

Black farmers pummel minister with questions

Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Senzeni Zokwana was caught off guard when black commercial farmers took him up on his offer for open communication with his office, bombarding him with questions and complaints.



Agriculture Minister Senzeni Zokwana told black farmers that his 'door was always open to them' and urged them to form partnerships and work together. Image: [Go South Online](#)

He has the task of drawing young South Africans into the agriculture sector with the dual objective of fighting poverty and unemployment and improving food security.

The department is grappling with the question of land ownership. While land restitution falls within the ambit of the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries must prioritise food security amid criticism that many land transfers have seen productive land being taken from productive farms and being transformed into unproductive land.

Speaking at an agriculture summit at Nasrec, Johannesburg, Zokwana told the audience, which included stakeholders in the agriculture sector, that he was accessible "on Twitter, by SMS and even on Whatsapp" to hear grievances.

He said agriculture could be more successful in combating poverty and unemployment in SA than investment from any other sector. Zokwana urged farmers to prioritise mentorship and partnerships as a way of sharing skills, thus maintaining food security.

"Form partnerships, work together"

"The important thing is to show white commercial farmers that they can only be successful by taking the hand of a black commercial farmer. Don't work as individuals. There is power in numbers. I am not here to promote unions. If you get together and agree on issues, feel free to approach me," Zokwana said, a former president of the National Union of Mineworkers.

He said he was confident that the agricultural sector's contribution to gross domestic product would rise from 2% to 7% in coming years.

As soon as he finished the address black farmers bombarded him with questions and complaints, ignoring the programme, which had made no room to accommodate them.

Bafana Mcena, a Free State-based farmer said despite land restitution policies, he and many other black farmers suffered constraints.

"I am a Bonsmara farmer and even when my livestock is valued where I come from, I am sidelined because I am black. On the other side you find capable farmers looking for land. But some people get 550ha but can't even operate a tractor," he said.

Limpopo-based farmer Vincent Rapeta said the department needed to remove trade barriers and increase intra-African trade in the sector and agroprocessing.

This week Zokwana will form part of a delegation to an African Union (AU) meeting in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, where heads of state will discuss the 2003 Maputo declaration on agriculture and food security. In 2003 AU leaders signed the declaration in which countries pledged to commit 10% of their total budget to agriculture. Only eight of the 53 nations have



Many productive commercial farms have been broken up as part of land reform and now are producing little or no food. Image: [Nedbank Capital](#)

honoured that commitment.

Source: Business Day via I-Net Bridge

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>