

**LIMPOPO PREMIER DR. PHOPHI RAMATHUBA SPEECH DURING AGRILIMPOPO 2024 GALA
DINNER AT MODIMOLLE, WATERBERG**

14 AUGUST 2024

Program Director,
Honorable Minister of Agriculture, Mr. John Steenhuisen,
Honorable Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, Mr. Dean Macpherson,
MEC for Agriculture and Rural Development Ms Nakedi Kekana
Executive Mayor of Waterberg District Cllr. Jack Maeko
Mayor of Modimolle-Mookgopong Municipality Cllr. Aaron Sebolai
Representative of Young Farmers, Mr. JJ De Nysschen,
President of AgriLimpopo,
Esteemed Farmers,
Sponsors,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening,
Thobela,
Avuxeni,
Ndi Madekwana,
Slotshisle,
Goeie Naand.

It is both an honor and a privilege to join you this evening as we close what I am sure has been a successful and productive 3-day conference. Your chosen theme, "We are because you are," speaks volumes about the spirit of community and interconnectedness that underpins our agricultural sector. This Ubuntu philosophy underscores that our individual existence and well-being are intricately linked to the well-being of others. It is a timely reminder that in agriculture, as in life, we thrive not in isolation but through cooperation and mutual support.

Program Director, Agriculture is the backbone of our province's economy. It is an industry that not only feeds our nation but also sustains livelihoods, creates jobs, and contributes significantly to the

economic stability of Limpopo. The agricultural sector is unique in that it requires the harmonious collaboration of various stakeholders—farmers, value chain operators, organized agriculture, researchers, policymakers, consumers, and the community at large. This sector is the lifeblood of our rural communities, driving development and ensuring food security for all.

Our farmers are the unsung heroes who toil tirelessly under the sun, battling unpredictable weather conditions and market fluctuations to put food on our tables. Your contributions to the economy are undeniable, and you are the bedrock upon which we build our province's future. As your Premier, I am fully committed to ensuring that you have the support, resources, and infrastructure needed to continue thriving. Your success is our success, and I pledge to stand by you every step of the way.

Program Director,

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to our commercial farmers, who have already made significant strides in advancing the agricultural sector in Limpopo. Your dedication, innovation, and resilience are commendable, and I encourage you to continue being proactive in your endeavors. The recent report by the Statistician General highlights a remarkable achievement—people in Limpopo Province are increasingly able to produce food for themselves. This is a testament to the hard work and commitment of our farming community, and it is a milestone we should all be proud of.

Since assuming office, my team and I have been inundated with calls and letters from both commercial and subsistence farmers raising concerns about the state of the roads in their areas of operation. We understand the critical importance of reliable infrastructure for the agricultural sector, and I want to assure you that these concerns are being addressed with the urgency they deserve. We have engaged with the MEC for Public Works, Mr. Ernest Rachoene, to prioritize these issues. Our Dikgerekgere Wednesday campaign, which focuses on blading and regravelling roads across the province, is one of the initiatives we have launched to improve our rural infrastructure. We are confident that this campaign will bring much-needed relief to our farming community.

Program Director,

One issue that has been particularly pressing is the condition of the R572 road, which many of you have described as treacherous and notorious. We hear you, and we share your frustration, especially for those of you farming in the Weipi and Bosveld areas. Rest assured, this matter is receiving urgent attention. We are in the process of reviving our Roads Agency Limpopo (RAL), following the

resignation of several board members. The appointment of a new board will bring the stability and leadership needed to tackle these challenges head-on. We are committed to ensuring that our roads are safe and reliable, enabling you to transport your produce to markets without unnecessary delays or risks.

Program Director,

I am also acutely aware of the challenges posed by recent frosts, which have severely affected several farmers, particularly those cultivating potatoes and strawberries in the Waterberg and Capricorn districts. The MEC for Agriculture, Ms. Nakedi Kekana, has already visited some of the hardest-hit farms, and the government is following due processes to ensure that relief measures are put in place. We understand the devastating impact that such natural disasters can have on your livelihoods, and we are committed to providing the necessary support to help you recover and rebuild.

Our presence here tonight is not just ceremonial; it is a demonstration of our unwavering commitment to the agricultural sector and to AgriLimpopo. The offices of the Premier and the MEC for Agriculture are always open to you. We are here to listen, to support, and to work with you to overcome the challenges you face. Let us strengthen our collaboration and build a robust, resilient agricultural sector that benefits everyone.

One of the key areas where collaboration is essential is in the relationship between commercial and subsistence farmers. I encourage our established commercial farmers to take it upon themselves to mentor and assist subsistence farmers. By sharing expertise, knowledge, and resources, we can ensure balanced growth in agriculture across the province. This collaboration will not only boost our economy but also ensure that food security is maintained for all our people.

Program Director,

As we look to the future, it is vital that we embrace the rapid advancements in technology. The agricultural sector is evolving, and it is essential that we adapt to these changes to remain competitive and sustainable. As a province, we are working diligently to implement irrigation and water solutions that address the persistent challenge of drought. Additionally, we are prioritizing the adoption of renewable energy in agriculture to reduce costs for farmers and increase efficiency. These initiatives are critical to ensuring that our agricultural sector remains resilient in the face of climate change and other global challenges.

Moreover, the development of broader agriculture-inspired programs remains a priority for our government. We are committed to supporting and facilitating the adoption of initiatives focused on agricultural processing and marketing. These programs are designed to boost entrepreneurship within the farming sector, create job opportunities, especially for our youth, and sustain the economic vitality of our rural areas. We believe that by expanding agriculture-related activities, we can make significant strides in reducing poverty and unemployment in our province.

To ensure the long-term success of these initiatives, we must also focus on integrating agriculture into our education system. We need to cultivate a new generation of farmers by encouraging our youth to take an interest in agriculture. By incorporating agriculture into the curriculum from primary through to secondary education, we can equip young people with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in this sector. Established farmers can play a crucial role in this effort by developing programs that bring students to farms, allowing them to learn firsthand about the agricultural industry. This will not only inspire a passion for farming among the youth but also address the issue of youth unemployment, which remains a top priority for our government.

Program Director, We can not ignore the impact of the global pandemic on the agricultural sector. The past few years have been challenging, with market closures, border restrictions, and supply chain disruptions. However, I am optimistic about the future. We have faced these challenges head-on, and as the world slowly recovers, we are beginning to see a positive outlook for the agriculture sector. It is imperative that we remain resilient and continue to adapt to the changing landscape.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate the importance of collaboration between the government and the agricultural sector. Together, we can amplify the success of agriculture in our province and create a prosperous future for all. We are committed to working with you to overcome the challenges, implement innovative ideas, and drive growth in the agricultural sector. Let us continue to build on the progress we have made, create opportunities, and foster economic growth in Limpopo.

Thank you for your dedication, your resilience, and your unwavering commitment to making Limpopo a leading agricultural hub in our country.

I thank you.