

BEEKEEPING INDUSTRY NEEDS INCREASED SUPPORT

Samuel Kgatla



Dr Lynne Hepplestone holds wine that is made from honey.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) is pleading for increased support in the beekeeping industry in Africa. She made the plea during the Third Apimondia Africa Regional Symposium held at Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre in Durban last month. The symposium, which took place from 21 to 24 March, was aimed at uplifting beekeeping and honey processing on the continent. It was attended by international stakeholders in the industry from Africa and other countries.

The event, under the theme, "Developing the Apiculture Industry in Africa", was educational, engaging and ground-breaking for delegates. The four-day conference and networking platform was an information-sharing and policy development session for

the apiculture economy that is expected to grow exponentially in Africa and South Africa in the coming years. Beekeepers also participated in the Honey, Mead and Bee Products Competition, and were awarded in various categories including a first prize in 3D Art created by Mmatau Mosiane. Other prizes awarded were second and third in the categories, Select Honey, as well as the Beeswax Wax Block

Apimondia is a non-governmental organisation that brings together beekeepers, manufacturers of beekeeping equipment and a wide variety of scientists involved in apiculture, apitherapy, pollination, development and economics. Despite Apimondia having been formed in 1893, Africa has only seen two regional symposia hosted in Arusha, Tanzania (November 2014) and Addis Ababa,

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Chief Director	Linda Page	083 460 4482	LPage@dalrrd.gov.za
Director	Moses Rannditsheni	083 337 5869	Moses.Rannditsheni@dalrrd.gov.za
Subeditor	Lerato Mofokeng	012 319 7927	LeratoMOF@dalrrd.gov.za
Reporters	Samuel Kgatla	066 084 6653	SamuelK@dalrrd.gov.za
	Matsepo Maletswane	012 319 7852	MatsepoM@dalrrd.gov.za
	Innocent Mhlanga	063 693 0353	InnocentM@dalrrd.gov.za
	Rony Moremi	066 084 6192	RincertM@dalrrd.gov.za
	Mercia Smith	060 973 3816	MerciaS@dalrrd.gov.za
	Ndivhuwo Thenga	073 815 0345	NdivhuwoTH@dalrrd.gov.za
	Mphahlela Rammutla	067 278 2052	mphahlelar@dalrrd.gov.za
Designer	Sibongile Ngcezu	012 319 7871	SibongileN@dalrrd.gov.za

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Ethiopia (December 2018), a situation that has left stakeholders with few opportunities to come together and engage in information-sharing.

President of Apimondia, Dr Jeff Pettis, thanked the minister and South Africa for the hospitality and hosting a successful symposium. He thanked the government of South Africa for the support and allowing them to host the regional symposium in the country.

Minister Didiza applauded the Apimondia initiative and expressed her optimism that the beekeeping sector, if given the necessary support, could transform the livelihoods of rural communities and help grow the rural economies.

“We will be glad to see honey and honey products being part of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area initiative, and we commit as DALRRD to make sure that challenges currently experienced as far as irradiation of honey is concerned, are addressed. I call upon African leaders in the agricultural and beekeeping fraternity to advance programmes and strategies that will assist in improving infrastructure such as laboratories, processing plants, and ports of entry,” she said.



Honey was the most talked about subject during the Third Apimondia Symposium in Durban.



Minister Didiza and MEC Mohono were some of the delegates who attended the beekeeping symposium in Durban.



Honey wine was on display at the Third Apimondia Symposium.

IZININI CHAIRPERSON PROMISE TO RESPECT THE LAND AFTER RECEIVING THE TITLE DEED

Samuel Kgatla



From left, Executive Mayor Mhlembana, Minister Didiza, MEC Pieters and Mayor Mafumbatha celebrating with the people of Izinini village.

The Izinini Communal Property Association (CPA) was thankful for finally receiving their title deed from the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) on 11 March 2023. The title deed was handed over by Minister Thoko Didiza, together with national and provincial leaders, at Izinini Village in Bizana under Alfred Nzo District Municipality, Eastern Cape.

The CPA received the title deed after a claim that was lodged by the late Chief Nkosiphendule Ndunge on behalf of the originally dispossessed persons and their direct descendants. The claim was lodged before the cut-off date of 31 December 1998, which

was set for the lodgement of claims in terms of the Restitution of Land Rights Act, 1994 (Act No. 22 of 1994), as amended. The total size of the restored land is 1272.3381 ha. Izinini community was dispossessed of their rights to an agricultural land after 19 June 1913 to further the objectives of the then racially discriminatory practices.

The claim comprised of 814 households, and the settlement benefitted approximately 1 279 households and a total of 1 300 beneficiaries. An amount of R22,330 269.00 was approved for financial compensation. The amount was approved for payment to the claimant families in lieu of non-restorable and improvements that were lost because of the dispossession. The claimant community has entered into a partnership agreement with South African Pulp and Paper Industries (SAPPI), non-government organisations (NGOs), Eastern Cape Rural Development Agency (ECRDA) and other government entities in empowering the communities through sustainable development.

Chairperson of the Izinini CPA, Mr Dumisani Sihele, thanked the department for the support and the claimants for remaining united. "Finally, we now have the rights to this land. We need to respect this land and not lose focus because we now have the title deed. What you are giving us today is huge and others wished it was theirs. We will look after the land so that it takes care of us," he said.

Minister Didiza mentioned that land is an economic asset, and the beneficiaries must always ask themselves on how they are going to feed their families with it. "The executive committee of the CPA should know and understand how to put the interests of the people first. Treat the claimants with dignity and respect. Do not destroy this CPA and the committee. Let us work together and comply with the rules of CPA," said Minister Didiza.



People from Izinini Village listening attentively to Minister Didiza during the handing over of a title deed.

COP27 RESOLVED TO ESTABLISH CLIMATE CHANGE LOSS AND DAMAGE FUND

Ndivhuwo Thenga



The United Nations Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP27) closed with a breakthrough agreement to establish a “loss and damage” fund for vulnerable countries affected by climate disasters. This was revealed by Mr Matiga Motsepe, a deputy director responsible for climate change in the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development’s (DALRRD) Directorate: Climate Change and Disaster Management. He was briefing members of the National Agro-meteorological Committee (NAC) during their quarterly meeting held on 13 December 2022 at Riverside Sun Hotel, Vanderbijlpark, Gauteng.

The COP27 meeting was held in Egypt’s resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh from 6 to 18 November 2022. According to the United Nations (UN) Environment Programme 2022 Adaptation Gap Report, adapting to the climate crises could cost developing countries between US\$160 and US\$340 billion annually by 2030. This number could increase to as much as US\$565 billion by 2050 if climate change accelerates.

In its decision, the COP27, among other things, requests the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) to establish the four-year Sharm El-Sheikh joint work on implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security.

“Loss and Damage” in the international policy debate broadly refers to efforts to *“avert, minimise, and address loss and damage associated with climate change impacts, especially in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.”*

Representatives from 24 countries will work together during 2023 to decide on what form the fund should take, which countries should contribute, and where and how the money should be distributed. Speaking at the end of the conference, Simon Stiell, UN Climate Change Executive Secretary, said that this outcome moves the parties forward. “We have determined a way forward on a decades-long conversation on funding for loss and damage — deliberating over how we address the impacts on communities whose lives and livelihoods have been ruined by the very worst impacts of climate change.” According to the UNFCCC website, serious concern was raised that the goal of developed country parties to mobilise jointly US\$100 billion per year by 2020 has not been met, with developed countries urged to meet the goal, and multilateral development banks and international financial institutions called on to mobilise climate finance.

The Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) economic bloc climate change action for years 2021 to 2024 requires that each member country leads a thematic area and: **“Reducing the negative impact of climate change on food security and adaptation of agriculture to climate change”** will be coordinated by South Africa. South Africa will host the BRICS meeting of the Agriculture Cooperation Working Group (ACWG) and the BRICS Ministers of Agriculture and Agrarian Development in Limpopo this year. A Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) Seminar/Technical Workshop that will coincide with the BRICS meeting is also planned, and provinces are requested to assist in identifying CSA projects with “best practices” for showcasing.



Delegates who attended the SAB hops harvest in George.

MINISTER KICKS OFF SAB HOPS HARVESTING SEASON

Samuel Kgatla

The Minister for Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) joined the South African Breweries (SAB) harvest tour in George, Western Cape during March 2023. The harvest stimulates major job opportunities in the area, with over 1 500 seasonal jobs and almost R100 million being pumped into the local economy. The intensive hops harvest takes place over six weeks between February and March. Hops are planted around July every year.

Hops are used to give beers its bitterness, aroma and flavour. Nine hops varieties are produced in George, which are locally utilised and exported internationally. The hops industry is 409 ha in 2023, ranging from three cooperate farms, one research farm, seven private farms and lastly, two black farmers in the country. SAB is the home for over 5 700 employees and its beers are locally sourced with their high quality ingredients being procured from more than 1 277 local farmers. It has invested approximately R100 million in interest-free loans to black emerging farmers. George is the only region in South Africa where the conditions are ideal for hops growing.

Lauren Steytler, Plant Manager at the Rob Roy SAB hops facility said there was a lot of unemployment in George and the surrounding areas, and they saw thousands of people outside their gates just before harvest hoping for a job, but unfortunately they could only take on a selection of workers.

Hops farmer Beverly Joseph, who started farming in 2016, said she is grateful for work SAB has done to help her thrive and that she was happy to be contributing hops to SAB. She is the founder and owner of Zelpy Farm situated near George. Zelpy is a 50 ha farm that produces around 20 ha of bittering and flavour hops used in beer. Joseph also farms with proteas and madiba flowers. She had previously made headlines for becoming South Africa's first black female hops farmer at the young age of 32. It was through the SAB Thrive Fund that she was eventually able to become the owner of Zelpy Farm.

Minister Didiza said the industry is a major contributor to revenue for the country and also of jobs for its citizens. "In addition, during job creation, a number of people get employed throughout the season, not just on the production cycle, but also looking after the plants, harvesting and removing alien vegetation in areas where expansion is required. All of those jobs are important. The hops harvest season has kicked off but due to load shedding, the yield is less than normal. Partnerships are important to survive in this sector," she said.



DALRRD Minister Thoko Didiza holding hops during her tour in George.



Delegates during the walkabout to verify university assets

IDAM PREVENTED LOSS OF SKILLS AND CAPACITY

Matsepo Malatswane

The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) officially handed over the ownership of the Institute for Development Assistance Management (IDAM) to the University of Fort Hare (UFH). This, after the five-year partnership between the university and the department ended—the handover marked a new chapter for the institute.

Established 14 years ago, IDAM is a product of an agreement between the department and UFH. It was developed due to the need for a strong and effective support capacity in development cooperation in the agricultural and food security field in South Africa and its neighbouring countries to prevent skills and capacity dependency from countries outside Africa for services.

The university was brought on board the project as the institution to provide formal teaching, learning and research in the area of development assistance and management.

IDAM, located on the Bisho Campus, was officially opened on 22 March 2016. Currently, the institute under the UFH Department of Public Administration, offers a Postgraduate Diploma in Development Assistance Management.

To signify the end of the partnership and the start of a new chapter, a project close-up evaluation report was handed over by the

Deputy Director-General (DGG): Food Security and Agrarian Reform in DALRRD, Mr Nasele Mehlomakhulu, to the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Sakhela Buhlungu, during the close-up celebration event held in Bisho, Eastern Cape.



Mr Mehlomakhulu, an alumnus of the university, said when the department was looking for a partner for this project, it had no doubt about the capability of UFH. He said that the new chapter includes entrusting the future of IDAM in the capable hands of UFH.

The Vice Chancellor, Prof. Sakhela Buhlungu said while some of the institute's activities will continue, the university will undertake a process of reimagining IDAM. "There is a plan and there is serious thinking. Part of the plan is to exploit synergies between IDAM and the Faculty of Science and Agriculture and other university activities," he said.

While the partnership has ended, both parties have shown great interest in future collaborations to ensure the success of the institute.

DDG Mr Nasele Mehlomakhulu and Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Sakhela Buhlungu during a close-up handover event held in Bisho.

PASSIONATE FARMER READY TO ADOPT CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE (CA)

Samuel Kgatla



Mr Isaac Mokgatla standing in front of his maize.

A Conservation Agriculture (CA) exposure trip from Gauteng to KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) by LandCare farmers in March 2022 convinced an aspirant and passionate farmer, Mr Isaac Mokgatla, to convert gradually to CA. This was witnessed during a two-day Natural Resources Management Working Group (NRMWG) meeting held at Ingwe Guest Lodge in Vanderbijlpark and a visit to Mokgatla's farm. These were organised by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) through Directorate: Land and Soil Management (LSM).

Mr Mokgatla is one of the successful farmers in Gauteng who farms with soya beans and maize at Kalbasfontein. His knowledge about crops fascinated the delegates who visited the farm from different provinces. Mokgatla is mentally ready to convert to CA farming because of the lessons that he learned from KZN exposure, and already other principles such as rotating soya beans with maize to build nitrogen reserves. The department has already given him the thumbs up to become a CA farmer. Soya bean production is currently on the rise in South Africa and farmers like Mokgatla are expected to thrive on that opportunity. He is farming on State land on 373 ha. of which 250 ha of land is for arable land and the rest is for grazing.

CA improves nutrient use efficiency and stabilises and protects soil from breaking down. Mokgatla was the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) National Small-scale Commercial Black Farmer of the Year award winner in 2016. He is busy doing trials with reputable companies like Senwes and they provide him with seeds.

Mokgatla pleaded with the government to support him with a no-till planter of minimum 8 rows to become a fully-fledged CA farmer. "This is what I am asking for and the rest I will do them by myself. I want government to support me until I become a commercial farmer. I thank the department for bringing people to my farm," he said.

The reflections and proposed interventions from the NRMWG teams to the farmers included, amongst others, more CA ex-

posure for the farmer, Gauteng to provide the farmer with CA transitioning support, roping of research team in the province to document the data and use Mr Mokgatla's farm as a Centre of Excellence for other farmers to learn and the development farm management plan for possible livestock integration.

Mr Ramakgwale Mampholo, LandCare Programme manager from DALRRD, indicated that the purpose of the visits was, firstly, to provide oversight collectively as a team from national and different provinces as part of the stipulated condition. Secondly, the visits are undertaken precisely to learn and share experience, to share and impart knowledge to a farmer and observe oppor-

tunities regarding what can be done better, based on observations, which would result in changes and positive impact to sustainable food production.

In closing, Mampholo said that he was very happy with what he saw that day on the

farm. "The engagement was important; farmers can do more if they are engaged. Let us work with the farmers. Mokgatla brings hope to other farmers," he concluded.

"This is what I am asking for and the rest I will do them by myself. I want government to support me until I become a commercial farmer. I thank the department for bringing people to my farm," he said.



LandCare NRMWG members during their visit to Mokgatla's farm.



PROTECTING THE CONSUMER THROUGH CORRECT PRODUCT LABELLING

Rony Moremi

If it is not meat and does not have any compositional properties of meat, its name cannot be sausage, burger, or mince. Section 6 of the Agricultural Products Standards Act, 1990 (Act No. 119 of 1990) prohibits sellers or traders to sell any product under names prescribed for other products other than those intended for.

According to this Act, the use of names prescribed for processed meat products is prohibited when they are used in the sale of plant-based products. For example, the use of the name “sausage” for meat analogues, also known as meat substitutes or faux meat, mock meat is prohibited because there is a regulation that sets out minimum compositional standards for processed meat products.

The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) issued a communique on the importance of compliance with the promulgated processed meat products regulations of 2019. These regulations set out norms and standards regarding compositional properties, quality standards, packaging requirements and labelling.

The main objective of these regulations is to ensure fair trade practices by ensuring that producers adhere to the same applicable standards. These regulations also protect the consumer against the sale of substandard products. Implementation of the regulations has been assigned in terms of the Agricultural Products Standards Act, 1990 (Act No. 119 of 1990) to the assignee, Food Safety Agency, appointed in terms of Section 2 of Agricultural Products Standards Act, 1990 (Act No. 119 of 1990) for the inspection of regulated animal products, poultry meat and eggs and any other meat products for which regulations may be promulgated.

Compositional standards prescribed in terms of the Act are important in ensuring the integrity of the nutritional properties of the prescribed products. For example, meat products guarantee the consumer the presence of certain nutritional elements, whereas the alternative products may not have the same nutritional properties. Therefore, labelling is very important in communicating to the consumer what to expect from the product because it influences their purchasing preferences. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) also considers food labelling as an important, direct way of communicating information such as ingredi-

ents, quality and nutritional value of the product to the consumer.

In terms of fair trade, sellers of prescribed products are expected in terms of law to comply with the prescribed minimum standards in order to ensure that claims that are associated with the product are properly authenticated. Currently, the department is considering the development of regulations for meat analogues and products derived from cellular agriculture, for example cultivated meat. During the development of these regulations, naming conventions of such products will be considered that will be in alignment with the products in terms of the product names.

These regulations are important to ensure that the legitimate purpose of the Agricultural Products Standards Act, 1990 (Act No. 119 of 1990) is realised and to further prevent lawlessness and misleading information in terms of sale of agricultural products.



Meat analogues.



Processed meat products.



Uncooked beef burger (meat product - uncooked).

SUNFLOWER FARMER INSPIRES AND HELPS OTHER FARMERS IN LIMPOPO

Samuel Kgatla

Eradicating hunger and improving the lives of fellow farmers is the inspiration behind Frank Monaheng's sunflower farming journey. Monaheng is the owner of Mora Farming Project in Bela-Bela, Limpopo. The farm was visited by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) on 30 March 2023. The purpose was to ascertain whether the farm was yielding positive results after the department gave it to Monaheng.

Monaheng is one of the successful farmers dealing with sunflower in the country. He also farms with maize, lucerne, cattle, sheep and goats. His 1 060 ha farm was acquired from DALRRD in 2016 at the cost of R14,8 million through the PLAS/LRAD programme and is currently being leased to him for a period of 30 years. He currently plants 400 ha of sunflower and supplies it to Sunflo in Limpopo. Monaheng has developed the farm into a thriving commercial enterprise by reinvesting his profits into the business, using the funds to buy machinery to improve production and creating more employment.

His farm is one of the success stories of farmers supported by government with financial and infrastructure support. Monaheng is assisted by his wife and four children. His farm employs six permanent and six temporary workers. Sunflower farming is South Africa's third largest grain crop, according to Grain SA. Sunflower farming conditions in the country are favourable, which makes growing them a good choice for local agricultural operations.

He said that farming needs three things: passion, land and finance or funding. "If you have these three things, you are going to succeed. However, if you have land and finance but no passion,

you are not going to succeed. Without passion, you are going nowhere. I am helping other farmers because I want to see them succeeding. Government has assisted me and I should help others to become better farmers. My farm is surrounded by other farmers and we are doing well because we learn from each other and not in competition," he said.

Moreover, Monaheng continues to assist other nearby upcoming farmers.



Mr Frank Monaheng said timing is also important when planting sunflower.



A combine harvester on Mr Monaheng's farm.



EXPLORING THE UNTAPPED INTERNATIONAL DRIED FRUITS MARKET

Mphahlela M Rammutla

South Africa (SA) is home to many fruit crops, however, every year large volumes of fruit go to waste owing to underharvesting and lack of markets as vendors are unable to sell. However, there is a large international market for dried fruit, particularly as consumers worldwide adopt healthier lifestyles.

Dried fruit are fruit grown across all seasons that have had most of their water content extracted. This allows people to preserve and enjoy them during harsh winters and off-season.

A recently-held webinar by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) indicated that there is untapped export potential for the dried fruit market, estimated at billions of rands. SA has accumulated R0,10 billion in exported value in 2020 in the United Kingdom, while total realistic export potential to target markets is estimated at R0,49 billion. The Dried Fruits and Raisins Trade Awareness Workshop Webinar aimed at bringing the growers to understand the value chain, processes to be followed to trade with external markets and regulatory requirements at the international level. The awareness workshop was held in partnership with Raisins South Africa, National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC), HortGrow, Small Enterprise Development Agency (Seda) and the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC).

Samkelsiwe Ngwenya, from the Directorate: International Trade Promotions said that DALRRD is hard at work to manoeuvre the international market dynamics to overcome barriers and trade wars, and to see that trade agreements are implemented. She indicated that the African Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) was signed by 54 countries. This agreement will be used to facilitate trade between African countries with ease.

The partners encouraged potential exporters to request any help needed to have their produce reach the international market. The DTIC has appealed to potential exporters to apply through their website for Export Marketing and Investment Assistance (EMIA), an incentive offered to partially compensate exporters for costs incurred in respect of identifying new and developing existing export markets for South African products and services and recruiting foreign investment.

Though the dried fruit market is available to all, fruit drying is a capital-intensive exercise, which may be a challenge to small-holder farmers, explained Dr Victor Thindisa from the agro-processing sector. He says producing large quantities requires a proper factory with all the necessary equipment, such as the latest dryers.

Simone Oliphant, Transformation Manager at Raisins SA, highlighted that SA contributes 6% to world production and had a total of 15,7% grape production in 2018/2019, rating it as the fifth-largest producer world-wide. She said Raisins SA is expecting growth in production volumes over the next five years through adopting high-yielding cultivars, further government investment in vineyard development and increased water supply.



Ladies who attended DALRRD's biosecurity awareness campaign in Mqanduli.

DALRRD EDUCATES COMMUNITIES WITH BIOSECURITY AWARENESS

The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), led by Minister Thoko Didiza, educated the communities around Mqanduli, Eastern Cape with biosecurity awareness. This happened during the Agricultural Biosecurity Awareness Campaign and promotional event at Gqubeni Great Palace in OR Tambo District Municipality.

The campaign aimed at creating awareness and capacitating farmers and rural communities on biosecurity matters, including the livestock identification and traceability system. Diseases affecting animals pose a great risk and are detrimental to agricultural productivity as they may cause market disruptions and ultimately affect food security and economic growth. DALRRD is striving to build a resilient biosecurity system for the country. Educating youth about biosecurity can help prevent the spread of disease in farm animals.

Furthermore, the department donated 100 farming implements to the community members. The agricultural inputs will support small-scale farmers who are contributing to food security in the country. More agricultural inputs are expected to be delivered in the future as the department is embarking on the development of the area. The area was also affected by the floods that disrupted agricultural activities.

Liseka Nomane is one of the beneficiaries who received farming inputs and attended the awareness campaign. She said she was excited to see the department reaching out to them. "The department is taking action and these inputs are going to help us as small-scale farmers. The biosecurity awareness has really opened our eyes," she said.

Minister Didiza said that agriculture is the engine of the economy and most of the department's budget should favour the farmers. "Government's budget must cover the farmers. The agricultural sector creates more employment, and it is important for the department to do the assessment of all farmers to see who needs support and what kind of support. Farmers need to get relevant support from government. I want to thank Chief Dalisizwe Dudumayo for approaching us to come and assist farmers and communities in the area. We like your land because it is fertile for farming and grazing. I have seen that people have planted crops and it is our responsibility as government to develop our rural areas. Farming is the basis of other industries," she said.

In conclusion, the minister promised to work with the provincial government to resuscitate dip tanks in the area.

Samuel Kgatla



Agricultural inputs were donated to the communities around Mqanduli in Eastern Cape.



Minister Thoko Didiza handing over farming equipment in Mqanduli.

LANDCARE PROGRAMME TO FOSTER NEW WAY TO IMPROVE PROJECTS' CONTINUITY

Mphahlela M Rammutla



National Assessment panelists on implementation of the LandCare Programme.

The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development is working to strengthen the capacity of communities to ensure that government-funded projects are sustainable and beneficial, even after the government exits.

At a recent two-day LandCare National Assessment Panel (NAP) session in Pretoria, the acting Deputy Director-General: Agricultural Production, Biosecurity and Resource Management, Mr Dipepeneng Serage, appealed to provinces and panelists to look deeper into the department's exit strategies and initiatives to improve continuity after the department withdraws from projects implemented in the communities. The acting DDG emphasised that the department must prepare beneficiaries, communities and farmers to be independent so that when government's support comes to an end, these projects are at favourable operational conditions for continuity.

This session was aimed at assessing the business plans presented by the provinces on the LandCare Programmes to be implemented in the 2023/24 financial year.

The provincial delegates presented their business plans and budget allocations to the panelists. These included plans on implementing the LandCare Programme's pillars such as SoilCare, Conservation Agriculture and Junior LandCare, controlling invasive species and creating awareness in the communities on safeguarding land and natural resources.

The provinces noted that exit strategy initiatives should have proper training and knowledge transfer as it is important to keep continuity in department-initiated projects upon handover to communities. They further showed that leaving the beneficiaries with proper equipment, a good market for their produce and sound financial management will keep projects running effectively, even after the departments' exit.

Mpume Ntlokwana, Deputy Director in the Directorate: Land and Soil Management and LandCare National Assessment panellist, said that the provinces have followed the criteria prescribed for their plans formulation. "As panel members, we have a role to assess, give inputs on where the provinces can improve and make sure the issue of natural resources in the country is well addressed for improvement and for continuous food security," said Ntlokwana.

The LandCare Programme was established in South Africa in 1997 because Government, communities and individuals needed to change their ways of managing and using land and water resources so that their long-term production potential is sustained and optimised. Modern agriculture and poor farming practices have led to land degradation, which results in soil erosion, overgrazing, wetland and watercourse destruction, and bush encroachment.

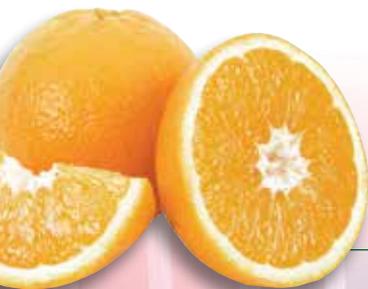
The purpose of this programme is to enhance sustainable conservation of natural resources through a community-based participatory approach to create job opportunities through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) model and to improve food security and the well-being of society.

The provinces indicated that these land degradation problems have, to some extent, a cost to achieving a highly productive agricultural sector. They are also the result of inadequate information being available to land-users regarding the consequences of their land management decisions, and the off-site effects of some land-users' actions on others.

Continued land deterioration is likely to result in further costs to the people of South Africa through the loss of economic production, ecological processes and biological diversity. Additionally, there is a huge decline in economic opportunities in rural communities and other related resources such as fresh water. These costs may impose a burden on future generations and restrict their capacity to choose how their land and relating resources are utilised.



Panel members during presentations delivered by provinces.



MINISTER DIDIZA PROMISES MORE SUPPORT TO THE CITRUS INDUSTRY

Samuel Kgatla



Delegates from Southern African countries came in numbers for the CGA Summit in Gqeberha.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), Thoko Didiza, promised to support the citrus industry because it is one of the major contributors to the economy and creates more employment. She said this during the Fourth Citrus Growers Association (CGA) Summit held at Sun Boardwalk in Gqeberha, Eastern Cape in March. This year's summit was held under the theme: "Respecting Our Roots, Forging Our Future".

The CGA Citrus Summit is a biennial event, alternating with the CGA Regional Road Show every other year. The summit creates a platform for citrus growers of Southern Africa (South Africa, Eswatini, Zimbabwe and Botswana) to discuss matters of common interest and find sustainable solutions to the challenges facing the industry in collaboration with partners from government and other parts of the value chain. It also provides an opportunity for growers to share their expertise and challenges facing the citrus industry. The CGA Summit presents an opportunity for growers from regions to get together and discuss pressing issues facing the Southern African citrus industry.

The South African citrus industry is the sub-sector in agriculture that makes the biggest contribution to export earnings and job creation. It accounts for 32% of total fruit production in South Africa (in volume terms) and it is also the main export fruit accounting for 45% of total fruit export earnings. The area under citrus cultivation in South Africa has grown steadily over the past decade, driven by ongoing investments on relatively high earnings from export markets. As a result, South Africa is set for record citrus exports of 2,7 million tons in marketing year 2021/22.

Pheladi Tlometsane from Zebediela Citrus Farm in Limpopo said the information she received throughout the summit is going to help her as a citrus grower. She said she is looking forward to implementing some of the things shared during the CGA Summit.

Minister Thoko Didiza added that citrus is one of the resilient industries as it was functioning even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, she announced the establishment of response task teams as well

as continuing to support the industry by further meetings with the European Union (EU) on Food Contact Materials (FCM) regulations. "It is essential for government to support the industry where possible. Government is looking at investing in your growth strategy. Citrus for us remains one of the top performing sectors within the department. We will continue supporting the sector," she said.



From left, Ms Vangile Titi, Chairperson of Fruit SA, Mr Justin Chadwick, CEO of Citrus Growers Association, and Minister Thoko Didiza during the CGA Summit in Gqeberha.



Directorate: Animal Health, ARC-OVR and OBP officials accompanied the delegation from Saudi Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture on a tour of the OBP and ARC-OVR to inspect the capacity in terms of vaccine production.

GOOD VETERINARY SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE BEST ASSURANCE FOR COOPERATION WITH SAUDI ARABIA

Rony Moremi

“I received most of the information I needed on the website and understood a lot about the department even before arriving in the country,” commented Mohammed Aljasir in agreement with Dr Altureif.

Good reception and excellent veterinary services, the best infrastructure and transparency is how Dr Baka Altareif, Deputy Director-General of the Risk Assessment Department of the Saudi Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture (MEWA) described his impression of the visit to South Africa. “These are good assurances for more cooperation,” remarked Dr Altareif. He was speaking during a bilateral meeting between the Saudi Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture and the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) and the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

“I received most of the information I needed on the website and understood a lot about the department, even before arriving in the country,” commented Mohammed Aljasir in agreement with Dr Altareif.

The purpose of the visit was to do on-site inspections for animal health systems and food safety systems for the export of beef, lamb, live animals and genetic material of ruminant origin. The Saudi technical team’s visit follows successful discussions at the ninth Saudi Arabia-South Africa Joint Economic Commission.

The delegation was informed about the animal diseases status of the country and the biosecurity measures in place to prevent and control the spread of animal diseases.

As part of their visit, the delegation from MEWA visited the Agricultural Research Council Onderstepoort Veterinary Research (ARC-OVR), the Onderstepoort Biological Products (OBP), Karan Beef feedlot, feedlot in Bronkhorstspuit and Cavalier Foods Feedlot. Dr Botlhe Modisane, Chief Director of Animal Production and Health assured the delegation that the facilities visited are all halaal facilities.

The delegation was informed on the capacity of the ARC-OVR vaccine production laboratory and the transboundary animal disease laboratory and the ports and infrastructure in place for the export of live animals. They were also informed about the working partnership between the ARC-OVR, the OBP and the University of Pretoria Veterinary Institute in terms of production of vaccines, research and the control and prevention of animal diseases.

HARRY GWALA RESIDENTS RAISE THEIR CONCERNS WITH MINISTER DIDIZA

Samuel Kgatla



DALRRD Minister Thoko Didiza is engaging with people of Harry Gwala District Municipality on issues related to agriculture and land.

Community members under the Harry Gwala District Municipality raised their concerns to the Minister of the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), Thoko Didiza during a Ministerial Imbizo held at Hela Hela, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma Local Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal. They spoke of their problems and challenges, which included unemployment, stock theft, and issues concerning the availability of agricultural land. The minister interacted with people and listened to their daily experiences and challenges they face in the sector in the Harry Gwala District Municipality.

The Ministerial Imbizo sought to provide residents a platform to discuss with and engage DALRRD on identified agricultural and land issues plaguing the community, and at the same time promote and improve relations between the department and the community at large. This Ministerial Imbizo was also in line with the department's broader strategy in fighting hunger and assisting the community members. Some of the challenges raised by community members at the Ministerial Imbizo include basic services such as water and electricity, lack of abattoirs, not enough tractors, no dip tanks for livestock, stock theft, fewer job opportunities for people over 35 years old and title deeds taking longer to be finalised.

The minister has reaffirmed government's commitment to assist the people of Harry Gwala. She said the department continues to help and train people through programmes such as the National Rural Youth Service Corps (NARYSEC). "We have plans to build some of the things mentioned by residents. We are going to give people seeds and fertilisers. We do not want people to die of hunger. If we want to win the fight against stock theft, then we need to keep our eyes open. We chose this area because we want to assist the people of Harry Gwala," she said.

The minister encouraged officials to work hard and recommit to the Batho Pele Principles, which are meant to enhance the quality and accessibility of services as provided by the department. The department is conducting other Ministerial Imbizos in other provinces.



Minister Thoko Didiza getting a brief during the Ministerial Imbizo in Emasemeni Sport Ground at Hela Hela.



DALRRD Minister Thoko Didiza led a team to address water challenges in uMkhanyakude District.

DALRRD AND DWS TACKLE WATER CHALLENGES IN UMKHANYAKUDE DISTRICT

Samuel Kgatla

MaryJean Gabriel represented the department well during the joint meeting dealing with water challenges in Jozini.



The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) and the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) met to address water challenges of uMkhanyakude District Municipality in Jozini, Kwa-Zulu-Natal (KZN). The discussion was specifically aimed at water infrastructure and development affecting farmers in the area. uMkhanyakude is one of the poorest districts and is still behind in terms of development. This led to the spheres of government uniting as part of their efforts to try to resolve the water crisis.

uMkhanyakude includes areas such as Jozini, Umhlabuyalingana and Hlabisa. For more than 30 years, these communities have complained about not having clean water despite the proximity of Jozini Dam. DALRRD Minister Thoko Didiza led a multidisciplinary team meeting with stakeholders from the district municipality to discuss water challenges in the agriculture sector. The multidisciplinary team includes DALRRD, DWS, KZN Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, the uMkhanyakude District Municipality, Mhlathuze Water, Amakhosi and councillors.

Minister Didiza said that the intention was not to only come together and talk, but to produce solutions. "We need to continue working together to help the people of uMkhanyakude. We are prepared to improve things and that is why we are working with other spheres of government. The collaboration between the spheres is expected to address water challenges faced in the area. This imperative of ensuring an unhindered and reliable supply of water to uMkhanyakude is one that cannot be delayed any longer; firstly, because the right to access to clean water is enshrined in our Constitution and secondly, because water is a catalyst for improved livelihoods, investment attraction and job creation," she said.

Both departments are planning to restore pump stations and build canals for the farmers. They agreed on how to control and manage water flow so that it does not damage crops. They made a commitment to complete all the uncompleted projects.

The district mayor, Siphile Mdaka, commended both departments for wanting to help the uMkhanyakude people. "We thank the minister for the feasibility study and this just shows that our government really wants to improve the condition of farmers and cooperatives. We are embracing the interventions from all the spheres of government," he said.

CASH INJECTION HELPS YOUTH AGRO-PROCESSING BUSINESS TO GROW

Samuel Kgatla

The Minister for Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), Thoko Didiza paid a courtesy visit to the SPUDZ Agro-processing Funky Fries Factory at Hillcrest in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. SPUDZ Investment Holdings (Pty) Ltd is the brainchild of Mr Sibusiso Mathe. SPUDZ is an epitome of entrepreneurial innovation and a youth entrepreneurship hub that specialises in agro-processing and fast-food. They have an agro-processing facility and container outlets to provide a workplace experience for the youth.

The company has employed 46 youths who are working in the outlets and processing plant which provides jobs for the unemployed young people in the township. DALRRD provided the project with a cash injection of R19 million to support its operations. The processing plant has the potential to create almost 200 jobs for the youth. According to the company, a partnership with the department's National Rural Youth Service Corps (NARYSEC) programme and other stakeholders has also been very beneficial and this, they say, is putting the "funk in Funky Fries".

Sibahle Ngubane, one of the young people on a 12-month learnership programme said she is happy to be working at SPUDZ. "Things are looking great and promising. We had some challenges when we started but things have improved, all thanks to Mr Mathe and our government. The experience I gain here will help me in the future," she said.

Minister Didiza said the purpose of the visit was to see how the processing plant was doing and how the department can bolster the working relations with SPUDZ. "I am happy to see young people working in the factory and this gives us courage as government. Young people are the future of this country and they must be employed. This partnership shall help government to create more training and job opportunities for the unemployed youth in the area," she said.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of SPUDZ, Mr Sibusiso Mathe thanked the minister for visiting their processing plant. He mentioned that he was also looking forward to work with the department to improve the lives of the youth.

SPUDZ is also looking at working in partnership with the street vendors and small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs), where they will train and mentor them on business skills and to run their businesses sustainably.



Minister Thoko Didiza engaging with Mr Sbu Mathe of SPUDZ Funky Fries in KZN.



Workers of SPUDZ Funky Fries processing meat at their processing plant in Hillcrest

MINISTER BROUGHT SMILES TO TEMBA RESIDENTS

The Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Ms Thoko Didiza, brought a smiles, food parcels and seedlings to the people of Temba in Hammanskraal. This heart-warming social celebration took place at PHL Moraka Secondary School.

The purpose of the event was for the minister to celebrate with the people of Ward 75. More than 100 needy people walked away with food parcels and seedlings. The DALRRD minister had approached different sponsors such as Fruit SA and Onderstepoort Biological Products (OBP) to come on board for the people of Temba. Minister Didiza and senior management members took time off their busy schedules to spend time with the residents of Temba while also giving specific time and space to listen to the concerns raised by the elderly and young people. Young people in agriculture requested for government's assistance.

Minister Didiza said she was happy to assist the people of Temba, and she chose them after she was approached by City of Tshwane councillors. In addition, she advised people to plant their own vegetables. "If we are able to plant tomatoes, spinach and cabbage, we can all have food. People travel long distances to buy vegetables they can plant themselves. Small pieces of land should be used to our own benefit. Use the same water you bathed in to irrigate the crops. We know that the food will not last long, but at least we want to make a difference," she said.

Leah Makhonjiwa said she appreciates the minister choosing to celebrate with them. "I thought they were joking when they told me that I am part of the beneficiaries to receive some things from the minister. The food parcels came at the right time. Our government really cares about us," she said.



Ms Leah Makhonjiwa receiving food parcels and seedlings from Minister Thoko Didiza.



Mr Zweli Silangwe addressing the people of Temba.



Minister Thoko Didiza posing with the sponsors who contributed to the people of Temba.



KIDS LEARN THE VALUE OF WETLANDS DURING WORLD WETLANDS DAY COMMEMORATION



Rony Moremi

Photo credit: Friends of Colbyn Valley

Wetlands are vital links between land and water that collectively form part of the important socio-economic ecosystem. They are home to trees, grasses, shrubs, moss and water-reliant plants. Worldwide, they play important functions through water storage, storm protection and flood mitigation, water purification through retention of nutrients, sediments, and pollutants, groundwater recharge, shoreline stabilisation and erosion control and are essential habitats for many plants and animals.

The main threat of wetlands' destruction is human activities by individuals, communities, companies and governments. Development in the form of drainage, dam construction, diverting water flow for agriculture, creation of transport networks such as roads and rail, residential areas, increasing farming land or overgrazing, etc. all lead to the degradation

of wetlands, increased flooding, washing away of soil nutrients, onset of drought damage and water pollution. These actions trigger a decline in wildlife population, wildlife watching and regional economic decline as recreational fishing, water sports and hunting are adversely affected.

The good news is that education is the answer to raise awareness for both children and communities. Children from various schools and youth groups from all over the City of Tshwane were taken on a wetland discovery walk during the World Wetlands Day commemoration in February 2023 at the Colbyn Wetland Nature Reserve in Pretoria. This event was hosted by the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) and affiliations like Friends of the Colbyn Valley, the Agricultural Research Council Institute for Soil, Climate and Water, the South African Wetland Society and Birdlife Northern Gauteng.

Activities of the day were designed to create awareness on wetlands' value, how they are formed, how they function and how to protect them, according to the statement issued by the Friends of Colbyn the Valley. The children also learned about the soils and plants that indicate the presence of wetlands, and built a simple model to show how wetlands work as well.

"Like wetlands, they are sponges soaking up fundamental concepts on environmental conservation, and they become agents of positive change at home, at school and in society," observed Dr Piet-Louis Grundling, who has been involved in wetland conservation activities in the Colbyn Wetland since the late 1990s, according to the Friends of the Colbyn Valley.



World Wetlands Day is commemorated annually on 2 February; this day marks the anniversary of the adoption of the 1971 Convention on Wetlands. This year, the day was commemorated under the theme, "It's time for wetland restoration". During the World Wetlands Day commemoration, the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Barbara Creecy, called on South Africans to collaborate in wetlands' protection. She further warned that nearly 90% of the world's wetlands have degraded since the 1700s and are being lost three

times faster than the forests. In addition, findings by the National Biodiversity Assessment indicate that 79% of South Africa's wetlands ecosystems are being threatened.

As important sources of water, wetlands provide clean water for drinking and regulate water quantity during floods. They are also important to biodiversity, climate mitigation and adaptation and water availability. South Africa is home to 28 wetlands of international importance, among them the False Bay Nature Reserve in the City of Cape Town.

According to a statement issued by the Friends of the Colbyn Valley, the Colbyn Wetland Nature Reserve is a valuable biodiversity and water resource as well as an educational and recreational site. It also has peat areas, which are rare in South African wetlands. Wetlands International defines peatlands as wetlands with a thick water-logged soil layer made up of dead decaying plant material. Peatlands are important because they absorb heavy rainfall, provide protection against floods and release water slowly, ensuring a clean supply of water throughout the year. The Colbyn Wetland Nature Reserve is managed by the City of Tshwane and was proclaimed a nature reserve in June 2014.



Heading out on the wetland discovery walk.

cont...

What can you do to conserve wetlands?

According to the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands, one can make choices that minimise the loss and degradation of wetlands and maximise awareness on how urgent their restoration is by:

- Learning more about wetlands;
- Making water-friendly and ecosystems conscious decisions; and
- Pledging to act for wetland restoration.



Wetland discovery walk.



Using a plant guide to identify wetland plants.



miniSASS: Using a key to identify aquatic invertebrates in a sample taken from a stream.



Crossing the swollen Hartbeesspruit.