

Extended Covid-19 relief for small-scale farmers

The minister of agriculture, land reform and rural development, Thoko Didiza, has extended the validity period of the Covid-19 Disaster Agricultural Support Fund Voucher. The fund is aimed at providing assistance to distressed small-scale farmers, who need financial relief from the impact of Covid-19.



Image source: Gallo/Getty

The validity period for the fund has now been extended to 30 September 2020. Initially, the vouchers were valid until 30 June and the Minister had extended it to 31 July 2020.

These extensions emanated from delays in the printing of vouchers and supply chain disruptions in the availability of production inputs caused by Covid-19, which negatively affected farmers' ability to redeem their vouchers.

Challenges on the ground

"I have noted that there are still challenges on the ground being experienced by both farmers and suppliers when it comes to the availability of some production inputs such as day old chicks and seedlings, as well as errors picked on some vouchers, which relate to incorrect ID numbers and incorrect allocation of production inputs," the minister said on Thursday, 13 August.

The minister has instructed the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development to identify applications that were erroneously disqualified and to make sure that they are provided with production inputs.

“I have considered all these challenges and decided that it would be prudent to extend the validity period to 30 September 2020 to allow suppliers to build adequate stocks of production inputs and farmers to redeem their vouchers,” Didiza said.

Further information on the extension of the validity period and names of more than 14,000 successful applicants will be available on the departmental website: www.dalrrd.gov.za, as soon as possible in order to encourage transparency.

Improved operations at deeds office

Meanwhile, the minister has met with the Chief Registrar of Deeds and all provincial registrars in order to plan on how backlog challenges in all deeds offices can be addressed. The meeting follows numerous complaints from various stakeholders regarding backlogs and constant closure of deeds offices.

The measures to address the backlogs at the deeds office include allowing examiners to examine documents at home in order to fast track the examination of documents.

“Registrars have the authority to manage this and should do so, taking all appropriate steps to ensure the safety of the documents as well steps to avoid fraudulent transactions,” the department said.

All deeds offices will re-arrange their offices to ensure social distancing and safety of staff, especially those with co-morbidities.

Officials must be provided with the relevant tools of trade to allow them to work from home, the department said. However, it is understood that in some instances, this may not be possible due to various factors such as where offices are in rural areas and where it is not safe to do so.

Responding to the 4th industrial revolution

“Registrars must ensure that despite these challenges, service delivery continues unhindered. Upgrading of Deeds Offices' IT systems to respond to the 4th industrial revolution will be prioritised, despite budget cuts due to Covid-19,” the department said.

The department said the closure of deeds offices will be minimised and done under extreme circumstances.

“Various options will be undertaken, which are not limited to ensuring that decontamination is only done in affected areas and not in the whole building and also to ensure that all officials continue to work while at home,” the department said.

The minister expressed her appreciation for the important role deeds offices play in the property sector and in the recovery of the economy post Covid-19.

“While I appreciate all that, I want to guarantee all stakeholders that the safety of our employees will not be compromised and we will all work very hard to address the backlog as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown, which affected the operations of these offices.

“We will ensure that all health and safety measures, as stipulated by the Departments of Health and Employment and Labour, are adhered to,” the minister said.

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