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Agri-parks: No intent of government to run agriculture

The government has no intent of running agriculture with its agri-parks concept. Rural South Africa, however, has to be transformed and the government believes that agri-parks will make a huge contribution in this regard.

Nasele Mehlomakulu, chief director: Infrastructure Development of the department of rural development and land reform, told the Agbiz congress that the department is consulting as widely as possible with stakeholders to ensure the success of the project.

“The interests of commercial farmers and the private sector will always be taken into consideration. Commercial farmers are already represented on all structures that concern agri-parks. Agri SA or Agbiz often represents them. They state your case.”

Mehlomakulu said that the challenge is to make sure that the private sector is doing what it should be doing and the government is doing what it is supposed to be doing. “The roles at the parks itself are being investigated by a consultant appointed by the department. The management structure is as yet not well defined, but the aim of the investigation is to determine all roles and responsibilities,” he said.

Definition

But what is an agri-park?

According to Mehlomakulu an agri-park is a “networked innovation system of agro-production, processing, logistics, marketing, training and extension services, located in a district municipality. “As a network it enables a market-driven combination and integration of various agricultural activities and rural transformation services.”

Mehlomakulu said that agri-parks are in line with the National Development Plan (NDP), which strives to create 1 million additional jobs in the agricultural sector by

2030 with an additional 1 million hectares under production. The New Growth Path (NGP) aims for 145 000 new jobs in agro-processing by 2020 and 300 000 new smallholders. The Medium-term Strategic Framework envisages 1 million jobs in the rural economy by 2030.

“It strives for a reduction in rural unemployment from the current 49% to less than 40% by 2030. We believe that agri-parks will fulfill these promises,” Mehlomakulu said.

There is one agri-park planned per 44 districts. The parks must be farmer controlled and they have to be the catalyst around which rural industrialisation will take place.

Support

Mehlomakulu said the idea is that government must support agri-parks for a period of ten years to ensure their economic sustainability. Strengthening the partnerships between the government and private sector stakeholders should ensure increased access to services such as water, energy, transport and production on the one hand, while developing existing and creating new markets to strengthen and expand value-chains.

“We want to maximise access to markets to all farmers, with a bias to emerging farmers and rural communities,” Mehlomakulu said. This will also ensure the maximum use of existing agro-processing, bulk and logistics infrastructure, including access to water, energy and roads.

“Agri-parks will result in the revitalisation of rural towns in terms of high economic growth,” he believes.

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