

■ DROUGHT

Farms face hard times

Inadequate rainfall leaves some dams less than half full or even empty

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THE Western Cape agricultural sector has been cautioned to prepare itself for another difficult season after below-average rainfall during the typically rainy winter season did little to improve the drought crisis.

Chief executive for Agri Western Cape Jannie Strydom said the sector must prepare for yet another difficult season. "The rainy season is over, with little prospects for any more significant rain. The rain (at end of September) was mainly along the coast, with very little rain in the areas where producers were hoping for good downpours," Strydom said.

"In the critically dry Oudtshoorn area and the Kannaland district, producers measured between 3mm and 15mm; in the Laingsburg, Prince Albert and Merweville areas between 4mm and 5mm; in the Beaufort West area between 2mm and 5mm; and in the Berg River and Saldanha regions an average of 2mm."

Strydom said farm dams remain empty, with some irrigation dams barely reaching the 50% mark or others that were completely empty.

Strydom added there were pastures in extensive areas that have not received enough rain to start recovering.

"The Brandvlei Dam, which is critical for irrigation of orchards and vineyards, stands at 53.8%, the Poortjieskloof Dam which Kannaland producers need to irrigate orchards and vineyards stands at 0.2% and the Keerom Dam, which is crucial for irrigation in the Koo and Nuy Valley, stands at 16.7%," he said.

"The dam level of the Kammanassie Dam is at 2% and the Stompdrift Dam 7.4%, which clearly indicates the enormous crisis in which Klein Karoo producers find themselves.



WESTERN Cape farms like this one in Grabouw have been cautioned to prepare for another difficult season after below-average winter rains. | EPA African News Agency (ANA)

"Lucerne, onion seed and lucerne seed producers need these dams for irrigation as well as for water for livestock. Agri Western Cape will continue to provide drought assistance to livestock producers and will also look at humanitarian aid to producers and their farm workers in the drought-stricken areas."

Spokesperson for the MEC for agriculture Daniel Johnson said the

department has ongoing engagements with all role players in the sector to address the matter.

"We are awaiting a response from (the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) to our request for a further R123 million which will enable us to provide further fodder support to the affected areas," he said.

"Steps are also being taken to extend current humanitarian support.

Currently, 125 households and 625 individuals in Kannaland are benefiting from food parcels until end of April. We will also continue to engage and provide advice to farmers through our agricultural extension services. A total of 660 agri workers in Kannaland, Matzikama and other affected districts are also benefiting from our Extended Public Works Green Opportunities Programme."