



SOUTH AFRICAN AGRICULTURE'S DILEMMA - THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY!

There is always some good news! Media predictions for South African agriculture for the 2022/2023 harvests are good. South Africa has enjoyed good rains for the past three seasons and there is optimism that this will be another high rainfall season.

On the face of it, the figures are outstanding. SA harvested a record soybean crop of 2.2 million tonnes in the 2021/22 production season. The maize harvest was 15.3 million tonnes, while other crops and fruit and vegetables benefited from increased soil moisture. In the first nine months of this year, tractor sales reached 6,485 units, up 15% year on year. Over the same period combine harvester sales were up 46%.

The Pretoria office of the United States Department of Agriculture forecasts South Africa's 2022/23 maize area plantings at 2,6 million hectares, which is well above the ten-year average of 2,5 million hectares. There is a chance that the maize harvest could be 14,8 million tonnes. Such a crop would be well above the country's annual maize consumption of 11,8 million tonnes which would preserve South Africa's net maize export status. (Excerpts from report by Wandile Sihlobo of AGBIZ 16.10.22)

The country's fresh food retailers' stalls groan under a cornucopia of produce which is fresh, clean and of excellent quality. Prices are slashed as far as possible as competition is fierce. Certainly, nowhere else on the African continent can citizens take their pick of world class fruit, vegetables, meat and poultry. These high standards have become the norm in South Africa, but for how long can farmers continue to meet the high bar they have set for themselves given the increasing hurdles they face, year after year. It never gets better for farmers under an ANC government. Crime is rampant,

expropriation without compensation continues to be a Sword of Damocles over organised agriculture's head. Inset costs soar, while the infrastructure necessary to maintain secure internal transport- to-market efficiency crumbles and, to boot, is highly dangerous. Export markets are perilous to maintain in terms of reliability and even the quality of the produce once it has reached its destination is subject to vagaries entirely out of farmers' control.

FARMERS UNDER SIEGE

It is a truism that unless one reads South Africa's Afrikaans press, one has little or no idea what is happening within one of South Africa's most important industries – farming and its corollary, the food chain from the harvest to the dinner table.

So many citizens take what they eat for granted. Millions line up every lunch time in the country's cities to buy their “pap” – ground and cooked maize meal – without ever thinking that one day this staple would not be available. Compared to the rest of Africa, South Africa is a Garden of Eden. But then so was the erstwhile Rhodesia and look at it now as Zimbabwe! North of the Limpopo River (the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe) to the Sahara, food security is a hit and miss affair. In some areas it is nothing more than plant-based basics, sometimes supplemented by low quality meat. The difference between these mainly basket cases and South Africa is due to the existence of this country's commercial farming industry - 32 000 framers continue to supply three meals a day for 60 million people, every day.

It is common cause that there is starvation in South Africa, despite the fact that our country is a food exporter. This phenomenon is not the farmers' fault. Much stands in the way of nutrition for thousands who go to bed hungry most nights – the cost of living is high, unemployment is rife, and the country's fractured infrastructure and lack of transport ensures that many have no access to food markets.

Yet the people who keep the wolf from the door and hungry mobs from battering down President Ramaphosa's parliament – SA's farmers – are treated abominably by the very government that depends on them for food security. The president is pushing his luck in his treatment of these essential providers who are continually

under siege.

For readers both local and overseas who do not read Afrikaans, and especially for the world's media which seems to have forgotten about South Africa now that "democracy" was forced on the country, below is the aftermath of the relentless pursuit by the world's media, the United Nations and especially the British and American governments of the one man one vote policy foisted on this now blighted South Africa. Below is a synopsis of reports on just one page of one edition of the Afrikaans publication Rapport (9.10.22):

+ Three farmers were murdered in the last week of September 2022. One farmer's body was found on his farm with stab wounds in his back and stomach, with his feet tied with wire. Another farmer, a veterinarian by profession, was found shot dead on his farm. The third, a macadamia nut farmer, was killed with a steel pipe.

+ Declared a woman farmer from the province of Mpumalanga: "Everything here is stolen or destroyed. Nothing is safe. Within a week we lost two stud bulls. They set traps for the animals and cut pieces of flesh from the beast while it was still alive. The poor animals suffered terribly.

+ Crime on farms is out of control declared an Mpumalanga agricultural organisation official. Cattle, diesel, copper cables, macadamia nuts, avocados, plantation trees, wire, posts, insecticide, maize seeds, fertilizer – you name it, it is stolen. The cost of this crime is in millions of rands.

+ In 2021 more than R21 million worth of avocados were stolen. It is well known that syndicates are for the most part responsible for this particular theft. This is not random stealing by a few who sneak into the farm with a burlap bag. These syndicates arrive with trucks and strip the whole harvest in one night. As well, millions of rands worth of macadamia nuts is stolen every year. These are the most expensive nuts in the world. Already in 2017, the value of these thefts totalled R150 million. Much of what is stolen appears in local markets and along the road. A ton of these nuts can fetch R70 000 overseas. Millions of rands have been spent by farm owners on closed circuit television cameras, patrol personnel to police the farm borders plus expensive electric fencing at R150 000 per kilometre.

+Another sector hit by syndicates is the tree plantations. "It's the wild west", said one owner. Plantation workers are confronted by thieves with shotguns and automatic rifles who steal their chain saws – 20 or 30 per night. These cost around R12 000 each. Syndicates also steal the trees themselves - up to 1000 trees are stolen in one go. More than R50 million worth of plantation produce is stolen yearly. There is around half a million hectares of plantations in Mpumalanga alone. This is a lot of land to police. This has resulted in the mushrooming of dozens of small sawmills in the area which illegally process the stolen trees. A farmer takes 14 to 20 years to develop a working plantation and it is destroyed in one night. Many tree thieves use hand saws which make very little noise. In one night, a team can strip a plantation clean.

+ The theft of diesel is also a problem. In one operation more than 8 000 litres were stolen in one operation. One farmer lost two Brangus stud cows valued at R200 000 overnight. Load shedding makes things worse because there is no noise, and everything is still and dark - easy pickings for the thieves.

+ Stock theft is notorious in South Africa. Farmers have suffered through this plague for years, even centuries. In one area 15 cows in calf were stolen with a value of R375,000. Thirty-five ewes valued at R100,000 were also taken. One farmer lost R40 000 worth of maize seed, R35 000 of wire and poles plus a diesel battery valued at R15 000 in one night. More than R160 million worth of cattle are stolen each year in Mpumalanga. This is the official figure. One should double or even triple this number as many thefts are not reported because of police inaction.

PORTS CRISIS, ROAD TRANSPORT VIOLENCE, NO RAILWAYS, WATER POLLUTION.

TLU SA president Henry Geldenhuys reminded the recent TLU SA annual congress that since the ANC came to power in 1994, "everything has deteriorated. Once functional institutions such as Denel, SA Airways, Eskom, Transnet (railways) and infrastructure such as ports and roads are indeed now a shame on our country." A recent World Bank report evaluating ports throughout the world, designated Durban the 351st place from 351 evaluated!! Koega was 349, Port Elizabeth 348 and Cape Town 347. Fifteen years ago,

the bank's experts reported Durban was the "best port in Africa". One has to possess a special kind of vicarious obtuseness to achieve the degradation of South Africa's first world infrastructure, as the ANC has. But its people do not possess the ability to introspect, an integral element of progress within the human spirit of progress. They see no beauty and see no ugliness. They have no shame, no sense of responsibility. These are supposed to be basic human qualities. Where does the ANC fit in the scale of human development?

The Cape's farmers are paying the price of the scourge of this government. Transnet "loses its grip". (Business Times 23.10.22) Fruit worth millions of rands have been left to rot at the Cape harbour, while drastically reducing crop yields as a result of delays in delivering seeds to farmers. There is insufficient skilled staff at ports to handle cargo. The Cape region is one of the mainstays of South African agriculture, accounting for around 55% of primary agricultural exports. All the citrus exporters – especially of soft fruit and prunes – have suffered a great deal of damage due to the Cape port's incompetence.

Our railways have been plundered – in some instances whole stations and surrounding infrastructure have disappeared. Our roads are corridors of crime and death. Road transporters of agricultural products are targeted by insider jobbers who know which cargoes to attack.

Eskom's crippling of the country's electricity grid is something those who cheered on the ANC thirty years ago should ponder. And what about the polluted water, sewage floating on our beach waves, our rivers full of dead fish. The ANC's control of the country is a cancer. How does one wrest South Africa from their toxic grip?