

Government in plan to provide R2bn to farmers

The government is pumping R2-billion into 44 district municipalities in a bid to develop emerging farmers and boost the agriculture sector.



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Despite past failed projects like the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (Jipsa) and the Accelerated Growth Initiative of South Africa (Agisa), Rural Development and Land Reform Minister Gugile Nkwinti is confident the plan to have agri-parks in municipalities will succeed.

Learning from the past

Nkwinti was talking in Addo yesterday at a consultative meeting with farmers from the Sarah Baartman District Municipality. He said the government had learnt a lot from mistakes they had made with Agisa and Jipsa and would now correct what was not done right. "We're learning from the past all the time," he said.

"When we started Agisa, one of the things we did not take into account was that if you accelerate production, where are your markets?"

"We did not think about that, so in a sense we learnt from the inadequacies of past initiatives."

Downscaling agri-parks to district municipalities

Nkwinti admitted that with the failed initiatives, the government had had no idea what was required to be done on the ground. But now, the government had decided to downscale the implementation of agri-parks to district municipalities, rather than doing it from provincial or national government level.

Nkwinti said the concept of establishing agri-parks in district municipalities was not entirely new as there had been past initiatives that supported emerging farmers. "This is both a new and old initiative "" from the point of view of being new, it is the first one where we have moved from this point in terms of institution building," he said.

Skills training and ownership

The establishment of the parks will see experienced farmers provide skills training in rural areas. Rural farmers will own 70% of the produce while the government and stakeholders will get 30% ownership of production in the next 10 years. Nkwinti said each agri-park would be run by a board of directors and each district municipality would receive R45-million from the overall budget.

"That is why I say there must be an interim committee elected now so that it can plan and discuss resources that will be needed," he said. "There is a lot of work and there must be results, because I don't want to return unspent funds to the Treasury."

Nkwinti said he was impressed by the Sarah Baartman District Municipality which had already set aside resources for their agri-park. The site for Sarah Baartman will be in the Sundays River Valley Municipality. The project will cater for all emerging and commercial farmers in the nine municipalities in the district.

Source: Herald

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