

RMFA POLICY POSITION DOCUMENT 2017

General perspectives on government's interventions in agriculture

Political campaigns are characterized by promises of hand-outs. RMFA is of the view that this sometimes results in the government behaving irresponsibly, for example in neglecting the maintenance of existing infrastructure, in launching myriad projects which it does not have the capacity to support, and in tending to make decisions without fully consulting farmers.

The general principle that RMFA would implore government to consider is to work more closely with farmers, and in particular through farmers' associations, and in so doing seek to employ government's limited resources more effectively. This principle applies across the board; a closer, structured relationship between the government and farmers could result in the formation of better policies and programmes; their more effective and thrifty implementation; and constructive monitoring and evaluation.

Infrastructure-related issues and recommendations

Infrastructure is an important cross-cutting issue in that it is vital to various aspects of agriculture, including crop farming, livestock farming, and processing and marketing of crops and livestock products. Broadly, one can distinguish between on-farm and off-farm infrastructure, where off-farm infrastructure is generally a government responsibility because it is virtually impossible for farmers to come together to ensure it is put in place or maintained. On farm infrastructure is a shared responsibility, however the historical neglect of black farmers, especially those who are not land reform beneficiaries, is such there is an argument for government and other stakeholders to be involved.

While there numerous specific infrastructure-related issue one could mention, RMFA has two main points to make in this respect, namely: i) the urgent need to explore opportunities for new infrastructure where it is lacking, or to restore infrastructure that has fallen into disrepair; and ii) the equally urgent need to device and test alternative models for maintaining infrastructure. The refurbishment of old and dilapidated infrastructure such as dams, rain water tanks and old water pipe networks remain a critical issue.

In the same vein, water supply and access to the agricultural use are crucial aspects. Water is an asset that belongs to and is controlled by the state. The previously disenfranchised communal farmers benefit minimally from the rivers that run past their arable fields and grazing lands. Another critical aspect to ensuring access to water supply is to ensure all water infrastructures are in good working condition and water infrastructure is maintained. According to RMFA, there are no dams or reservoirs constructed in rural areas which are important in ensuring that water is conserved for agricultural uses.

A critical aspect to consider in ensuring access to water supply is to ensure water infrastructure is in good working condition. Following this, RMFA identifies the following:

- ✓ There is lack of resources to pay for broken infrastructure and lack of skills for renovations to be carried out by farmers. Unrepaired infrastructure result in the loss of irrigation water leaving farmers with heavy debts.
- ✓ There is an absence of functional dams in communal areas, resulting in livestock having to walk a long distances for water and contributing to the under-performance of communal livestock farmers. One reason for the current situation is that government lacks cost effective ways of ensuring the de-silting of existing dams.
- ✓ There is need for an awareness campaign in regard to protecting and maintaining existing infrastructure by community members.
- ✓ The government should only make use of costly external service providers as a last resort; instead, government should make greater use of communal farmers, co-operatives, local SMMEs and farmers' associations who can offer the same services. At least 30% of all goods and services should be handled in this way, especially where the maintenance of infrastructure is concerned.
- ✓ There is need for employment of local rangers in order to prevent irresponsible damaging of infrastructure, e.g. fencing; this too, however, could done in cost-effective manner through outsourcing to communal farmers, co-operatives, local SMMEs and farmers' associations.
- ✓ The local municipalities lack appropriate structures for raw water supply for agricultural use.
- ✓ Government programmes are not effectively rolled out to combat alien species that demand a lot of water.
- ✓ The government processes on water supply need to be simplified in order to expedite water access for agriculture purpose by communal farmers need to shortened and simplified.
- ✓ The government farmer capacitation efforts on proper water usage and conservation are ineffective.
- ✓ The government needs to effectively introduce cheap water harvesting techniques.
- ✓ RMFA resolved to engage DWS in the province not to charge fees on underground tanks
- ✓ The government needs to ensure that when water rights are awarded to commercial farmers, neighboring developing communal farmers should be made aware thereof in order to avoid unnecessary conflicts.
- ✓ Communal/developing farmers need to actively participate in public hearing on water related policies.
- ✓ Communal and developing farmers should be at the forefront of campaigns against illegal water connections.

- ✓ Farmers need to be fully informed in terms of the volumes of water needed for different use, especially in communal areas, depending on the water consumption rates of various commodities.

Agri-parks

The Agri-parks programme was launched by the South African government in 2015, led by the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) as one of the cornerstones of rural economic transformation. The National Development Plan (NDP) sees agriculture as having the potential to create close to one, million jobs by 2030. The Agri-parks programme believed to contribute to realizing these jobs targets.

The Agri-parks programme offers an avenue for supporting production, agro-processing, logistics, marketing and training within district municipalities. The programme aims to provide communities with jobs, food security and opportunities to prosper. South Africa's Agri-parks promise to offer comprehensive services along the various commodity value chains.

Given such, RMFA outlines the following:-

- ✓ RMFA recognizes and is in support of the identified Agri-park centres in Butterworth and Dimbaza in Amatole District Municipality.
- ✓ RMFA calls on the local municipal authorities to ensure that production support units are identified, supported and informed by farmers.
- ✓ RMFA welcomes the offer of 70% shareholding of farmers in Agri-parks; however we will closely monitor the rights and privileges of farmers to own shares in the proposed Agri-parks.

Perspectives on mechanization service for communal farmers

Communal farmers need reliable access to mechanization services for land preparation, transport and agro-processing. While the hope is that the Agri-parks will go a long way to addressing the challenge of agro-processing, there seems to be little thinking around the better provision of mechanization for land preparation and transport. In recent years, government has procured and given away large numbers of tractors, but generally to little effect.

The Association is of the view that rather than contracting external service providers of tractors services, or seeking to provide its own tractor services, government should focus on two models:

- 1) supporting local tractors services providers that already exist in many communities, for example through training, subsidizing equipment acquisition and subsidizing or otherwise facilitating repairs and maintenance;
- 2) facilitating the formalization of co-operative mechanization serves. In short, government must avoid the trap of giving away tractors for the sake of earning political points, or for the benefit of tenderpreneurs.

Agricultural co-operatives and Agri-BEE

One of the internationally agreed upon eight principles of co-operative clearly states that co-operative should not be politically driven by members. Moreover, the establishment of co-operatives should not be motivated but the access to government grants, but mainly by recognition of the value of co-operative activities. The South Africa Co-operative act 2005 state that a legal and institutional framework for the promotion and development of sustainable co-operative should be established. The Act mandates national department, provincial and local levels of government including delivery agencies, to provide support for co-operatives. RMFA believes that co-operatives and Agri-BEE programmes are integral to creating linkages, partnership and network for balanced, mutually benefiting results for all concerned. However, a major concern with the nature of co-operatives to date is that the vast majority of them focus on joint production, whereas it would be more beneficial if they focused on collaborative marketing.

The Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) policy was introduced to empower South African black people who were previously marginalized from participating in the economy of South Africa during the apartheid regime. The objective of Agri-BEE are to facilitate Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment in the agricultural sector by implementing initiatives to include black south Africans at all levels of agricultural activity and enterprises. This is believed to contribute toward the transformation and growth of the agricultural sector.

RMFA identifies the following as key in the transformation of co-operatives:-

- ✓ RMFA to foster ongoing development of agricultural co-operatives as per the international core principles.
- ✓ RMFA should endeavor to recognize the various types of service co-operatives.
- ✓ RMFA should facilitate a workshop on Agri-BEE by approaching the department of trade and industry (DTI) to provide officials to conduct the above.

- ✓ RMFA should facilitate a formal engagement with the local municipality with the view of establishing a forum for learning institutions that have expertise in farmer co-operative, for example, Fort Cox College, University of Fort Hare and others.

Extension services

Extension services are vital to improving farmers' activities. The South African government spends R4 billion across the country per annum for extension services, whereby about 60 000 farmers access the services. It has been found that the cost of extension services range from R50 000 to 80 000 per farmer per annum. It seems clear that in respect of extension services, government is not achieving value for money.

One possible solution to this problem is for government to pursue a policy of farmer-to-farmer extension, which would make more effective use of existing resources, and build on the reality that at present, farmers rely more on one another for information and advices than on government extension services. Another advantage of a farmer-to-farmer approach would be that it would accord more value to farmers' indigenous knowledge, which tends to be neglected

Government could recognize and approach farmers' association for assistance in developing and implementing a system of farmer-to-farmer extension, the aim of which would be to offer effective, timely and frequent extension services provision to much larger members of farmers across the size spectrum.

Apart from promoting a farmer-to-farmer approach, RMFA believes that part of the problem with the current extension system is that some extension officers are not highly motivated to serve farmers. Put differently, RMFA is aware that some extension officers are committed and render excellent services, while many are and do not. We will seek a way to acknowledge outstanding extension officers as informed by farmers receiving their extension services, while also highlighting those areas whose farmers feel they are being poorly served.

8. Protection of natural resources

Although the local municipality has excellent potential for various types of agriculture, it is also the case that its underlying resource base is fragile. The signs of resources degradation are everywhere. In some cases this is because of farmers' lack of know-how, in other cases it has to do with an absence of affective system of government, or incorrect technologies.

We would like to see more aggressive efforts to combat the degradation of soil and other resources, especially within communal areas. In short:-

- ✓ There needs to be the development and promotion of soil conservation strategies for sustainable crop production, possibly through conservation agriculture and through the massification of the Land Care programme.
- ✓ Areas that are adversely affected by soil erosion need to be identified and corrective measures need to be implemented as a matter of urgency.
- ✓ There is a need to identify natural means to enrich land/soil, for example crop rotation and farming of legumes that enhance nitrogen fixation in the soil. Crop rotation as informed by soil conditions as well as market demands for commodities should be encouraged to farmers. There is need for crop varieties that support conservation of soil to be identified.
- ✓ RMFA should advance a clear policy that discourages forceful use of agricultural land for residential purpose or other non-agricultural purposes.

- ✓ We should organize a campaign on co-operative tree planting actions with relevant departments.
- ✓ There is a need of an integrated veld management model which includes all livestock farmers. One possible approach is holistic rangeland management. Along these lines, there should be a revival of rotational grazing, whether this is done via co-ordinated herding or clearly demarcated and fenced grazing camps.

9. Conclusion

Raymond Mhlaba Farmers Association believes that a clear direction, strong policies and the concerted efforts of farmers, associations, government and other stakeholders, are vital in addressing the problems and issues affecting farmers in Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality.