

Minister Thoko Didiza: Agriculture and Food Sector of South Africa on Coronavirus

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Speaking notes by Ms. Thoko Didiza, MP Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development

A Message to the Agriculture and Food Sector of South Africa

As you may be aware, that last night the President announced measures to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, which include a 21-day lockdown.

Several businesses will be affected, but the agriculture and food supply sector is one of essential systems for livelihood and therefore will remain operational. Our food supply system will remain functional during this period. Agricultural production in all its forms will remain uncompromised. This includes all services including provision of veterinary and advisory services.

Live auctions of livestock and sale of other agricultural commodities will continue but under the strict conditions a prescribed by the President. Exports and imports of critical agriculture commodities and the logistical measures will continue during this lock down period to ensure global and national food security.

This is not only limited to retailers but the entire food value chain, from farm-related operations, agro-processing and food manufacturing, logistics and related services, wholesale and retail services, and all support functions that ensure efficient delivery of the agro-food system.

As a nation, we boast for being self-sufficient in food production, and a part of this year's supply is yet to be harvested – which promises to be a bumper field crop and citrus harvest – and these processes will continue as normal as a foundation of South Africa's food system. I will be making regular updates on crop estimates to inform the country of our critical commodity supply.

To ensure that we do not have inflated prices in the sector. Food price monitoring will be conducted on critical food basket commodities and reports will be given to the nation on regular bases.

The Department has set aside a package of R1.2 billion to address effects of the corona virus and ensure sustainable food production post the pandemic. The Department soon will make the details of this package together with the application channels available. The Department has also availed R100 million to the Land Bank to assist farmers under distress.

Together with the industry we are working on a sector operational procedures that would ensure adherence to the measures announced by the President this includes the provision of sanitation to employees within the sector especially farm workers.

We urge the food value chain role players to strictly comply and adhere to strict health regulations to contain and arrest COVID-19 as we strive to supply food to the nation.

I appeal to the public not to embark on panic buying, as the President has indicated. The country has sufficient food supplies. Panic buying will only cause disruptions and inconvenience in the food system. I urge you, fellow-citizens, to also be considerate and purchase that which is sufficient for your needs.

To wholesalers and retailers, we urge you not to engage in price gouging, at such a crucial time for the country. You have an important role to play in the supply of food, and the fight against COVID-19. We ask that you continue to serve the nation and help ensure food security at this critical juncture.

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