

## Speech by Premier Dr. Phophi Ramathuba at the AgriXpo

The Ranch Resort, Polokwane  
Thursday, 13 March 2025

Programme Director,  
MEC for Agriculture Ms Nakedi Kekana,  
Capricorn District Executive Mayor, Cllr Mamedupi Tefo,  
Polokwane Executive Mayor, Cllr Makoro John Mpe,  
President of Agri Limpopo,  
Business leaders,  
Farmers,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thobela, Ndi matsheloni, Avuxeni, Good morning, Goeie môre.

There is a saying in agriculture: “He who sows bountifully shall reap abundantly.” Today, we stand here not just as spectators but as cultivators of hope, champions of resilience, and architects of a thriving agricultural future. The land is our heritage, the soil our wealth, and the harvest our legacy.

In Limpopo, farming is not just an occupation, it is a lifeline, a culture, and the backbone of our provincial economy. It feeds our families, sustains our industries, and strengthens our rural communities. But as every farmer knows, a good harvest does not come without toil, patience, and adaptability to the changing seasons.

Programme Director, agriculture remains a critical driver of Limpopo’s economy. In 2024, the sector contributed approximately 2.3% to the provincial GDP and 7.6% of South Africa’s total agricultural output.

Our province is home to some of the country’s most fertile lands, producing a wide variety of crops, from citrus fruits, avocados, and bananas to macadamia nuts, maize, and tea.

We are proud that Limpopo accounts for nearly two-thirds of South Africa’s tomato production and produces over 285,000 tons of potatoes annually. But herein lies the challenge, while we are rich in raw produce, we remain reliant on external processors.

Why should Limpopo tomatoes be processed into tomato sauce elsewhere when we can build factories right here, creating jobs and boosting local industries?

Ladies and gentlemen, the time has come for us to move beyond primary production and venture into value-added processing, ensuring that the full economic benefits of agriculture remain within our province.

The evolving global political landscape, including ongoing discussions around AGOA (African Growth and Opportunity Act), reminds us that we cannot afford to be solely dependent on international trade agreements for survival.

While we remain hopeful that diplomatic negotiations will yield positive outcomes, this should serve as a wake-up call.

We must diversify our markets, strengthen intra-African trade, and focus on self-sufficiency. Our farmers must produce not just to export, but to feed our own people first. This means prioritising local production, improving infrastructure, and creating a strong agricultural value chain that supports both commercial and emerging farmers.

Ladies and gentlemen, climate change is no longer a distant threat, it is our reality. We are witnessing erratic weather patterns, extreme heat, unexpected frost, and devastating floods all in a single season.

As a result, we have seen a shift in farming trends. Many of our farmers are transitioning from cattle farming to more climate-resilient livestock like goats, while others are investing in drought-tolerant crops such as sorghum and sunflowers.

These shifts highlight the need for government, private sector, and research institutions to invest in climate-smart agriculture.

Recent floods have damaged critical roads and bridges, making it difficult for farmers to transport their produce. Through initiatives like Dikgerekgere Wednesdays, we have started rehabilitating rural roads, but we know more needs to be done.

That is why we have already submitted claims for disaster relief to the National Disaster Management Office, and we will continue pushing for urgent intervention.

Programme Director, while commercial agriculture remains a pillar of our economy, we can not overlook the struggles of emerging farmers. Many of them face limited access to markets, inadequate financing, and a lack of infrastructure to support their growth.

To our financial institutions and agribusinesses, I make this call: Be the agents of change. Support our emerging farmers with financial aid, technical training, and access to markets. Without this support, their potential remains untapped, and the fight against unemployment remains an uphill battle.

In the words of Charlotte Maxeke, “This work is not for yourselves. Kill that spirit of self and do not live above your people, but live with them. If you can rise, bring someone with you.”

Let us embody this spirit by uplifting small-scale farmers so they too can thrive, create jobs, and contribute to our economy.

AgriXpo must be more than just an event. It is supposed to be a platform for knowledge exchange, technological innovation, and economic empowerment.

As it brings together government, industry experts, commercial and emerging farmers, all working towards a common goal, it should create a sustainable, inclusive, and thriving agricultural sector.

In alignment with the National Development Plan (NDP) and Limpopo's strategic agricultural vision, AgriXpo should accelerate:

Transformation in agriculture – ensuring more farmers, especially women and youth, enter and succeed in the industry.

Inclusivity – providing small-scale farmers with equal opportunities to access markets and finance.

Innovation and technology adoption – embracing mechanization, precision farming, and agro-processing.

We want to see Limpopo as a united, prosperous, and productive agricultural province, one where every farmer, big or small, thrives in an enabling environment.

Ladies and gentlemen, let this AgriXpo be a turning point for Limpopo agriculture. Let it be the foundation upon which we build a self-reliant, globally competitive farming sector.

As the saying goes, Rome was not built in a day. But if we put our heads together, if we work collectively, government, business and farmers. Limpopo will not only be the food basket of South Africa but of the entire continent.

I thank you.