

Western Cape farmers urged to join business chambers

Agricultural leaders and farmers are urged to put their weight behind their local business chambers functioning under the AHi Western Cape, says the President of Agri Western Cape Cornie Swart.



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Swart says agriculture is without a doubt the backbone of the economy. "We are one of the leading employers in South Africa. Whatever happens to agriculture is directly linked to the prosperity of each town or village. Involvement of every farmer and business owner is imperative. We should stand united to cooperate with our municipalities, the province, business leaders and our communities."

He encourages members of affiliated farmer associations to join as members of their local business chambers in addition to membership of organised agriculture at a recent AHi Western Cape Garden Route, Karoo and Hessequa workshop at Stilbaai.

In his reaction to this call, CEO of Agbiz, Dr John Purchase says: "With third tier government becoming more inefficient daily the role of business chambers is in principle becoming more important, subject to their effectivity and ability to realise adequate funding."

Economist Mike Schüssler states that South Africa needs business and farming now more than ever. "We are in such a low growth climate that we need to explore all avenues to improve the struggle against red tape and inefficient government if we aim to make it as a democracy. Business chambers can only be strengthened by agriculture and farmers who will benefit from business chambers."

Business is committed

According to the chairperson of AHi Western Cape Dr Willie Cilliers, close relationships between business and farmer associations are essential in all districts. "We learned from our main speaker, Mr Japie Gouws that agriculture is indeed the biggest economy within the Western Cape; as a business, we will ensure that we get and stay committed."

He continues: "Although our challenges are the same, we all move in silos. It is about economic growth. How do we create jobs? When things are not well on farms the farm workers move to the nearest town. Potentially they become part of an unemployed squatter community. Business need to create a safety net by joining forces with agriculture and equip these people with business skills."

"Every farming enterprise is just a business outside of a town," says Swart. "We all depend on the same municipality for farming and non-farming business. What happens on the farm is directly linked to the economy of the nearest towns. Without revenue from the farms, no municipality or town business will survive. We need to stand united," says Swart.

He adds that Community Watch in towns and Farm Watch cannot expect the police to take all the blame for the handling of increased farm attacks. The police should know that farmers and business are joined as one and able to provide good information and support.

More attention from local authorities

According to Dr Purchase cooperation on this level is imperative. "As agribusiness leaders, Agbiz is affiliated with the Apex organisation, Business Unity South Africa (BUSA) to create a united voice for business. We regard municipal services, safety and security as definite common denominators."

He mentions that a proper value proposition needs to exist between the organisations. "It costs business chambers money to be able to deliver effectively on their value propositions. The combined membership of farmers with farmer associations and their nearest business chamber will only work if the value proposition is clear and delivered."

Schüssler says farmers and business chambers could establish improved networks. "We need businesses to grow to their full potential. It is important that they, together, get more attention from local authorities.

"AHi Western Cape will soon discuss common goals and the implementation of an action plan with Agri Western Cape. Dr Cilliers agrees to provide all relevant information of AHi Western Cape to Agri Western Cape affiliated organisations while farmer association details will in return be available to business chambers."

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