



AGRICULTURE OILS THE WHEELS OF A FUNCTIONING SOUTH AFRICA

The recent TLU SA annual Congress has, as always, brought to light points and opinions that make eminent sense, something that is dismally lacking in South Africa's day to day political narrative. No matter how many times TLU SA has emphasised the need to base agriculture's aim of profitably as the motivating ethos for growth and success, this key kernel of wisdom is continually ignored. The basic element of survival of nations and people throughout the ages has been food security. Everything else comes second. TLU SA president Henry Geldenhuys declared in his presidential congress address this year that "All of South Africa's mechanisms function because there is food on the table". That is the bottom line.

Despite thirty years of the African National Congress' (ANC) bad government, of neglect of farmers' rights, of harassment, hobbling legislation, crime, stock theft, high input costs, no electricity, impassable roads, crumbling export ports, a broken railway system and national road hijackings to get to these ports, plus harvest thefts in broad daylight and farm murders, the sacrificing of productive farms on the altar of the regime's land "reform" policy that has failed miserably, is still in place. The government continues to give farms to those who can't farm, and who don't want to farm. It is not clear why denseness of mind continues to be the hallmark of the ANC: to persevere with a policy fiasco and expect different results is bizarre! Despite this mania, the country's commercial farmers stay the course: a visit to any of SA's top retail outlets is proof of this.

Conspicuously evident is the quality, the organisation, the stocked shelves, the cleanliness, the service and the management of these stores. It puts retailing and markets to shame in the rest of Africa. It is not a fallacy that many SA citizens believe that food comes from our retailers. They don't associate a farm with tinned beans. What would happen if our farms eventually fell into the clutches of the SA government, to meet the same fate that befell the more than 3 000 SA farms already destroyed under its land "reform" policy. The average South African takes the high quality of our country's retail sector for granted. That sector is the visible face of good farm production. But the farming sector is virtually ignored, while its importance is absolutely crucial to SA's survival as a nation.

THE REFORM HANDOVERS CONTINUE

In a recent report described as a "costly legacy of failure", Daily Maverick (DM 2.9.24) exposes the farmland restitution projects still collapsing as these projects have been experiencing since they began.

"Nearly three decades after the formal land claims process began in 1996, many of these projects are floundering or have collapsed, raising questions about the extent to which

billions of rands of state expenditure has benefited the claimant communities. This has also raised broader concerns about the impact on national food security, rural jobs, animal disease control and SA's agricultural economy."

"At Dawn Valley Farm in Ixopo (a vegetable farm and game ranch purchased by the government in 2008 for R12,8 million), there was little evidence of significant crop cultivation. Large parts of the farm have reverted to indigenous thorn bush. A nearby game lodge has been burnt to the ground and most of the large antelope and other wildlife species have been hunted out".

"There is a similar situation at the adjoining Ponderosa Farm (a 770ha former commercial dairy and crop farm purchased by the government in 2008 for R8 million). While small patches of cabbages are still being grown, the milking sheds, main farmhouse and other buildings have been demolished and most of the former cropland lies unused."

"Further south in Madakweni near Umzimkulu, another 1500 ha of land at the old Highlands Farm is mostly unused. It was expropriated from a white farmer in 1967 for incorporation into the Transkei homeland. In 2006 a maize milling factory was built but only used for a few months. Thereafter steel components from the milling equipment, silos and roofing were removed and sold as scrap metal." (DM 2.9.24)

It's a long story but a familiar one. The book "The Great South African Land Scandal", published in 2004, tells similar stories. Thousands of productive SA farms were given to government-approved claimant groups, named Community Property Associations (CPA's), based on the fictitious premise that the land they had occupied (in many cases on and off given the wars and plunder that occurred in pre-settler southern Africa) was theirs. These farms were owned under SA title deeds which concept was introduced by Western occupation of South Africa. This formula became the norm throughout the new world as colonists and frontiersmen occupied countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and many lands in South America at around the same time as the first white settlers came to South Africa.. South Africa is not unique therefore in this regard.

The two principles of "ownership" thus clashed, but registered title deed possession became the norm and was used by the SA government as the legal basis of transfer of title deeds to their CPA beneficiaries. The mistake of course was giving land to groups. Agriculture and socialism do not mix. Historical examples of this were the Soviet Union whose "collective farm" policies caused the death by starvation of millions of Soviet citizens, particularly in Ukraine.

Closer to home, the most spectacular failure in post-colonial Africa was Tanzania's Ujamaa policy, introduced in 1967 and declared a failure in 1980. Land was expropriated from the Indian and British-descent farmers who were faced with "the inadequate endowment of the poor peasantry in skills and education", as quaintly put in a Cambridge University article. Small villages were created and farmers were given 5 ha pieces of land on which to grow their crops. There was nothing left for the market and in the end there was nothing left for anybody. The results are still seen today. Food security in Tanzania is widespread: over 30% of children are stunted and 13 million citizens live in extreme poverty. This despite the fact that Tanzania has been the second-biggest receiver of foreign aid in sub Saharan Africa. (USAID).The World Bank says that today the country still faces stubbornly high levels of poverty, in part as a result of dependence on low productivity agriculture".(Forbes 16.3.24)

CORPORATE FARMING

Food for Tanzania is produced by big corporations (12 of them) and large privately owned farms. Farms run by "third world associations" do not exist. Large and medium sized farms, efficiently run, are the only answers to food security, anywhere. In Canada there are 1166 corporations in farming, Australia has 1280, Germany 1597, United States 10 756 and France 1962.

Yet we have the South African government still actively executing a Neanderthal policy of Soviet and Tanzanian agricultural collectivisation, hoping somewhere along the line that it will work. Those implementing this dangerous policy should be charged with endangering the country's food security, which is unconstitutional. It amounts to grand theft of taxpayers' money. They will continue like this to grab a few votes, even if the people go hungry.

Group farming doesn't work. It never did. No back up support was and still is not given to the CPA's as outlined twenty years ago in the Land Scandal book, and the current DM report. Whatever money made available is soon stolen. There is no boss –some people want to work, others don't. There is continual infighting and there always has been. It is worse now however. Unemployment is rife in these rural areas. One Dawn Valley farm "beneficiary" whom DM interviewed would not give his name: "I will not share my name because people have killed each other too much because of these farms", he said.

Don't take SA farmers for granted. They stand between our glittering retail offerings and scratching around for corn kernels in the dust which we see just over our border in Zimbabwe.