

Help-for-farmers plan withers on vine

After promising to revitalise Gauteng's economy by helping small-scale farmers, the provincial department of economic development, agriculture and rural development has yet to give support to a single farmer.



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When he presented his budget vote on June 23, Gauteng economic development, agriculture and rural development MEC Lebogang Maile said: "Agriculture is a stepping stone to realising Africa's industrialisation. There are signs everywhere that point to agriculture as a key element of Africa's industrial story. The potential it carries is yet to be realised."

A dismal performance

But the department's report for the first quarter of the 2015-2016 financial year, which has been tabled before the provincial legislature's economic development portfolio committee, reveals a dismal performance.

The department set itself the target of giving support to 42 smallscale farmers, but not a single one was helped. The reason given in the quarterly report: "Delays with procurement proposals received are still being evaluated."

The department also planned to support eight women farmers but none received help and a similar reason was given.

There was a plan to provide 125 people with agricultural skills training but only 42 took part in the programme.

More emphasis on better planning

Maile's spokesman, Phindile Kunene, said the MEC was worried about aspects of his department's performance. "Areas of non-performance in the first quarter can be attributed to poor planning and execution. The first quarter is not good at all and that is why we must ensure that we accelerate efforts to deliver in the remaining three quarters of the financial year.

"We are placing more emphasis on better planning and ensuring that our targets are not wholly dependent on factors outside our control," Kunene said.

The DA believes the targets will not be met by the end of this year. "Gauteng is home to the most unemployed and out-of-education citizens in the country. Those not in employment and not in education are at a concerning 23.6%. SMMEs are a launch-pad from which many individuals create successful, profitable large-scale businesses. Denying them opportunities to build a better life not only stymies economic growth but halts job creation," said DA MPL Janet Semple.

Source: The Times

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