

Help for rural towns

Agricultural union organises humanitarian aid for KZN areas hit by unrest

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Thirty-one rural towns suffered massive destruction while a further 10 were left without food during the civil unrest.

KwaZulu-Natal agricultural union Kwanalu said this is its grim tally after conducting a survey among its members to assess the extent of the damage to farms, rural towns, and their surrounding communities.

Smaller municipalities outside Pietermaritzburg like Impendle, uMshwathi and Umgeni were severely affected by the recent unrest in the province.

uMshwathi covers New Hanover and is made up of largely farming communities.

The Richmond and Ixopo central business districts were also among towns that were badly hit by looters.

The union said in a statement that it

had teamed up with Agri SA, WeareSouth-Africans and their partners ReMAX SA, One Logix, Toyota Knights, various Round Tables and Hino Pietermaritzburg, to bring in more than five tons of donated food from Gauteng.

"Food donations worth R5 million have been moved into rural towns and communities of KwaZulu-Natal, feeding more than 500 000 people, and ensuring food security for a further 300 000 in the upcoming weeks.

Nearly two tons of mealie meal was donated by SenWes, four tons of food was donated by Karino Farms Mpumalanga through OrangeHearts (Citrus Growers Association), potatoes and onions were from OneFarmShare (Hello Choice) and two tons of sugar from UCL Pty Ltd, amounting to a total of R5 million worth of food aid," read the statement.

Kwanalu CEO Sandy la Marque in the statement said the union has undertaken to restore value chains, address rural security and restore rural stability on behalf of their members, to the rural communities surrounding their members' businesses.

"[Added to this] our leaders in these towns are advancing on ideas on strengthening civil society to achieve stability and to stop the decay of these critical towns across the province," said La Marque.

Meanwhile, Kwanalu project manager Dr Kathy Hurly said that out of the 31 rural areas hit by the unrest, there were 10 vulnerable towns needing critical assistance immediately.

Hurly added that together with the Agri SA Disaster Relief Foundation they put plans in place to provide humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable rural communities

in KZN.

"The resilience of the farming community and the spirit of philanthropy of our many partners turned this disaster into an opportunity for assisting vulnerable communities, resulting in a total of donations to the value of R5 million," said Hurly.

She added that re-building the decimated rural towns will not be easy, but that it does provide an opportunity to review how rural towns operate and to identify how safety, security and stability can be strengthened.

She said the unrest has shown that the functioning of rural towns is critical to the survival of thousands of people in the deep rural areas of KZN.

Hurly added that the affected towns are all dependent on external parties to provide their supplies, including food, cash and services.

"This tragedy must be used to strengthen the independence of rural towns, that the businesses of the townships and towns be better integrated, ensuring solidarity into the future and that where business opportunities exist that these be investigated and funded to provide the much-needed jobs in rural areas," said Hurly.

She said Kwanalu has also developed a business plan aimed at supporting women and youth in rural businesses and entrepreneurship, and when training is combined with a business stimulus and business incubation, it can be used as a vehicle to reconstruct the 31 rural towns.

"Because it is aimed at the whole agriculture value chain, it can grow new farmers but more importantly provide a mechanism to link these farmers into local and new markets," said Hurly.
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