



agriculture

Department:
Agriculture
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
CROP ESTIMATES COMMITTEE**

MEDIA RELEASE

**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE REQUESTS FARMERS TO
ASSIST WITH CROP ESTIMATES**

- Accurate crop estimates in everyone's interest
- Free State, Mpumalanga, Gauteng and North West farmers to be contacted soon

From 2 to 17 February, field workers will visit farmers in the Free State, Mpumalanga, Gauteng and the North West Province to obtain crop estimate information. By means of this survey, information will be gathered regarding the number of hectares planted to summer grains and the expected crop yields for the summer season.

Grain South South Africa, the National Chamber of Milling and other producer organizations, such as the Grain Silo Owners, support the crop estimates project and requested farmers to give it their full support. Mr André Ferreira, Senior Economist: Production of Grain South Africa, said that this information is of critical importance to farmers and other role-players in the grain industry in order to plan for the trading, transport, storage and marketing of the crop.

‘The method that is followed, namely by means of personal interviews on the farm with farmers by farmers, is by far the best way to obtain accurate information. The aim of the survey is to alert farmers of expected shortages or surpluses, thus assisting them to make informed decisions,’ he says. He emphasized that farmers are being used as fieldworkers precisely because they are familiar with the environment, industry, farmers and crops. ‘It also reduces the security risk since the

farmer does not have to allow a stranger on his farm, but can speak openly to somebody who is known to him, ' says Mr Ferreira.

This project is managed by the **Crop Estimates Consortium**, under the auspices of the Agricultural Research Council (ARC). It is one of the methods that the **Crop Estimates Committee**, under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture, uses to obtain monthly crop estimates information. The committee consists of representatives who have no vested interest in the crop estimates, such as the National Department of Agriculture (NDA), Provincial Departments of Agriculture (PDAs), various institutes of the ARC, Statistics SA and the National Agricultural Marketing Council. The Department also gathers information through physical, post and telephone interviews in addition to the survey that will be conducted in February.

According to Mr Rodney Dredge, chairperson of the Crop Estimates Committee, timely, accurate, unbiased and reliable crop statistics supplied by an impartial source such as the CEC, is immensely important as means of preventing rumours aimed at market manipulation and the unfair influencing of prices.

In the February project, highly sophisticated scientific methodology and modern technology such as geographical information systems, remote sensing technology, satellite imagery and global positioning systems as well as an advanced internet database will be used to ensure accurate results. A state-of-the-art internet database will allow the daily updating of information gathered by interviewers in the field. Satellite technology will provide a tool to verify field sizes for selected quality control points.

The field workers are farmers who have been trained to carry out the surveys. Personnel of the Agricultural Research Council (Institute for Soil, Climate and Water) are responsible for the quality control of the surveys. A random cross-section of farms will be surveyed. The information of these farms will be statistically applied to the entire province to make an estimate of area.

Most of the interviewers used in last year's survey, is used again this year to ensure continuity and to compile a complete database of qualified field-workers who has the necessary expertise, in South Africa. The project will be finished by mid-April 2006.

All interviewers will wear a cap with the wording '*Oesskatting / Crop estimates*' which will make them easily identifiable. These interviewers will also be able to identify themselves by means of an identification card. The card displays a photograph of the interviewer and an expiry date printed on a yellow background.

Mr Dredge assured farmers that all information provided by respondents is strictly confidential and will only be used for crop forecasting purposes. Interviewers are required to sign a confidentiality agreement before they can participate in the survey.

In terms of section 17 of the Statistics Act, 1999 (Act No 6 of 1999), the completed questionnaire remains restricted to the National Department of Agriculture.

More information can be obtained from Rodney Dredge, tel (012) 319-8454; fax (012) 319-8031 or e-mail: SMAS@nda.agric.za.

End.

**ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE CROP ESTIMATES COMMITTEE BY
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