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**Author:** Given Majola

ECONOMIC GROWTH

## KZN invests in strategic programmes to boost farmers

GIVEN MAJOLA  
given.majola@inl.co.za

THE KWAZULU-Natal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (KZNDard) is to continue to invest in strategic programmes aimed at the lucrative agricultural sector to bolster economic growth and job creation and to help alleviate poverty in the province.

This as the South African agricultural sector has doubled in value and volume terms over the past three decades, according to Agricultural Business Chamber (Agbiz) – a significant contributor to South Africa's gross domestic product.

In an interview with *Business Report*, Zibusiso Dlamini, the KZNDard head of department, said one such programme was the agri-hub programme, providing secondary and tertiary value addition centres for primary agricultural products. The magnitude and the success of the agri-hubs to support the stimulation of the economy in the province depended on planning.

"Currently, the department has embarked on feasibility studies and value chain analysis, the development of business plans and concept designs. Linked to this phase are the environmental impact assessment processes, geotechnical investigations and the development of the aggregation strategy.

"This planning phase commenced in November 2020 and is approaching completion, with most of the activities listed above complete," Dlamini said.

Sites had been identified for all the hubs and provincial approval from the property owners had been received. The process of the formal acquisition of the sites involved the Department of Public Works and was in line with its mandate to take the process forward in ensuring that property-related contracts were concluded and the properties were registered in the state's asset register, he said.

KZNDard said an application was launched with the Budget Facility for Infrastructure (BFI) for the funding of all the agri-hubs. In response to the application, the BFI had approved a budget of R153 million for the development of the fresh produce hub. The allocation for the financial year 2023/24 was R8 400 000.

For the red meat hub (pig and sheep), the department recently informed by the aggregation strategy took a decision to segment the red meat hub into two, that is, the red meat hub (beef) at Zululand and the red meat hub (sheep and pig) at uMgungundlovu.

The plan for 2023/24, subject to approval, was to have contractors on site as at the beginning of the financial year 2024/25 for both the fresh produce hub and the red meat hub (sheep and pig), while concluding the plans for the remaining hubs for implementation in the outer years.

Last year, which saw the department joined by a new MEC, Super Zuma, was said to have been an exceptionally good year as the department had implemented critical programmes aimed at assisting farmers and improving the agricultural sector in the province.