

**SPEECH BY HELEN ZILLE
PREMIER OF THE WESTERN CAPE
NATIONAL FARM WORKERS SUMMIT
SOMERSET WEST**

FRIDAY 30 JULY 2010, 10H00

“Farm workers must be given the opportunities to pursue their dreams”

The President of the Republic, Mr. Jacob Zuma

National Minister for Agriculture, Ms. Tina Joemat-Pettersson

All National Cabinet Ministers

Premiers of the respective Provinces

National Deputy Ministers

Members of the Executive Councils of the respective Provinces

Members of the National Assembly

Members of the Provincial Legislatures

Chairpersons of the Provincial Houses of Traditional Leaders

Directors-General

Presidents of Organised Labour

The President of AgriSA

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to welcome you to the 2010 National Farm Workers Summit in the Western Cape where farming is very close to our hearts. In fact, agriculture is the backbone of our economy.

Agriculture brings in 40% of all export revenue and employs around 200 000 people in the Western Cape. This makes farming integral to economic growth and job creation. Indeed, rural development is a crucial component of our plans to open opportunities for all in this province.

We cannot do so unless we nurture our farm workers. After all, farm workers produce food for us all and directly support close to one million of the five million people living in the Western Cape. So we must do all we can to expand farm workers' opportunities and improve their quality of life.

Our task at this summit is to discuss ways in which all three spheres of government – working with role players in civil society and the private sector – can create the conditions for farm workers, and therefore agriculture, to thrive. In the spirit of co-operative governance and sharing best practice, it is important that we all learn from each other.

It is our belief that no farm worker who does an honest day's work should live in poverty. And it is a sentiment shared by the majority of this province's farmers who understand the value that farmworkers add to the agricultural sector and society in general.

We know that creating opportunities for farm workers is also about investment in rural infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and housing. We believe that farm workers and their families should have access to the proper educational opportunities, health facilities and amenities. Every country recognizes the importance of sustainable growth and development in rural areas.

This is why we are devoting a significant portion of our health infrastructure budget to upgrading rural hospitals and clinics – around R600 million over the next five years. Worcester, Paarl, Ceres, Caledon, Robertson, Malmesbury, Beaufort Wes and Rawsonville are all in the pipeline for upgrades.

It is why we have a learner transport scheme, which ensures access to transport in rural areas for learners that live 5km or more from the nearest school. And we are increasing the opportunities for learners, particularly in rural areas, to participate in after-school sports and other activities. We are also paying special attention to

combating substance abuse in rural areas, particularly the scourge of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome.

It is important that rural communities are not isolated, but connected to each other, to cities, the rest of the country and the world. This is why the e-access programme was established. At 19 rural e-Community Centres we provide free computer, software and internet access supported by skills transfer and training programmes. Last year, more than 100,000 rural citizens benefited from this service.

Besides improving living standards and expanding access to opportunities, we believe that government has a crucial role to play in helping farm workers improve their skills and all round personal development. Farm workers who utilise their talents must be given the chance to progress along a career path where effort is linked to reward.

The Western Cape Provincial Government has started a number of initiatives that recognise and reward farm workers in the province.

Our annual Farm worker of the Year Competition rewards excellence in the field. It has grown from 36 entrants (limited to

the Hex Valley) in 2002 to 750 entrants from 12 regions this year. Prizes are awarded across a range of categories – general worker, specialist worker, tractor driver, administrator – and so on. Last year 60% of the category winners happened to be women.

The Farm Worker of the Year competition is not a PR exercise – although it does highlight the contribution that farm workers make to our province. It has real benefits for all those who compete in it. We have found that the competition has done much to improve morale and motivation across the sector. It has also expanded opportunities for those who have managed to win these prestigious awards.

This week I spoke to two recent winners of these awards, Mrs Cathleen Beerwinkel and Mr Jafta Galant. Their stories are truly inspiring. Both are from poor farm worker families but they have risen through the ranks to win numerous awards. Every opportunity they have been given has been used as a springboard to reach greater heights, and become their best, fulfilling their potential.

They have also – like all Farm Worker of the Year winners – earned a place on the Prestige Farm Worker Forum which serves

as a direct link between farm workers and the Provincial Minister of Agriculture. This is a forum that we take very seriously indeed. It is one of many provincial initiatives to take public participation and stakeholder consultation to new levels.

In fact, Minister van Rensburg and I met with the Prestige Farm Worker Forum on Monday. They shared with us their thoughts on the sector and made us aware of some of the challenges they face.

Their greatest concern is the moratorium placed on equity share schemes by the national government in August last year. This, as you know, is a moratorium that affects the Western Cape far more than any other province – there are currently 10 000 people in this province benefiting from the 83 schemes that are up and running here.

The representatives of the Prestige Farm Worker Forum know first-hand the benefits of these schemes, which is why they cannot understand why they have been stopped. Their view (and our view) is that such a successful model of land reform and broad-based economic empowerment should be extended throughout the province and in the rest of the country.

Let me say that I recognise that there were some good reasons for placing the moratorium in the first place. I know that there were a few instances where farmers abused government grants to bail them out of financial trouble. And I know that there have been budget cuts in the national department.

But I also know that when policies have unintended consequences, it is important to re-evaluate and change course. If we throw the baby out every time we change the bathwater, we will never make progress.

The fact is that equity share schemes are desirable because, when implemented correctly, they are a model of genuinely broad-based empowerment. They are important for land reform too. There is also evidence – from government research – that 50-50 equity share schemes are the most productive land reform model by far.

Don't just take my word for it. Talk to farmers involved in successful schemes like Jannie Bosman of Lelienfontein in Wellington and Bernhardt du Toit of Langrivier in Koue Bokkeveld. Better yet, speak to the workers on their farms who are benefiting from becoming part owners of the farms they work on.

On Lelienfontein, farm workers have been issued share certificates for their 50% shares, are given counselling on how to invest their dividends, and trustees receive financial and management training. In 2019, these farm workers will be in a position to take full ownership of Mr Bosman's farms -- 430ha of some of the Cape's finest vineyards. This is an opportunity that would have been unimaginable to a previous generation of farm workers.

On Langrivier, 242 farm workers were made co-owners of the company in 2008 – the largest agri-BEE deal ever in the Western Cape. In addition to a share of the company's profits, farm workers have a crèche for their children as well as access to a fund for further training and their children's education. As a result, many workers on the farm have risen to management positions. Some of them now sit on the board of the company.

The fact is that when equity share schemes work, they are productive, sustainable and offer real empowerment. This is why it is important that all stakeholders at this summit consider ways to make equity share schemes work in the interests of farm workers.

This may include tighter regulation of the grant so that it genuinely empowers farm workers and is not abused by any party. It may

include better monitoring to make sure that workers are receiving the necessary empowerment, training and are involved in the management decisions of the farm. It may mean that grant applicants are carefully screened to ensure that their farms are not financially insolvent.

I am convinced that we can find ways and means to mitigate the unintended consequences. And I am certain that it doesn't have to take a year to do so.

It is true that you cannot fix the wheels of a moving train. But it is equally true that when you stop a moving train, it stops moving until you get it started again. It is time to get the train moving. Let's work quickly to resolve the problems with the equity share schemes so that farm workers, who are the bedrock of a sustainable food-producing economy, can start reaping the benefits once again.

I look forward to fruitful discussions and deliberations on this and many other issues of concern to farm workers over the next two days. Enjoy the summit.

Thank you