

# The Free State cannot afford another drought disaster

While agriculture is slowly recovering from the drought - which may take farmers and industry years - millions were spent to support Free State farmers with drought feed. While many agriculture companies have opened their hearts and pockets through donations and in terms of payment of credit, those credits are now payable during the recovery period, which means farmers and the industry are still under pressure.

## Maintaining grazing, prepping for fire season

According to weather forecasts by Johan van den Berg, climatologist from Santam Agriculture, the past few months, the development of another El Niño system can be seen, but the with its outcome currently uncertain. Farmers have been busy for weeks, and some already for months, to prepare for the fire season, especially as grazing reacted so well on the rain - thus there is a lot of grazing and/or grass that can burn down if a fire should occur. Maintaining the grazing and/or grass is very important to farmers, especially in view of the uncertain conditions in the coming season.

It is against this background that Free State Agriculture (FSA) would like to earnestly request not only farmers to ensure timely preparations for fires, but also the public to please exercise caution and not cause fires.

“The Free State cannot afford another disaster with the drought at its end and given the forecast of another El Niño weather system that can occur in the 2017/18 season. We would like to request farmers to protect their grazing, we don’t know what will happen next year. Furthermore, we want request drivers to please not throw cigarette buds out of vehicles, as it can cause fires in the grass on the side of roads. Furthermore, we ask that the use of open fires be limited and responsible, especially on windy days. An open fire that gets out of control can cause major damage to a whole community,” according to Henk Vermeulen, chief operating officer of FSA.

## Photos of major damage that such fires caused in the Free State in 2014:



A farmer fighting a fire at Reddersburg on 27 October 2014. Photo: Herman Maartens



Burnt down sheds after devastating fires at Harrismith on 19 September 2014. Photo: Adj Marius Swart



Livestock died in the devastating fires at Harrismith on 19 September 2014. Photo: Ansie Jooste of the N3 Toll Concession

Vermeulen says the organisation is grateful to see the Department of Roads and fire protection associations already working together to cut grass in road reserves in some parts of the province. “We would like to motivate the department and other fire protection association who have not started this, to please do so in earnest.”

[Tips from the Free State Umbrella Fire Protection Association \(FSUFPA\) for the fire season.](#)

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