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Expanding, transforming South Africa's agricultural base a must – Ramaphosa

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President Cyril Ramaphosa

South Africa's population continues to grow and with it, so does the demand for food. Being reliant on the productive capacity of a relatively small segment of the population to meet the country's food needs is unsustainable, says President **Cyril Ramaphosa.**

In his latest weekly newsletter, he says that, despite a flourishing farming sector, many communities remain on the periphery.

Ramaphosa says the local sector still has "two agricultures", noting that predominantly white-owned commercial farms account for

the bulk of the country's commercial farming output, while black farmers only account for about 10%.

"We must, therefore, focus on the transformation of our agricultural sector. This is both necessary for the broader transformation of our economy and critical to food security," the President says, emphasising the need to cultivate a new generation of farmers to address the inequalities of the past and to meet the needs of the future.

Hence, he argues that the productive agricultural base has to be expanded, outlining the need to build a pipeline of skilled and productive commercial farmers who can sustain the sector.

"We must equip aspiring farmers with the skills, mentorship, training, technologies and other resources to farm successfully on a commercial scale. The first step in building a new generation of South African farmers is providing them with titled access to land.

Through the Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy, Ramaphosa says the government is releasing about 2.5-million hectares of State-owned land in various parts of the country to black farmers and providing them with title deeds.

In addition to land, the President also notes that knowledge about crops, weather, animal disease and the like is gained from practical experience and learning from established farmers.

"We are greatly encouraged by the programmes being run by commodity associations like the Citrus Growers' Association, Grain South Africa, National Wool Growers' Association, Potatoes South Africa, Red Meat Industry Services, Milk Producers' Organisation and Fruit South Africa, which do admirable work in building an inclusive farming economy."

Ramaphosa adds that a successful farming enterprise also needs affordable, patient capital for new-era commercial farmers, noting that the Land Bank, together with the Department of Agriculture, started the blended finance instrument to address this funding aspect.

He thus encourages other agribusinesses and commercial banks to join the blended finance programme and to develop more funding instruments to support agriculture.

The President says the government is on a concerted drive to expand and diversify export markets for the country's agricultural products, noting that government is engaging with agribusinesses and farmers on issues such as new breeding techniques and advances in agricultural biotechnology.

"Agriculture is a sector that holds immense potential for growth and jobs. Through strong partnerships between government, farmers, business, lenders, traditional leaders and communities, we can build on the strong progress it has made over recent years.

"We can bring more land under cultivation, create a new generation of black commercial farmers and ensure that we grow enough not only to feed all our people, but to sell to markets across the world."

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