved in farming. “It is not easy, but they must pull up their socks. They must take over from us and continue where we have left off,” said Skosana. Andile also identified climate change as the farm’s major challenge.

On Monday, 26 February, hail damaged their maize and soya bean crops, but fortunately, the crops were insured, and they were busy with paperwork in order for their insurer to pay out their claim. To mitigate against climate change, the farm practices a no till cultivation process which saves time and fuel. After planting their crops, Groundup weeding chemical is applied to eliminate weeds. They also practise crop rotation to prevent the depletion of soil nutrients. The Executive Mayor of Nkangala District Municipality, Cllr TD Ngwenya and MMC for Infrastructure, Cllr Msibi committed to repairing the access road to the farm.

NKANGALA FARMERS RAISE THEIR CONCERNS WITH DEPUTY MINISTER

Samuel Kgatla



One of the farmers raising her concerns during the engagement with Deputy Minister Skwatsha.

only four tractors available at their disposal were not enough for all the farmers under the municipality.

All issues were responded to by Deputy Minister Skwatsha with the assistance of senior management staff members of the department. The deputy minister told the farmers that the department was dealing with several challenges, but assured them that efforts are underway to improve the services.

He further encouraged the farmers not to give up on Government, but instead continue to work with the department. "We have been to Mpumalanga many times to deal with issues related to farmers. We made a commitment to resolve your issues and all the concerns are going to be addressed by the department. Some of the issues cannot be resolved in one day, but we are going to help you," he said.

Meanwhile, the Mpumalanga Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs (DARDLEA) promised to improve on mechanisation and requested the farmers to register with the department to get the relevant assistance.

A shortage of farming equipment, the title deeds transfer process and stock theft are among the concerns raised by the farmers from all the municipalities under the Nkangala District in Mpumalanga. Farmers were addressing their challenges to the Deputy Minister for Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), Mcebisi Skwatsha, on 4 March 2024 in Emalahleni during the stakeholder engagement between the department and more than 500 local producers. This engagement was part of the Pre-Presidential Imbizo activities, which took place ahead of the District Development Model (DDM) Presidential Imbizo on 7 March, in the Nkangala District.

The Pre-imbizo events were aimed at assessing the department's progress and challenges relating to agricultural, land reform and rural development issues in communities. Among the various concerns voiced were infighting among the communal property associations' (CPAs) members, CPAs' members destroying their own properties, hail disasters, insufficient tractors at Emalahleni Municipality, damaged fences at some farms, delays in title deeds finalisation, inadequate water, loss of livestock owing to biosecurity issues, and limited grazing land owing to mining activities.

Mr Sihle Mtsweni, one of the farmers who raised concerns, pleaded with the government to improve by adding more tractors to the Emalahleni Municipality to service them, adding that the



Mr Sihle Mtsweni pleading with the government to provide services by adding more tractors to the Emalahleni Municipality.

MOTSHWENE VENTURES INTO SORGHUM AND AGRO-PROCESSING AFTER CHALLENGES IN THE PORK INDUSTRY

Ndivhuwo Thenga

Mr Zondiwe David Motshwene of Naga Piggery Farm in Emalahleni was once a successful pork producer, and his son Katlego even won the Young Farmer of the Year accolade in 2016. Sadly, this changed when the profitability of his farm declined. He revealed this to the Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Thoko Didiza, during her visit to the farm as part of stakeholder engagements ahead of the District Development Model (DDM) Presidential Imbizo held at the Sy Mthimunya Stadium in Emalahleni on Thursday, 7 March.

“I was in pig farming up until 2023 but stopped its operations because it was no longer viable. That is when I decided to take on the grain giants such as SENWES and Tiger Brands. These big companies buy our produce on their own terms without taking into consideration the costs involved in grain production,” Motshwene told Minister Didiza and other dignitaries during the visit to the farm.

Portion 0 of Klipoort 277 JS was acquired by the department through the Pro-Active Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAAS) in March 2011 and was leased to Naga Piggery Farming CC for a period of 30 years. The farm now produces sorghum, maize and livestock. In the initial stages, they experienced theft after the establishment of the Siyanqoba residential area near to the farm.

In 2022, a tripartite agreement was signed into between Naga Piggery, South African Grain Farmers Association (SAGRA) and the department. DALRRD has made significant investments into Naga Piggery through its land development support programme. A total of R3 945 336,54 was allocated to the project and an amount of R1 596 624,00 was spent on production costs, R252 000,00 on operations, R1 790 000,00 on infrastructure, and R229 373,00 and R77 359,54 on service fees. Fencing and renovation of the workshop were done at a cost of R1 863 063,00 and agrochemicals, seeds and fertilisers were purchased for R691 167,50.

Motshwene thanked the department for leasing the farm to him for a period of 30 years, and for the support it has given to him over the years. He also sung praises to the provincial department of agriculture for allocating a dedicated extension officer to the farm to support him in his endeavours. Five permanent jobs have been created through this project and 10 temporary jobs were created during fencing and the renovations.

Naga Piggery has ventured into agro-processing by building a state-of-the-art sorghum mill. It was designed by Khutso Madubane, Motshwene's grandson who is a qualified industrial engineer and will operate henceforth. According to his grandfather, Khutso is the future CEO of the company and will work with his uncle, Katlego, who is the business manager of the farm.



State-of-the-art sorghum mill designed by Khutso Madubane, Motshwene's grandson a qualified industrial engineer.

Two grain silos that are also under construction on the farm will store red sorghum after harvest. The farm also has its own challenges. Its main challenge is that the 175 ha of arable land is small and cannot produce enough sorghum for the agro-processing facility. The remaining 202 ha of the 378,8406 ha farm is used for the grazing of Tuli and Bonsmara cattle. “I am designing a sorghum-based snack and the process is at an advanced stage,” said Khutso. The Mpumalanga Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs (DARDLEA) is assisting the farmer with food safety certification and to access the AgriBEE Fund grant.

Motshwene indicated that he would one day go back to his first love of pig farming when market conditions are right. He requested Minister Didiza to transfer the farm to his company as it currently has a lease agreement with the department. She committed to transfer the farm to the farmer if all outstanding rental debts have been cleared. He confirmed to the minister that his rental payments were done in advance, which will assist the minister to consider his request.

SAUDI ARABIA AND SOUTH AFRICA TO ENTER INTO MULTIPLE TRADE AGREEMENTS



Saudi Arabia delegation visit.

Rincert Moremi

Seeing South African beef on a store shelf in the United Arab Emirates in 2020 while on a work trip gave Mpesa Mopeli hope that one day she would also export her meat to other countries. Four years later, Mopeli's dream is about to become a reality with an open market for South African red meat to Saudi Arabia.

Mpesa attended the meeting between the Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Thoko Didiza and her counterpart, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Minister of Environment, Water and Agriculture, HE Eng Abdularam Abdulmohsen A Alfadley, to discuss possible agricultural investment opportunities between the two countries.

The meeting was also attended by senior government officials, agricultural entities, farmers and business leaders from South Africa and Saudi Arabia. The meeting follows successful negotiations on red meat export, which allows South Africa to export red meat and livestock to Saudi Arabia.

Minister Didiza welcomed the opening of the Saudi Arabian market for red meat and livestock and added that, "The livestock industry is very important to our country, both in the promotion of rural economic development and the generation of foreign earnings." This opening of red meat export to Saudi Arabia will open opportunities for farmers like Mpesa Mopeli and Makatsa Disebo from Free State to export their red meat products to Saudi Arabia.

The minister said that the country had ambitions to expand its domestic production on over two million hectares of currently underutilised land and subsequently increase exports in the coming years. South Africa is a net exporter of agricultural products to Saudi Arabia with the top five agricultural products exported by South Africa to Saudi Arabia between 2018 and 2022 being live horses, live asses, live mules and hinnies, and live cattle. These products account for 67% of South Africa's total agricultural exports to Saudi Arabia. South African key agricultural products

imported from Saudi Arabia are dates, mixes and doughs of flour, biscuits, pastry, and waffles.

The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), Deputy Director-General: Agricultural Production, Biosecurity and Natural Resources Management, Dipepeneng Serage said that South Africa has untapped opportunities in soya bean, lucerne, and meat as areas of potential for agricultural investments.

Saudi Arabia is a strategic market for importing agricultural products worth R380 billion per annum. The two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to export South African meat products to Saudi Arabia in 2022.

Disebo Makatsa, a farmer from Free State, attended the meeting and said that she was hopeful that the opportunity to export to Saudi Arabia would improve their farming operations. "We would like to be commercial farmers; we want to grow, we do not want to remain small-scale farmers forever," Disebo pleaded with Minister Didiza. Disebo is a dairy farmer and supplies milk from her Ayshire cattle to Woolworths. She also grows maize and hopes to grow her farming business to be able to process milk into other products.

In closing, it was suggested that the DALRRD would work with the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition to organise a trade seminar with the private sector prior to a planned visit to Saudi Arabia in May 2024, which will be led by Minister Didiza. It was also suggested that a task team to work on projects for investment offerings should be established.

EGYPTIAN DELEGATION VISITS SOUTH AFRICA



The Egyptian delegation and DALRRD officials inspecting soya beans at Omverwacht farm in Bronkhortspruit.



The Egyptian delegation visited the South African Bulk Terminals in Durban to inspect silos that carry soya beans.

Innocent Mhlanga

A technical delegation from Egypt visited South Africa for the purpose of verification of production practices and handling of corn and soya bean for export from South Africa to Egypt.

The delegation was welcomed by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), through officials from the Directorate: Plant Health (DPH) led by Mr Kgabo Matlala, manager of international standards within the DPH. During the opening session, the delegation was accompanied by DALRRD officials along with industry members to the farms and silos in Bronkhorstspuit and Durban.

Mr Matlala said, "According to the phytosanitary processes for exports, prior to the exporting of produce, the importing country should send technical experts to review the production practices in the fields, harvesting, packhouses and storage facilities and to evaluate pest mitigation systems." The final approval and initiation of this programme should, therefore, be based on the report by technical experts.

The Egyptian delegation comprised two members: Dr Islam Aboelela, who supervises the pest risk analysis unit at the National Plant Protection Organisation (NPPO) of Egypt, Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation, and an engineer, Mr Mostafa Tolba, an inspector from the Damietta Port, NPPO.

Asked for comment on the visit, Dr Islam Aboelela said that the purpose was to get acquainted with the plant health regime in South Africa and to verify some procedures to grant the market access of South African maize and soya beans to Egypt, as well as discuss the bilateral cooperation and facilitate safe trade between the two countries.

He added that the expectation of the visit was to meet all stakeholders in the value chain and learn expertise from South African farmers and exporters in addition to agreeing on the draft

phytosanitary of import requirements for maize and soya beans to Egypt.

The DPH is the official policy unit of the NPPO of South Africa positioned within the DALRRD to regulate plants and plant products in line with the Agricultural Pest Act, 1983 (Act No. 36 of 1983).

The DPH aims to reduce the spread of pests associated with plants and plant products, to facilitate safe trade and to ensure compliance with the appropriate international plant health standards.

Mr Kotzé from the South African Cereals and Oil seeds Trade Association (SACOTA), representing exporters, said that the visit might open Egypt as an exporting opportunity for soya beans and maize and will ensure an international fair price for South Africa.

Kotzé added that farmers will be able to export surplus stock and, ensuring that we give our citizens the best prices, having an active article export market helps with food security as well.

"The population in South Africa is consistently growing, and what is noteworthy is that our agricultural sector is well-equipped to handle this growth," said Mr Godfrey Kgatle from Grain SA. "Fortunately, our unified agricultural sector, involving the government and various industry stakeholders throughout the value chain, allows us to produce an excess of grain."

"This surplus enables us to export our grain, preventing commodity price drops caused by an oversupply. We extend a warm welcome to delegations from around the world, including the Egyptian NPPO, to witness the high-quality production we achieve and to assure them of the excellence of our products," he emphasised.

BIOCHAR—CARBON GOLD THAT WORKS WONDERS WITH PLANTS



Biochar made from burned avocado tree twigs.



Dr Corrie Swanepoel of Agricultural Research Council presenting the donated kiln to produce biochar.

Ndijhuwo Thenga

Climate change is a reality and climate-smart agricultural practices should be adopted by all producers to ensure sustainability. Up until now, biochar was not associated with agricultural production, however, a recent research study conducted by the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) at the Lwamondo, Tshifulanani Irrigation Scheme in Vhembe District, Limpopo, will soon change this.

Biochar is a charcoal-like substance that is made by burning organic material from agricultural and forestry waste in a controlled process called pyrolysis. During pyrolysis, organic materials, such as wood chips, macadamia nut skins, twigs or dead plants are burnt in a container with little oxygen. Biochar is black, highly porous, lightweight, fine-grained and has a large surface area. Approximately 70% of its composition is carbon. The remaining 30% consists of nitrogen, hydrogen, oxygen, and other elements.

It is by far more efficient at converting carbon into a stable form and is cleaner than other forms of charcoal. Biochar improves soil health through the retention of nutrients and moisture. Biochar stays long in the soil and helps the soil keep fertiliser for a longer period. Once fertiliser is applied, biochar will retain it and make it last longer in the soil, therefore saving production costs during the production cycle.

In her “Biochar-based climate-smart smallholder agricultural production” information and awareness session with the Tshifulanani smallholder farmers, Dr Corrie Swanepoel told participants that healthy soil produces healthy crops. “Healthy soil consists of organic material and plenty of organisms.

Healthy soil is loose and not compacted. Earthworms make soil loose, allowing roots and water to penetrate the ground,” said Dr Swanepoel. To test the efficacy of biochar in agricultural production, Dr Corrie Swanepoel and smallholder farmer, Mr Lesley Nembudani, embarked on a field trial by planting habanero pepper, okra, and green beans on his plot. The results were good and there were clear differences in quality between non-experimental and trial crops.

Biochar is expensive and a ton costs about R15 000 in the Levubu River Valley. Dr Corrie Swanepoel uses a kiln made of a bigger drum outside and small drums inside to produce biochar. It is cheaper and uses firewood to burn plant material. The process to produce 40kg of biochar takes six hours: two for burning and four for cooling. She has donated her kiln to local smallholder farmers under the leadership of Ms Rudzani Mudau. The kiln will be used to demonstrate the production process to smallholder farmers and to artisans who will produce more kilns.

Biochar technology shows promise in mitigating climate change and improving soil quality. Although biochar technology is considered a new strategy for carbon sequestration, the practice of adding charred biomass to improve soil quality is not new. It is modelled after an ancient Amazonian practice, where indigenous people created areas of rich, fertile soils called terra preta or “dark earth”. The fertility of terra preta is significantly higher than the infertile soils of the Amazon. It is for this reason plants grown in the terra preta soil grow faster, and are more nutrient-dense than plants grown in neighbouring soils. The terra preta soils continue to hold carbon to this day.

FARMERS INFORMED ABOUT TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER WITH RESPECT TO ANIMAL BREEDING

Mercia Smith

Part of the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) and Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) research conference included a visit to the ARC Animal Production Institute in Irene. The focus area of research at this campus is about animal breeding and improvement, rangelands, nutrition, food science and technology to improve productivity and sustainable resource utilisation.

South Africa's Livestock Recording and Improvement Schemes and associated database, the Integrated Registration and Genetic Information System (INTERGIS), are also managed by this division on behalf of DALRRD.



Mr Johannes Chauke from the ARC Meat Science Centre demonstrating different cuts to Ms Mamiki Selebogo from Bafikile Basadi Farm and Ms Matshidiso Mooketsi from Driehoek Farm in Kuruman.



Ms Liselle Rheeders, technician in the Sensory Lab at the Meat Science Centre, with Ms Kutlwano Sekulu, a chicken farmer from the Soutpan area.

The Sensory Analysis Unit analyses food for sensory evaluations and chemical content. The facilities include 15 temperature-controlled tasting booths plus a well-equipped laboratory on par with similar research institutes world-wide.



Dr Kgantjie Moloto, manager of the abattoir showing Ms Mamiki Selebogo the cold store room. Ms Selebogo farms with chickens at Bafikile Basadi Farm in Hammanskraal.



SOUND PARTNERSHIP—THE FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESSFUL RESEARCH



Deputy Director-General: Land Redistribution and Tenure Reform, Mr Ndove and Ms Tsotso Sehoole, acting Deputy Director-General: Corporate Support Services, were part of the audience attentively listening to presentations.

Mercia Smith

A first-of-its kind research conference, hosted by the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) and the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) was held from 12 to 14 February at the ARC Roodeplaat Institute for Vegetable, Industrial and Medicinal Plants (ARC-VIMP). The theme for the conference was: “Science transforming food systems for a better future”.

The aim of the conference was to create a platform for all the necessary stakeholders to present research findings and highlight new developments. Included were scientific paper presentations, sub-theme addresses, panel discussions, policy-focused dialogues and exhibitions.

“The conference comes at a time when our food system, both nationally and internationally, is confronted by externalities ranging from climate change, global conflicts, food waste and the constant detection of new pests and diseases,” Ms Thoko Didiza, Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, said in her opening address.

“Around the world there is consensus that food systems must change to deliver on the human right to food in an environmentally sustainable, cost-effective and socially just manner. To achieve this, investment in agricultural research, innovation and partnerships is of utmost importance,” Minister Didiza said. In the current financial year, DALRRD has invested R100 million in the ARC to ensure that research continues.

Foreseeing the importance of transforming food systems, the ARC and DALRRD are establishing a Centre of Excellence on Climate Smart Agriculture at the ARC-VIMP Roodeplaat Campus, which will advance research, innovation, and knowledge



One of the exhibitors at the DALRRD ARC Conference showing off products made from cannabis.

dissemination in the field of climate smart agriculture. Climate change has a devastating impact on agriculture, affecting crop cultivation, animal production and disease occurrence and spreading. This centre will bring together experts, practitioners, and stakeholders from various disciplines. Minister Didiza concluded her opening address by affirming the government’s commitment to promoting and supporting research and development to the benefit and advancement of the agricultural value chain.

SMALL-SCALE FARMERS CELEBRATE POTATO HARVEST DAY



Mr Piet Ndinisa, a potato farmer from Bronkhorstspuit during harvest day at his farm.

Samuel Kgatla

Small-scale potato farmers around Gauteng celebrated Potato Harvest Day at Mr Piet Ndinisa's farm in Onspoed, outside Bronkhorstspuit on 13 February 2024. The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) and the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) hosted the Potato Harvest Day as part of the 75-year celebration of potato and sweet potato breeding research.

The ARC-Vegetables, Industrial and Medicinal Plants (ARC-VIMP) has been the pioneer and lead institute that served the South African potato and sweet potato industry for the past 70 years. The multidisciplinary research and development (R&D) has also been involved in demand-led cultivar development (including vitamin A-enriched cultivars), optimisation of cultivation practices, crop protection and diagnostic services, germplasm conservation and characterisation, stream-lined seed systems, processing and enterprise development. The ARC potato breeders shared their experiences, achievements, and challenges in the industry as part of the 75 years celebration.

DALRRD, ARC and the Gauteng Department of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment (GDARDE) funded 12 potato farmers; and the support will continue for two years. The programme started in 2023; training farmers in potato production. The commemoration was a day filled with great harvest and information on all things potatoes. Harvesting potatoes is so much fun, even the kids find it fun—It is like digging for buried treasure.

Potatoes are one of the easiest vegetables to grow and they produce heavy yields of tasty tubers when planted in garden beds or containers. Plus, there are so many awesome potato varieties to grow, from fingerlings to russets in a rainbow of colours.

Mr Ndinisa, one of the beneficiaries of the potato breeding programme by ARC and GDARDE, thanked the government for choosing him as one of the farmers to benefit from the potato breeding programme. Ndinisa was selected as the top performer of the programme and was given a drip irrigation system for half a hectare by AfriqWater Company. "I am prepared to work with this government because it has shown that it cares. This is my first time planting potatoes, and so far, it looks promising. My focus is going to be on potatoes and the training on potato production by government has opened our eyes. I know a lot about potatoes because of the programme," he said.

Dr Lerato Matsaunyane from ARC's farmer support mentioned that they wanted to make sure that small-scale growers also have the opportunity to participate in the value chain. "We wanted to showcase and celebrate the fact that you are able to have smallholder farmers that can make a profit and sustain a living from the potato industry," she said.



Dr Lerato Matsaunyane from ARC's farmer support with some potato farmers during the harvest day at Bronkhorstspuit.

RELIABLE CROP INFORMATION IS VITAL TO THE SMOOTH-RUNNING OF GRAIN MARKETS



Jabulani Malinga

The Crop Estimates Liaison Committee (CELC) recently released the finalised crop production figures of commercial white and yellow maize, sunflower seed, soya beans, groundnuts and sorghum for 2023.

The committee releases reliable, accurate and timely crop estimate statistics of the most important grains and oilseeds in South Africa monthly. These statistics benefit all the role players in the sector, including producers, financial institutions, input suppliers, buyers, transport agents, agricultural economists, policy makers and other decision makers.

“Reliable crop information is vital for the smooth-running of grain markets as it gives the market an early indication of the expected production prospects, helping it to accurately plan in terms of storage, transport, marketing imports and exports,” said Ms Rona Beukes, a senior statistician at the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD).

The figures recently released by the CELC are positive, especially for maize when taking into consideration the 2023/24 marketing season. The total supply is projected at 17,73 million tons and the total demand at 15,02 million tons, including opening stock and production. Therefore, the projected closing stock level on 30 April 2024 is estimated at 2,70 million tons, or 87 days of stock. This means that South Africa will regain its status as a net exporter of maize this season.

The statistics also indicated that a crop of 2,770 million tons of soya bean was produced, which is the highest on record. The crop is 71,4% higher than the average of 1,616 million tons for the past five years up to 2022. The carry-over stocks are expected to be approximately 309 847 tons, or 57 days of stock on 29 February 2024.

The statistics further painted a positive image in the case of the sunflower seed. The total supply was recorded at 809 017 tons, which is also higher than the total demand of 686 550 tons. The carry-over stocks on 29 February 2024 are expected to be about 122 467 tons, or 66 days of stock.

The timeous release of these statistics plays a crucial role in the agricultural sector and the economy of the country as they contribute to the price setting mechanisms of the market.

“Doing a crop estimate is an important practice because, for example, maize is the staple food in our country and Africa as a whole. Knowing how much maize is available in the market will determine how much we will have to pay for it at the supermarket,” said Ms Beukes.

“There are many other products whose prices are also indirectly determined by the maize price, e.g., products such as livestock feed. Therefore, knowing how much maize will be available at harvest time enables us to manage and budget accordingly. Consequently, in a poor season, we would rather keep maize back on exports and instead keep reserves for our own country’s consumption. In a good year, we would again rather export or perhaps dedicate a larger percentage into animal production. These are all decisions that the crop estimates help us make,” she added.

Crop estimates are used to form the basis in calculating the contribution of the grain crops and oilseeds to the country’s gross domestic product (GDP). The largest contributor towards the gross value of field crops for 2023 was maize (47,6%), followed by soya beans (16,5%), wheat (10,8%), sugar cane (9,3%) and sunflower seed (5,1%).

FARMERS BENEFIT FROM CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE FORUM'S VISIT TO ZUNCKEL'S FARMS

Samuel Kgatla

Youth farmers from various districts of KwaZulu-Natal benefitted from the Conservation Agriculture (CA) Forum's visit to Zunckel's farms in Bergville late last month where they were exposed to farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange about CA and cover crops from one of the successful commercial farmers, Mr Egon Zunckel on his farms. The visit was arranged by the CA Forum supported by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD).

The CA Forum consists of producers, researchers, and related industries where they discuss CA matters, such as minimal disturbance of the soil, diversity through crop rotation and retention of residues.

CA is a farming system that promotes minimum soil disturbance (i.e., no tillage), maintenance of a permanent soil cover, and diversification of plant species. It helps South African smallholder farmers to be more resource-efficient and has proved to increase yields and reduce production costs for farmers in Newcastle and Bergville in KwaZulu-Natal.

The continued support that farmers received from government extension services and benefits associated with the adoption of CA has contributed to the sustained practice of CA. Cover crops are crops (grasses or legumes) planted between, or sometimes with, regular crops primarily to protect and improve the soil.

The CA Forum aimed to inspire farmers to get to the level of Mr Zunckel who started farming in 1990 in Bergville and Warden in Free State. He farms with wheat, soya beans, dry beans, yellow maize and livestock. His CA farming operation started in 1997 and this has helped him to become a successful commercial farmer.

Ms Celiwe Mazibuko, one of the promising smallholder CA farmers in Newcastle, thanked the department for arranging the visit to Mr Zunckel's farms. "The exposure was helpful, especially for us as farmers farming with the CA method. It was a fruitful day for farmers because we learned a lot about cover crops. We have learned that cover crops help to keep our soil moist, reduce the costs and to balance the nutrients," she said.

Mr Klaas Mampholo from the Directorate: Land Use and Soil Management at DALRRD said that they wanted to see farmers growing and that was the reason they organised the visit to Zunckel's farms. "We are using government resources well for the benefit of farmers. Some farmers are not aware that cover crops save money in farming, Government must continue creating a conducive environment for farmers. It is never too late to become a better farmer and I am glad that we are exposing them to farming practices that will assist them to become the best farmers. Let us help our farmers as government officials," concluded Mampholo.



Conservation Agriculture Forum members and farmers visited Zunckel's farms in KZN.



Conservation Agriculture Forum members at Zunckel's farms in KZN.