

Eastern Cape launches irrigation scheme revival program

The Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture in South Africa has launched an irrigation scheme revival program with a budget of R19.5 million, equivalent to about US\$1.05 million, aimed at supporting agricultural production across the province. The program was launched on January 27 by the Member of the Executive Council for Agriculture, Nonceba Kontsiwe, at the Zanyokwe Irrigation Scheme in Keiskammahoek.

In its initial phase, the program will support vegetable production across 1,528 hectares in the Eastern Cape. Farmers participating in the program will receive access to equipment and machinery. The Department of Agriculture said its longer-term objective is to revitalise 10,000 hectares of irrigation schemes across district municipalities in the province.

Speaking to Farmer's Weekly, Kontsiwe said the program is focused on addressing socio-economic conditions in rural areas. "The purpose behind everything we are doing here is to fight poverty in the Eastern Cape. We have taken a decision as the provincial government to revive the irrigation schemes in the province, and [ZIS] is one of them," she said.

"We want to fight poverty, we want to create job opportunities, and introduce new skills of working the land. We also want to boost the economy of the province and the economy of the actual farmers."

Kontsiwe said the department considers the target of revitalising 10,000 hectares achievable. "It is realistic in the sense that we have seen the outputs of [other people] who have been working. Here at Zanyokwe, they have already reached the market space; they are even selling their produce beyond the province and the country.

"With dedication, commitment, and the support we get from other departments, as well as partnerships with the private sector, we believe we are going to realise this objective," she said.

The Zanyokwe Irrigation Scheme board chairperson, Dr Litha Matiwane, said irrigation scheme farmers welcomed renewed public investment in infrastructure. He said support has included centre pivots, sprinkler irrigation systems, tractors, and other implements, which have increased production capacity. Matiwane added that repairs to the scheme's potato washer have already been completed and are operational.

Looking ahead, Matiwane said the scheme plans to expand production into citrus. "We want to grow and expand into citrus production on 300ha of land, and we already have water rights for that," he said.

According to the Department of Agriculture, district-level funding allocations include R5 million, about US\$270,000, for 613 hectares in the Amathole District Municipality, R6 million, about US\$323,000, for 700 hectares in the Chris Hani District Municipality, and R3.5 million, about US\$188,000, for 215 hectares in the OR Tambo District Municipality.

The Eastern Cape Rural Development Agency has been allocated R5 million, about US\$270,000, to support commercialisation, market organisation, new production technologies, technical assistance, and access to production finance.

Source: Farmer's Weekly (<https://www.farmersweekly.co.za/agri-news/south-africa/eastern-cape-department-of-agriculture-launches-irrigation-revival-scheme/>)

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