**Remarks by Premier of KwaZulu-Natal Hon. Nomusa Dube-Ncube during the Agriculture Indaba held in Mandeni on 04 March 2023**

Programme Director, MEC for Treasury and MEC Champion for Ilembe District Honourable, Neliswa Peggy Nkonyeni;

MEC for Agriculture and Rural Development, Honourable S. Zuma;

Mayor of ILembe District Municipality Cllr. T.P Shandu;

Mayor of Mandeni Local Municipality Cllr. T.P Mdlalose;

Chairperson of the Provincial House of Traditional Leaders Inkosi R Shinga;

Amakhosi and Izinduna;

Organised Agriculture, Women, Youth in Agriculture and Rural Development;

Representatives of all Vulnerable Groups;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good Morning!

May I take this opportunity to welcome you all to this Provincial Agriculture Indaba which brings together all the critical stakeholders in the farming and agribusiness sector in KwaZulu-Natal.

This is one of the most important gatherings since we delivered the State of the Province Address on 24 February, and is a clear indicator of the spirit of decisive action that will characterize the financial year 2023/2024, and particularly the speed and agility with which we will deliver sustainable transformation to the people of KwaZulu-Natal.

Programme Director, to this Indaba provincial government has invited the community of KwaZulu-Natal, but also delegates from vulnerable groups to join in discussions on the future of Agriculture. In this exercise we are guided by Amakhosi, Women in Agriculture and Rural Development, Youth in Agriculture and Rural Development, Graduates in Agriculture, Farmers and Officials of government.

At onset, I wish to inform this gathering that this Indaba is not a talk shop. This is a service delivery oriented meeting of minds. Accordingly, our focus is always trained at achieving results. In this regard, our primary fixation is to see farmers and all other producers in the agricultural value chain benefitting meaningfully from information as well as government services that will improve their enterprises. This Indaba, specifically, is a culmination of a series of work that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development commenced a while ago. Itself a sign of continuity and consistency of this administration.

**Unveiling the yellow plant**

Earlier today, to indicate the pace of our decisive actions, we unveiled yellow plant equipment which is being made available province-wide to agriculture and which will help clear fields and access roads especially in areas which are affected by floods and heavy rains.

This is a programme that is being rolled out to all the districts of our province, and represents a step change as we place agriculture at the centre of economic growth, much-needed job-creation and food security.

Programme Director, like all sectors, agriculture in our province is fast emerging from the challenges that we faced as we dealt with the unrest of July 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic and the Floods of April and May 2022. Together these events have had a lasting negative impact on our plans, but our efforts have been further undermined by the intensification of load-shedding and the energy supply crisis that to all intents and purposes has taken the shine out of our service delivery programmes.

**Objectives of the Indaba 2023**

As indicated earlier, this Indaba is set to look at the role that agriculture and agribusiness can play in addressing the pressing challenges of employment, poverty and intergenerational inequality. The gathering is to look at the increased supportive role of Amakhosi who, on behalf of His Majesty King Misuzulu kaZwelithini, manage royal custodianship of land in rural areas. In this manner Amakhosi are key to unlocking the value of the land in their areas particularly in respect of agriculture.

We will not forget the words of the late Isilo Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu who often castigated the people of KwaZulu-Natal, branding us “amavila”, who were prepared to starve when land was lying fallow and God had given us brains and hands to work the earth.

In its January 8 statement the ANC acknowledges that agriculture holds vast potential to uplift poor South Africans out of poverty through increased food production, vibrant economic activity, and job creation.

The agricultural sector has continues to grow and have a positive contribution to food availability, employment and economic growth, and government continues its support to the sector by ensuring underutilised land is brought into production and made available to communities and historically disadvantaged individuals.

Provincial government supports the acceleration and revitalization of the rural economy to provide necessary farming implements and mechanisation in rural areas. The province therefore wishes to applaud the signing of the Agriculture and Agribusiness Masterplan at national level which is a social compact of the sector that ensures partners in agriculture work together for the transformation and inclusive participation of all.

It is the role of government to ensure equitable access to land in order to reverse the apartheid spatial planning and to increase the participation of historically disadvantaged communities in agriculture and other land-based industries.

It is therefore revolutionary that our National Assembly has adopted the Expropriation Bill which provides for expropriation of land without compensation and is now to be finalized in 2023 by the National Council of Provinces.

**Outlining the huge potential of agriculture**

Programme Director, a January 2023 article that appears in *The Conversation* magazine, is emphatic that “there is compelling evidence that, on average, growth in agriculture is more poverty-reducing than an equivalent amount of growth outside agriculture. This brings home the need to invest in and expand agricultural production, particularly for the benefit of poor rural communities”**.**

In a speech delivered recently at the Gordon Institute of Business Science AFGRI CEO Chris Venter believes that in the next 10 years South Africa will become a major food exporter increasing the sector’s contribution to the local economy. Mr Venter however remarked that resolving issues around policy regarding export licensing, a substantial increase in agricultural activity in rural provinces and an emphasis on urban farming and hydroponics projects would lift the country’s potential significantly.

He further suggests that the country and the SADC region needs a bold vision for agriculture and food security spanning over 50years. “This should feature a 50-year food security plan for SADC and include plans for processing of locally produced products including a formalised approach to export production and thoughtful agricultural policy which takes into account the funding and support needs of small-scale farmers. If we ultimately want to create one million jobs in agriculture, these can only come off the back of production and processing.”

Commenting on technology Venter said “data analysis, including soil data and weather station analysis, are becoming increasingly important to agriculture. AI-enabled machinery, such as crop sprayers that distinguish between plants and weeds, are able to reduce the application of fertiliser and pesticides by as much as 90%. While advances in technology may mean large scale commercial farms will become less labour intensive in certain areas of agriculture, small scale urban farming would drive productivity and steer jobs growth.”

Ladies and Gentlemen, like the Afgri CEO we believe that next to tourism, agriculture holds the greatest potential to help KwaZulu-Natal’s economy grow and create mass employment in the coming years.

At this Indaba therefore, we are expected to emerge with the solutions that will turn our land into sites of production and bring food security in the form of more available goods, but also jobs for especially the vulnerable groups of women, youth, those with disabilities and military veterans. Our agriculture expansion goals must take into consideration the impact of climate change, righting the regulatory environment, opening access for the previously disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.

International conflict involving Russia and Ukraine has resulted in steep commodity prices and rise in logistics supply chain costs and among the questions we must therefore discuss will be the following:

* the impact of energy shortages;
* land reform;
* the expansion of exports;
* the role of local government in supporting agriculture;
* review of regulations that hamper agriculture growth;
* the role of the financing of the sector.

The agricultural sector and food producers report that power outages disrupt production, supply chain logistics and add extra cost to food companies and farmers leading to consumer food price inflation being elevated from 6,5% in 2021 to 9% in 2022.

Agricultural scientists and economists predict that huge growth in domestic production in 2023 which will necessitate that South Africa reaches new export markets with countries like China, South Korea, Japan, the USA, Vietnam, Taiwan, India, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, the Philippines and Bangladesh being targeted for fruit, wine, beef and grains. These are real opportunities for agriculture in KwaZulu-Natal.

This further brings into focus the inefficiencies in ports and rail, the availability of water on the cost of doing business and investment being taken away from productive agribusiness activities to maintaining roads and other infrastructure has constrained expansion and made conditions even more challenging for new entrants.

**KwaZulu-Natal to become a leading agriculture producer**

Programme Director, we must use this gathering to kickstart a major revolution in our agriculture. We want South Africa to become number one in agriculture again, and we want KwaZulu-Natal to lead that trajectory.

In this regard in 2023, in KwaZulu-Natal there will be a drive for the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development to broaden the blended finance instruments to accommodate more financial institutions and increase its scale to reach more farmers.

As we indicated in the State of the Province Address the province will commence with the rollout of agrihubs located in various districts, and to this extent an amount to the tune of R152 million has been allocated to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development over the next three years.

The agri-hubs programme has been identified as a national priority programme and is to be included in the Presidential Infrastructure Coordinating Commission and funded accordingly. There is ample appetite from local and international investors to partner with the KZN provincial government in the development of these agri-hubs and we expect construction to commence soon.

**Mega-Nurseries and Agronomic Seed Production**

The Makhathini Nursery and the new Mega Nurseries at Dundee and Cedara Research Stations for seed production are bearing fruit. The Makhathini nursery produced 70 000 seedlings for the farmers around uMkhanyakude district with 30 graduates recruited to support seedling production. The structure designs for nurseries at Dundee and Cedara have been completed and the construction will be completed this month.

Under the agronomic seed programme, the Department managed to harvest 3.63 tons of maize seeds and distributed to farmers who planted 145 hectares. The farmers will harvest an estimated 580 tons of maize. Bean seed harvested is 7.0 tons and distributed to the farmers who planted 93 hectares of beans. The farmers will harvest an estimated 139.5 tons of beans.

**Food and Nutrition Security**

Through the department’s food security intervention 16 722 subsistence farmers had been supported against an annual target of 16 581 subsistence farmers and this will be 18 071 subsistence farmers this financial year. The department is planning to support 3 958 smallholder producers in the 2022/23 financial year.

**Projects to Support Women, Youth and People with Disabilities**

In the 2022/23 financial year, the department is spending a total budget of R26 108 096 towards supporting 230 Vulnerable Group projects constituting of 113 Women owned projects, 83 Youth owned projects and 34 Person with Disability owned projects.

**Unemployed Agriculture Graduates Programme**

At least 340 agricultural graduates were placed on farms and agricultural enterprises under the agricultural graduate development programme. The first cohort that started in 2019 have now exited the programme. This year these 340 graduates undertake their second year in the programme and new group of 340 new graduates will enter the system.

**Establishment Early Morning Farmers Markets**

Having witnessed the challenges associated with food distribution during COVID-19 Lockdowns and Social Unrest that occurred in the province last year, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has developed a concept for the establishment of Early Morning Farmers Markets for Cooperatives (including vulnerable groups) as a complimentary strategy to existing Municipal Fresh Produce and RASET Markets.

This initiative offers alternatives distribution method to reduce reliance on the middleman/distributors (agents) who sometimes exploit smallholder farmers buying their produce at poor prices and selling the same fresh produce at much higher prices. It is through such initiatives that the government is trying to support youth and women cooperatives, in particular, to enable their produce to be sold in their locality, reducing travelling and transport costs.

The province intends reviving our “One Home One Garden” programme to fight poverty not only in rural areas but our townships as well. The RASET programme must also focus on townships - poverty is exacerbated in townships by non-availability of land. We need more seeds, scooping of dams and mechanisation programmes to support our small-scale farmers.

Through the department’s farmer support intervention programme, over 15 248 subsistence producers were supported with food production initiatives in 2022/23 financial year. The department is planning to support a further 13 455 subsistence producers in the 2023/24 financial year; 978 smallholder producers and 20 black commercial farmers who are producing exclusively for markets. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will unpack more during its budget vote.

As indicated the province will this year continue to provide Vegetable seed/seedlings scoops as immediate intervention which will be provided based on local needs.

Each household will be given a scoop of 2 different vegetable seeds/seedlings, 1 grain commodity & fertilizer.

Infrastructure establishment and rehabilitation including Diptanks, Irrigation, Animal handing facilities, Boreholes, Grazing Camps, Dams: scooping and Fencing of arable lands will be among the support interventions we will roll out to unleash the agricultural potential of KwaZulu-Natal.

With regard to cattle and Sheep Stock Breeding, we are unveiling a Cattle and sheep breeding programme to commence in financial year 2023/24.

**Establishment of Veterinary Clinic**

The Government plan to establish the Mhlumayo Veterinary Clinic to improve livestock health management. Access to veterinary diagnostic services is critical to any successful or aspiring livestock farmer. The dilemma facing most communal livestock farmers is the long distance to the provincial diagnostic lab based in Pietermaritzburg. The mobile facility will have facilities that will allow it to provide diagnostic services in the remotest parts of the province.

Rural abattoirs are being funded to procure, install and maintain a quality management system in compliance with Meat Safety Act.

The previously marginalized emerging Livestock farmers will be encouraged to participate in the mainstream economy to increase their gross farm income and production by delivering high quality livestock. This program is achieved through cooperation between Amakhosi, livestock associations and other stakeholders.

Programme Director, amakhosi and municipalities are critical in improving our agricultural potential. Amakhosi, Municipalities, farmers, will be identifying the under-utilized places in Municipalities and Amakhosi areas and turn those into market areas. This Programme will benefit more farmers under Amakhosi areas as it will create platform for farmers to sell their produce within their close proximity with their areas of production. It positively contributes to food security as the farmers will manage to generate income from their produce.

**Towards Climate-smart Agriculture**

This gathering may also consider looking at the impact of climate change on agriculture and the evolution of Climate-smart agriculture. Climate Smart Agriculture is an integrated approach to managing landscapes—cropland, livestock, forests and fisheries--that address the interlinked challenges of food security and climate change.

**Conclusion**

Programme Director, we look forward to this gathering agreeing on a social compact to achieve the following:

* Promoting and supporting agricultural development through mobilizing financial and non-financial resources;
* Reduce dependence on imported food and food products;
* Ensure sustainable and smart agriculture;
* Promote competitiveness and profitability of the agricultural sector;
* Improve policies and by-laws governing agriculture;
* Promote and encourage private sector investments;
* Enhance the role of youth and other vulnerable groups;
* Promote applied research and innovative technologies for agribusiness development;
* Create strategic partnerships with organized agriculture, investors and markets;
* Promote the inclusion of households, micro, small medium agricultural enterprises to food value chain.
* Provide various support packages to small farmers and food security initiatives.
* Develop food security strategies.

I wish to assure all participants of this Indaba that their inputs and contributions from today’s deliberations will be considered by the departments as it finalizes its Budget Vote to be tabled at the KZN Legislature in the coming months. I am assured by MEC Zuma and his management team that this gathering will also inform their plans for the upcoming 2023/24 financial year. To this end, we expect to see final fruits of this engagement being realized in the form of programmes and projects that this Department, and its entity the ADA, will implement to the benefit of the KZN communities.

I wish all the participants well and may this Indaba bring solutions to our agriculture sector and help KwaZulu-Natal become a better place for all to live.

**Thank you!**