

## Media release

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### AFASA calls for immediate action to support drought-stricken farmers

The African Farmers Association of South Africa has noted with great grief the effects of the current drought situation on the local agricultural sector. Farmers continue to suffer huge losses as a result of the persisting drought and are calling for government to intervene quickly.

Provinces hard hit by the disaster include the North West, Free State, KwaZulu Natal, the Northern Cape, as well as the Eastern Cape. AFASA joins the calls from other bodies calling for the government to declare drought as a national disaster. According to AFASA Chairperson, Mr. Neo Masithela, drought cannot be viewed as a looming disaster, because the country is already living in a disaster. Farmers continue to record high numbers of livestock losses across the country.

“Every day we receive reports of farmers losing their livestock and crops, boreholes drying out, and dam water levels declining,” said Mr. Masithela. “Worse, there have been reports of farmers committing suicide. This is evidence of a country in a disaster,” added Mr. Masithela.

He said the country is also looking at a possibility of “Water shedding” if consumers do not stick to restrictions while there’s still no significant rainfall. News reports, as well as information from the Department of Water Affairs, states that dam levels are lower in every province compared to the same time last year. In addition to this, the Katse Dam in the Lesotho Highlands, which is the key back-up system for South Africa, is reportedly down to 13.6% compared to 49% this time last year.

AFASA calls for immediate intervention to cushion farmers against more losses. A preliminary report from provincial AFASA structures shows that farmers are in dire need of support and are on the brink of collapse. The preliminary report shows that in the past few weeks, KZN has already reported more than R12 million in losses of livestock. One farmer lost 80 breeding cows, 8 bulls and 40 calves. “It will take many years to recover from this, hence we urge the government to act fast before it’s too late,” said Mr. Masithela.

He said disasters like this do not only impact on farmers but the country and its economy, noting that many farmers were still trying to recover from the severe droughts that hit the country about three years ago. Not only will food prices rise, but jobs are under threat as well. Mr. Masithela said the country cannot afford such a situation, especially considering the gloomy picture the Finance Minister painted during his medium-term budget speech and the results from Statistics SA regarding the highest unemployment rate in 11 years, all announced in the same week.

The farmers are entering the planting season with uncertainty as it is still too dry to plant. The optimal period to plant in the eastern side of the maize belt is October 15 to November 15, in the west it is November 15 to December 15. Maize farmers in drier areas aren’t sure if they can start preparing their fields.

AFASA acknowledges with appreciation the quick intervention provided by the Northern Cape Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and its districts for providing relief worth around

R30 million to the farmers. “We call on all other provincial leadership whose provinces are experiencing drought to act swiftly,” Mr. Masithela urged.

“We have submitted our report to the Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development and Land Reform and have suggested that a plan be devised together with all stakeholders, including financial institutions, agribusinesses and insurance companies on how best we can assist farmers in affected areas,” concluded Mr. Masithela.

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