

More than 55% of rural towns in economic devastation

According to a survey conducted by the agricultural union of KZN, Kwanalu, economic activities have been totally demolished in more than 55% of rural towns, by the recent unrest and criminal activities which swept through the province last week.

Kwanalu, representing rural landowners, farmers and agri-businesses in KZN, conducted a real-time survey amongst its membership base to assess the impact of the past week's unrest on agricultural areas and rural towns in the province.

The survey also indicates early results that more than 15% of towns experienced a severe degree of damage (between 40% and 80%) to businesses and trade, while a further 15% of towns experienced limited looting with their centres "partially intact" (between 11% and 40%).

"This valuable, on the ground, real-time information we have gathered from our members, assists us to understand the degree of damage to our rural areas, enabling Kwanalu, together with Agri SA, to allocate assistance through our humanitarian aid programme to the affected areas in our province. It also assists us to continue to identify impor-

tant trade routes which must be reopened in order to stimulate the production and delivery of food and secure the agricultural value chain" said La Marque.

The survey reveals that 64% of towns are experiencing severe food shortages, 32% moderate food shortages and only 4% report a relatively secure source of food supply.

"The impact of the closure of the N3, as the primary gateway for the movement of produce and products into and out of the province, has had catastrophic consequences for farmers, agri-businesses, retail stores and the entire agricultural value chain – just one example is 25% of South Africa's milk moves out KZN. The effects of the closure of various distribution centres for packaging, feed for animals, fertilizer storage and the lack of fuel, has severely set back the agricultural economy of KZN," said La Marque.

"Contrary to what is believed, the looting and rioting was not only centred in the larger cities and towns, but also in smaller communities. It could have been far worse if communities had not stood together to protect the remainder of towns, and for that we are grateful," she said. – Supplied.