



MEDIA STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TO: ALL MEDIA/NEWS EDITORS

DATE: 22 FEBRUARY 2021

Recent heavy rains experienced during the week of 7th - 13th February have left farmers in the Umfolozi area severely affected by floods. Agricultural fields, particularly sugar cane have been flooded, with some vast hectares of cane covered in water. On Friday, the South African Farmers Development Association (SAFDA) visited the area with representatives of Umkhanyakude District Office of Agriculture in KwaZulu Natal, Umfolozi Sugar Planters Ltd (UCOSP), small scale and land reform farmers.

According to the information provided to SAFDA by UCOSP representative Lawrence McGrath, "*The problem of waterlogging is caused by two factors*. The first being the condition of the uMsunduzi River which runs through the fields and is supposed to be taking the water through to where it meets with uMfolozi River to the river mouth to the sea in St Lucia. The river has bottlenecks towards the end which are too narrow to allow flow of water. The second factor is the condition of a part of the river which is supposed to serve as river mouth. The mouth cannot perform its function of taking water into the sea and it needs to be opened up using excavators. The flooding is believed to be a back flood caused by water returning from the river mouth area due to inability flow through to the sea" says McGrath. UCOSP further said what is being experienced lately is the effect of back flooding that has started building up since 2016, when the water stopped flowing through the river mouth.

While the Umfolozi Flats waterlogging has been known for many years, what was observed with the recent floods reached levels which had never been seen before. Flood water is reported to have reached between 4 and 6 metres height. Crop is covered in water. Infield roads have turned to dams. Cane extraction cannot happen as roads and bridges have been destroyed. The affected area is estimated at over 2720ha. This involves 2000ha for large scale commercial farmers and 720ha for small scale farmers, mainly in the Sokhulu area. With the rains still reported on the weather forecast in uMkhanyakude District, it is expected that the devastation is likely to worsen.

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The economic assessment and analysis will be done to determine the extent of loss suffered by famers. However rough calculations insicate that the damane of the cane crop alone could be in the region of around R120 million. The figure is likely to be higher considering the infrastrure damage in terms of eroded roads and bridges and fixed improvements on farms affected by the floods.

The following table shows the extent to which small scale and land reform farmers were affected.

Farm	Affected Area (ha)
Big Sedar	171,8ha
Mabhodla	102.4ha
Fini farm	5ha
Maphumulo	150ha
MTE	10ha
Nsombosi	7ha
Nkosiyethu	115ha
Sthuli	70ha
Sokhulu (SSGs)	600ha
Monzi (SSGs)	120ha
Total	1351.2ha

SAFDA has made the following recommendations to the relevant departments regarding this flooding:

- An urgent visit to the area by the senior leadership of the relevant Departments be done. These Departments should ideally include the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture, Department of Water Affairs and Sanitation, Isimangaliso Wetland, UCOSP, Representatives of small scale, larges scale and Land Reform Farmers in the area.
- While the floods affected all farmers, SAFDA has particular concern for black small scale and land reform farmers. Due to their limiting scale of farming, they often do not have options of bank overdrafts, loans or cash reserves to fall onto in times of shock or disasters. All that was destroyed is all that they have. Without any form of financial assistance, they can't return to business and they are literally out of income. SAFDA recommends that black small scale and land reform farmers be assisted with cash in the form of a grant to mitigate the impact of the total loss which they experienced. This will assist them to have income which they were expecting upon harvesting.

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- Where replant is needed, black small scale and land reform farmers be financially assisted to replant the lost fields once the water has subsided.
- Infrastructure destroyed by the floods be rebuilt urgently to extract cane that is due for harvesting when the mill opens.

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