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Agri survey highlights drought impact on farming industry

Larry Bentley

THE KwaZulu-Natal Agricultural Union (Kwanalu) conducted an online survey among its members, 81 farmer's associations and commodity affiliates to assess and understand the extent of the effects of the drought on the industry.

The survey was well received by the respondents and provided Kwanalu with a unique understanding of the dire circumstances many members are experiencing.

The information will enable the union to comment on and inform the national assessment project undertaken, as well as provide quantitative inputs and recommendations.

The results of the survey show a very serious situation on farms in KZN, with the majority feeling there was little or no proactive actions being undertaken to support the industry.

The survey indicated that if the drought is compared to 'normal conditions at this time of the year', 35-40 per cent of the farmers feel the situation is worse than normal for this time of year.

Almost 60 per cent reported the situation as 'bad'.

The results indicate 75 per cent of farmers have not experienced any significant rainfall, with only 25 per cent

reporting recent good levels of rain.

Dam levels

Ninety per cent indicate that low dam levels have had a negative impact on irrigation potential, with 20 per cent of farmers reporting not being able to irrigate at all.

Sixty per cent reported significantly reduced availability and a further 20 per cent experienced a moderate reduction in water levels.

Water available for livestock is shown as significantly lower than average, while availability for domestic, municipal and industrial use is only slightly higher than average and groundwater or surface water levels indicated at very low levels.

The survey revealed that the current level of fodder available for livestock is well below moderate, with the general condition of veld and grazing at even worse levels.

Labour

The extent to which members have had to retrench farm workers as a result of the drought is fairly moderate, with an increase in wild fires also being reported as fairly moderate.

Farmers also indicated that the level of financial support is very low, with support from financial institutions as

insufficient.

Approximately 48 per cent revealed health issues, including depression, anxiety or other mental health concerns as a result of the economic pressure the drought places on them and their businesses.

Kwanalu CEO, Sandy la Marque, thanked the farmers for the exceptionally high number of responses and the calibre of information provided in the survey.

'With the high response rate and the subsequent key information gathered and analysed, Kwanalu is able to lobby and inform stakeholders of the situation in the province.

'Engagements have already taken place with banks and stakeholder engagement will remain ongoing,' said La Marque.

Farmer needs identified in order of priority

- Fodder/feed for livestock
- Subsidisation of interest on loans
- Control of invasive plants
- Fire and drought awareness programmes
- Borehole repairs and maintenance
- Subsidisation of interest on produce
- Grants
- Rebates on livestock reduction
- Rebates on transport