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Media statement

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The Department of Agriculture commemorates International Day of Plant Health in Mpumalanga

Today, on the commemoration of the International Day of Plant Health (IDPH), the Minister of Agriculture, Mr John Steenhuisen, emphasised the link and the importance of plant health and food security. "Plant biosecurity is active involvement. Fighting plant pests and diseases today secures food security for tomorrow for animals and humans. By strengthening plant biosecurity, we are locking the doors against devastating pests and securing the nutrition, livelihoods and future for all South Africans. Protecting plants today is the only way to feed tomorrow," said the minister.

The Department of Agriculture (DoA) and the Mpumalanga Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs (DARDLEA) commemorated the International Day of Plant Health in Mbombela, Mpumalanga.

Plants make up 80% of the food we eat and are the main source of the oxygen we inhale, yet they are under constant attack from pests and diseases. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), pests and diseases destroy up to 40% of food crops annually.

"Protecting plants is not just the responsibility of farmers or government or scientists, or an agriculture issue, but a shared responsibility—it is a national and global responsibility," said Mr Dipepeneng Serage, the Deputy Director-General for Agricultural Production, Biosecurity and Natural Resources Management at the Department of Agriculture (DoA) while delivering his keynote address at the IDPH commemoration.

The date was proclaimed by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly on 29 March 2022. This year, the International Day of Plant Health is commemorated under the theme: “*Plant Biosecurity for Food Security and Nutrition*”. This theme highlights the urgent need to safeguard crops against invasive pests such as the Oriental fruit fly, Fall armyworm and Citrus greening. Protecting plants is essential to achieving the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Zero Hunger.

The DoA encourages communities to promote plant health because South Africa faces the challenge of quarantine pests that are of critical concern due to their occurrence in specific parts of the country; pests and plant diseases such as the Oriental fruit fly, Polyphagous shothole borer, Macadamia felted coccid disease, Fall armyworm, Banana Bunchy Top Virus, Citrus greening (African strain) and Citrus black spot. The spread of plant pests and diseases poses a threat to food security and has a dire effect on agricultural production which is the primary source of income for many poor rural communities.

The DDG informed the delegates that the Department of Agriculture will drive plant biosecurity and win the war against food insecurity by working together with universities, research institutions such as the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), provincial governments, local municipalities, traditional leaders who are custodians of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and all other stakeholders including the private sector.

Farmers and delegates visited the Mpumalanga International Food Market to observe how the market operates and facilitates its connection to regional and international markets and the importance of plant health in international trade. The DoA and DARDLEA encouraged communities to work together with the departments to raise awareness, strengthen plant protection systems, and safeguard the future through healthy plants.

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