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Land reform ignites debate at Agri SA congress

13TH OCTOBER 2016 BY: MEGAN VAN WYNGAARDT - CREAMER MEDIA CONTRIBUTING EDITOR ONLINE

If government wants to successfully proceed with its land reform programme, while enjoying the support of the wider agricultural community, a number of steps need to be taken, Agri SA's agricultural development policy committee chairperson **Ernest Pringle** put forth at the 2016 Agri SA Congress on Thursday.

“Ownership needs to be extended as a basis of land reform. Better beneficiary selection is also absolutely vital, as [land reform] is currently not working, with too much corruption and nepotism in the process,” he stated.

Since 1994, the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform has transferred 5.9-million hectares of land to land reform beneficiaries.

Pringle said that, too often, agricultural ventures on the transferred land had failed, owing to a lack of proper training. He called on government to invest in agricultural training, but added that the country's agricultural colleges had been shut down.

Further, he noted that proper financing for land reform was imperative, as funds were woefully inadequate and, furthermore, were “currently being abused through corruption; an appalling waste of money”. He added that a community of 35 000 commercial farmers could not solely fund land reform.

Pringle also called for proper support systems, so that emerging farmers, who receive land, can be self-sufficient.

Grain SA vice-chairperson **Preline Swart** further pointed out that land beneficiaries needed land ownership and title deeds, or they would remain dependent on government otherwise.

She pleaded that government needed to choose beneficiaries that were willing to learn. “Help the farmer that has helped himself. This way, you will know that when a farmer receives land, he will make a success from it. Without support, our producers cannot survive in the country,” she added, noting that beneficiaries needed at least three years of support.

Further, she noted that land reform was taking far too long, while arguing that there was “more than enough money” to support the country’s land reform goals.

In agreement, Department of Land Reform and Rural Development ministerial adviser **Masiphula Mbongwa** noted that production should not and need not be hampered by the transfer of agricultural land to black owners, emphasizing that it needed to stay the same or increase.

“The party that was there as the owner, preferably, should get involved in the restitution to ensure that the management aspect is there,” he pointed out.

Restitution of land refers to the return of land to individuals or communities that was forcibly dispossessed of it in the past. 🇷🇺

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