

SPEECH BY PREMIER DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA SUMMER PLANTING SEASON
CAMPAIGN, VHEMBE DISTRICT
06 DECEMBER 2024

Honourable MEC Nakedi Kekana,
Cllr Freda Nkondo Executive Mayor of Vhembe District
Municipality Cllr A Rambuda Mayor of the Thulamela Municipality
Vho-Musanda Kennedy Tshivhase and his Traditional Leaders,
Farmers,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ndi Matsheloni, Avuxeni, Thobela, Good morning, Goie more.

We are today marking the launch of the Vhembe District's 2024/2025 Planting Season. As we would all know, Agriculture is the lifeblood of Limpopo, driving economic growth, ensuring food security, and uplifting rural communities. As a province blessed with abundant natural resources and a dedicated agricultural workforce, our province is uniquely positioned to become not only South Africa's agricultural hub but a leader across the African continent.

Programme Director, Food security begins at home, and one of the most direct and impactful ways to address food insecurity is through backyard farming. In a province like Limpopo, where many households rely on subsistence agriculture, backyard farming provides an accessible means for families to meet their nutritional needs while reducing dependency on purchased food.

This type of farming offers several advantages. It allows households to cultivate fresh vegetables, fruits, and herbs, ensuring a consistent supply of nutritious food. This reduces vulnerability to market price fluctuations and ensures that even low-income households have access to essential nutrients.

Furthermore, backyard farming empowers communities to become self-sufficient. It fosters a sense of ownership and resilience, particularly in rural areas where access to large-scale agricultural infrastructure might be limited.

Programme Director, by adopting practices such as crop rotation, composting, and water-saving irrigation techniques, families can sustainably maximise the productivity of small plots. We have our Extension officers here ready to help- please do get in contact with them at the local District offices.

We know that Vhembe has been thriving with backyard farming- it is evident with the ever-green land we see. You look at the streets, you find those who have had surplus outputs will then be selling to the public. That's another means of income.

As we move forward, we must also integrate modern agricultural technologies into backyard farming. Innovations such as vertical gardens, hydroponics, and aquaponics can significantly enhance yields, even in limited spaces. All this jargon can be clarified by our extension officers wearing brown here today- please do see them when you leave for further information.

Programme Director, while subsistence and small-scale farming remain essential, the true transformative potential of agriculture lies in elevating small-scale farmers to commercial production. This transition is not just a matter of scaling up operations; it is about unlocking the full economic potential of agriculture to create jobs, generate wealth, and build a more inclusive economy.

Small-scale farmers are the backbone of Limpopo's agricultural sector. However, many face significant barriers, including limited access to markets, financing, and modern farming technologies. Breaking down these barriers is a top priority for this administration. Commercialising small-scale farming also involves improving market access.

Programme Director, our government is working to establish and strengthen value chains that connect smallholder farmers with local, national, and international markets. Initiatives such as cooperative marketing platforms, farmer exchange programs, and trade expos are creating new opportunities for farmers to showcase their products and compete on a larger scale.

We also recognise the importance of infrastructure development in facilitating this transition. Investments in irrigation systems, storage facilities, and transportation networks are essential for ensuring that farmers can produce at a commercial scale and deliver their goods to market efficiently.

Furthermore, the adoption of climate-smart agriculture is a critical component of commercial farming. By embracing sustainable practices and leveraging technology, small-scale farmers can mitigate the risks associated with climate change while increasing their productivity. The Department's extension services provide training and technical assistance to help farmers adopt these innovative approaches.

Programme Director, Limpopo is uniquely positioned to become a leading agricultural hub in South Africa and beyond. Our province is endowed with fertile soil, a favourable climate, and a rich biodiversity that supports diverse agricultural activities. From citrus and macadamia nuts to livestock and grains, Limpopo's agricultural sector is both vibrant and diverse.

To capitalise on this potential, we must build a comprehensive strategy that leverages our strengths while addressing key challenges. Central to this vision is the development of agro-processing industries that add value to our raw agricultural products. By processing and packaging goods locally, we can create jobs, boost local economies, and increase the competitiveness of Limpopo's products in international markets.

The Agricultural and Agro-processing Master Plan (AAMP) provides a roadmap for achieving this vision. It emphasises the importance of strengthening value chains, promoting export-oriented agriculture, and fostering partnerships with the private sector. Under this plan, we are prioritising investments in agro-industrial parks, export zones, and research and development centres that will position Limpopo as a leader in agricultural innovation.

As we expand our agro-processing capabilities, we are also focusing on branding and marketing Limpopo as a premier agricultural destination. Initiatives such as the Provincial Abattoir Rating Scheme (PARS) and the Limpopo Meat Safety Scheme highlight our commitment to maintaining high standards of quality and safety. These efforts not only enhance consumer confidence but also open doors to lucrative export markets.

Programme Director, our vision as a provincial government extends beyond South Africa's borders. As the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) comes into effect, Limpopo has an opportunity to position itself as a key player in regional agricultural trade. By leveraging our strategic location and agricultural expertise, we can become a hub for exporting high-quality products to neighbouring countries and beyond.

However, achieving this vision requires a collective effort. Collaboration between government, private sector stakeholders, farmers, and research institutions is essential for driving innovation and ensuring sustainable growth. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is committed to fostering these partnerships and creating an enabling environment for all stakeholders to thrive.

Programme Director, while we celebrate the opportunities that lie ahead, we must also acknowledge the challenges that continue to impact on our agricultural sector. Climate change, land degradation, and urban encroachment threaten the sustainability of our farming practices.

We are also investing in education and training to build the next generation of agricultural leaders. Partnerships with educational institutions, such as the University of Limpopo and the Limpopo Department of Education, equip young people with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in a modern agricultural economy.

Let us work together to turn this vision into reality. By embracing innovation, fostering collaboration, and prioritising inclusivity, we can transform Limpopo into a thriving agricultural hub that benefits all its people.

I wish all our farmers a successful and productive planting season. May the seeds we sow today yield a bountiful harvest for the future.

I thank you.