

Meeting with agri minister bears fruit

The Agri SA leadership had the opportunity to meet with the minister of agriculture, land reform and rural development, Thoko Didiza. Critical issues such as biosecurity, the infrastructure of rails, harbours and roads (particularly rural roads), rising input costs, the incomplete Orange River flood walls, and the flood damage to crops and infrastructure in certain areas, were raised during the meeting. From this meeting, the following actions materialised:



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Biosecurity

During discussions, Agri SA emphasised the severity of the vaccine shortage crisis in the country and the role of Onderstepoort Biological Products (OBP) in this regard. Agri SA president, Jaco Minnaar, also alerted the minister to the possibility of a Rift Valley fever outbreak and the devastating impact it could have on livestock.

Consequently, the minister gave an instruction that a meeting be scheduled to discuss the impending crisis with vaccine availability and how to resolve it. Attendees included OBP, the Agricultural Research Council – Onderstepoort Veterinary Research division, the registrar's office in terms of the Fertilizers, Farm Feeds, Seeds and Remedies Act, 1947 (Act 36 of 1947), the National Animal Health Forum (NAHF) as well as other private sector stakeholders. The slow pace at which the Act 36 registrar approves agricultural and stock remedies was also highlighted.

A task team led by the NAHF and particularly by the chairperson, Gerhard Schutte, will work together to resolve these challenges.

Rails, harbours and roads

Concerns regarding the operations at Cape Town harbour and the impact on agricultural exports were also discussed. Transnet, meanwhile, has requested Agri SA to invite key commodity organisations that are exporting on a large scale to a meeting to discuss the challenges faced by the industry and to determine ways to resolve them.

The minister has undertaken to arrange a meeting between herself and the Department of Transport to determine which emergency interventions can be initiated by the Rural Enterprise and Development (REID) unit within the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development to assist with road repairs. Minister Didiza committed that in emergency cases, the challenge can be addressed through the rural development branch for it to facilitate partnerships with farmers, provincial department and national to address challenges.

The issues of rural road infrastructure were also tabled at a National Economic Development and Labour Council meeting held in January 2022, where the president and cabinet ministers were present.

Flood walls

Funding from the Comprehensive Agriculture Support Programme (CASP) budget will be made available to complete the flood wall project along the lower Orange River. The minister committed to following up on the progress.

Flood damage

Dr Mmaphaka Tau, head of the National Disaster Management Centre, signed a state of disaster declaration after assessing the magnitude and severity of the severe weather events occurring in parts of the country.

Rising input costs

Didiza has undertaken to put together a small task team under the leadership of the Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (BFAP) to research the benefits of the local manufacturing of input products currently being imported. The minister has also undertaken to engage the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy on the production output of the phosphate mine, Foskor, in Phalaborwa and products currently being produced by Sasol.

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