

South Africa's food security at risk, farmers warn

South African farmers are expressing growing concern over the government's unpredictable policymaking in the agricultural sector, fearing it could jeopardise the country's food security. These concerns have been further exacerbated by the recent publication of regulations governing the export of certain agricultural products to the European Union (EU) and Britain in the Government Gazette on October 31 and 1 November 2023.

These regulations, implemented since 2016, coupled with the government's history of economic mismanagement, have reinforced farmers' apprehensions about the long-term viability of the agricultural sector. Farmers are particularly concerned about the potential impact of these regulations on their ability to export their products to key markets such as the EU and Britain. They fear that the regulations could create additional barriers to trade, making it more difficult for them to compete in the global marketplace.



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The Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the EU signed an economic cooperation agreement on 10 June 2016, which took effect on October 2016. These regulations, particularly those impacting family farmers, raise public concerns about the agricultural industry's future.

According to TLU SA, the expectations created by Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) limit the growth and sustainability of the agricultural sector. "Regulations aimed at trying to achieve growth have a significant impact on the agricultural sector in South Africa. They are enforced not only in one area but also in areas such as land ownership and chemical use, water management, support, subsidies, and animal welfare, to name just a few," says Bennie van Zyl, TLU SA general manager.

"Agriculture in South Africa has a strong history that is still supported today by the success of family farms. It is these farms that continue to be part of the agricultural sector's significant contribution to South Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It is also these farms that operate on a commercial level, ensuring that there is food on consumers' tables.

"The recent republication of regulations on the export of certain agricultural products where BEE requirements remain one of the criteria has once again highlighted the short-sightedness of the government."

Challenges in empowering Black South Africans in agriculture

Out of South Africa's approximately 37,000 commercial farmers, only a small fraction engage in exports and generate valuable foreign exchange for the country. However, with over 60 million residents, the question arises as to how many

people can realistically be empowered through BEE initiatives.

Even if it involves compensation, current commercial farmers are struggling to maintain their operations in the face of South Africa's current circumstances, making it difficult to prevent further ownership losses.

The African National Congress's (ANC) implementation of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and other regulations aimed at promoting sustainability, food security, and social equality has been poorly executed and misguided, according to Van Zyl.

These shortcomings have created significant obstacles that continue to impede the agricultural sector's profitability and competitiveness. "Instead of clinging to an ineffective policy approach, the government should prioritize the sustainability and food security of the agricultural sector," Van Zyl asserts.

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