

# Climate change calls for sustainable farming practices

By [Karabo Mabuza](#)

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On 7 November 2022, President Cyril Ramaphosa released a letter to the nation on climate change. The president indicated that the flooding earlier this year, the wildfires in the Table Mountain range, the locust plague outbreak in parts of the Northern Cape, Western Cape and Eastern Cape, are all associated with climate change and that our common future depends on climate action now.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

Farmers in South Africa face a serious threat from climate change and erratic weather patterns, which will gradually hit their pockets and financial well-being. Some businesses may find it less appealing to operate given that their profit margins are currently being squeezed by high input costs.

Farmers are currently busy with plantings for the 2022/23 production season after the recent rains, and this happens after massive spikes in the price of fertiliser, electricity, diesel and freight costs among others. High fertiliser and fuel prices are a major concern and it can be expected that small to medium farmers will be the worst hit. Another factor is higher debt costs due to rising interest rates. These factors are likely to impact overall profitability.



## Climate change - the real threat to farming profitably

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The natural disasters outlined by the President show that the changing weather patterns as a result of climate change have already cost the South African economy in terms of damage costs, and if nothing is done it could cost the economy billions in future.

Due to the frequency of extreme events, farmers who depend on seasonal weather patterns are finding it harder and harder to prepare ahead. In light of the many uncertainties that are facing agriculture presently, risk management is crucial. For any Agribusiness to withstand the changing environment with the possibility of closing down, farmers will have no choice but to adopt technologies that contribute to environmental sustainability and also incorporate insurance into their risk management processes.

## Sustainable environmental practices

Extreme weather incidents are showing greater frequency even in areas of South Africa where they have not previously occurred, and are very destructive on farm infrastructure (buildings, roads, etc). In many cases, none is found prepared to deal with such events. Due to limited resources the local government is unable to afford the cost of dealing with such incidences and in many instances small businesses that are not financially able when such disasters occur become a nail in the coffin.

Sustainable environmental farming practices are the future, adoption of technology has become more crucial to the production of agricultural food. Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Certification is now a requirement to access markets.

GAP applies available knowledge to address environmental, economic, and social sustainability for on-farm production and post-production processes, resulting in safe and healthy agricultural products. It set standards for the safe and sustainable production of crops and livestock. It aims to help farm owners maximise yields and optimise business operations while also minimising production costs and environmental impact. Following Good Agricultural Practices makes it easier for producers to supply products with the quality retailers demand and consumers want. It also demonstrates to the producers the need to have a sustainable environment.

Heat stress is on the rise as temperatures increase, more frequent and intense extreme events such as flooding and drought, changing rainfall patterns, shifting length and duration of growing seasons, as well as changes in the prevalence of pests and disease, are some of the impacts that are brought about by climate change within the agriculture industry.



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Awareness of climate change is indeed improving with more and more companies, business owners and farmers becoming increasingly conscious about the environment in which they operate. Adaptation in the agricultural sector is essential.

Not only is the agricultural sector at risk, but all who depend on it both directly and indirectly. That places food, income, and job security at risk, more so since the entire agricultural value chain is heavily impacted by it. The farming community at large has a key role to play in facilitating the climate-smart transformation of the sector to manage the threats rendered by climate change, but also to unlock the opportunities of climate-smart technologies and practices.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karabo Mabuza is an Agricultural Economist currently serving in the Agriculture Advisory Division at Land Bank. She writes in her personal capacity and the views expressed in this article are her own and do not necessarily represent policy positions of Land Bank.

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