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MEDIA RELEASE

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LEGISLATIVE CHANGE TO FOSTER GROWTH IN AGRICULTURE.

The Preservation and Development of Agricultural Land Bill which aims to preserve and develop agricultural land as well as using agro-ecology to restore land that has already been damaged through harmful agriculture practices, has been finalised and is waiting for President Cyril Ramaphosa to assent.

Minister of Agriculture John Steenhuisen took part in a panel discussion held on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos. The panel discussion focused on answering the question, “how to reverse the trend of land degradation to ensure resilient economies are created for the future?”.

Globally, 40% of land is degraded and the consequences are starting to be felt in industry that includes a fall in agriculture productivity, polluted waterways, and increased frequency of droughts.

Minister Steenhuisen said, underpinning the Bill are the core principles of agro-ecology - ensuring the land is used optimally according to its specific potential, resilience and viability without resulting in the degradation of the natural resource base.

Each agro-ecological system will be managed according to its specific needs which is inclusive of interventions to combat existing land degradation, identification of suitable land

use options with the aim to promote regenerative production practices towards improving the status of the natural agricultural resources.

Role of Communities

Minister Steenhuisen also stressed the important role communities have to play in preserving agriculture land.

“There needs to be a buy in and understanding from local communities on why soil and the preservation of it is so important from a community health perspective, but also from a food security perspective. Over the last 20 to 30 years, we have seen very harmful practices being implemented in agriculture.”

Minister Steenhuisen added that communities need to be educated around why soil preservation is so important and why we need to move towards more sustainable farming practices.

South Africa is among the 196 countries that have pledged to arrest land degradation by 2030.

The importance of protecting our soil for sustainable agriculture is vital. The Agriculture and Agro-processing Master Plan aims to achieve R32 billion gross production value (GVP) within the agriculture value chain and to maintain 865 000 primary and 263 000 secondary jobs, as well as create more than 70 000 new jobs by 2030.

The productivity of land affects the production of food for the growing populations and the prosperity of agriculture and the nations. Therefore, Land Degradation Neutrality represents a major opportunity to contribute to sustainable development by scaling up good practices and pilot activities through large-scale transformative projects and programmes (TPPs). These initiatives can generate multiple benefits, including positive changes in human well-being, poverty alleviation, and the restoration of terrestrial ecosystems and their services.

Additionally, through the combined efforts with South Africa’s focal point for United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the country has various programmes including Landcare programmes funded nationally, aimed at addressing land degradation through a community-based participatory approach which ensures inclusive participation as well as capacity and skills building.

G20 Partnerships

It is envisaged that the G20 will provide the international coordination necessary to foster public-private collaboration between industries, governments, international agencies, farmer

associations and civil society to encourage technical and financial support required for monitoring developments on sustainable productivity growth across countries including analytical frameworks that would allow international benchmarking of productivity and sustainable performance of agriculture.

Minister Steenhuisen added that there is acknowledgement that world populations are growing while available land remains static. Thus, G20 countries as key players in the global food system must meet several significant challenges including dealing with land degradation effects of drought while contributing to land degradation neutrality targets to meet in a sustainable manner food requirement of each nation subsequently global food security.

Promotion of sustainable land management practices and responsible public and private investment including generation of economic opportunities for younger generations would serve as key enablers for ensuring the supply of products for future generations while recovering from COVID ramifications.

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