

Minister Essop Pahad
Address: Red Meat Producer's Conference

15 September 2005

Thank you for inviting me to be a part of your National Conference and Annual General Meeting.

The theme of your conference "Synergising meaningful participation of youth and women in the AgriBEE framework" is an important and relevant theme.

For me it brings together a number of critical issues facing our nation. It brings together issues of food security, socio-economic transformation, and meaningful participation by members of historically disadvantaged communities, land reform, and the very rich historical tradition of the co-operative movement nationally and globally.

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia we understand that "Co-operative farming is a system, in which farmers pool their resources for co-operation in certain areas, such as purchase of supplies (seeds, fertilisers, etc.) and services, or produce distribution and marketing. It is sometimes referred to as agricultural co-operation, although the latter term may have a non-specialised meaning of "co-operation in the area of agriculture."

Co-operative farming is not collective farming, in which farmers pool nearly all resources, including labour, land, or produce. At the same time some economists consider collective farming as a special, although extreme, case of co-operative farming.

The coming together, the pooling of resources must be for the purposes of creating what Engel's called "Associations of the Future". These associations he argued must combine the efficiency of commercial enterprises with "concern for the common social welfare, and thereby fulfil its purpose". But what is its purpose? What should the purpose of an Agribusiness co-operative be? The answer is that the purpose must be socio-political as well as economic. It must be directed at providing food for all while at the same time ensuring that farmers are successful and farming is sustainable.

As you are all aware the preamble to our Constitution states that the people of South Africa adopted the Constitution so as to: * Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights; * Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law; * Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person;

One of the most important ways in which we can improve the quality of life of all South Africans is through the provision of food. Our government is acutely conscious that poverty, unemployment, especially rural unemployment and underdevelopment all have lasting effects on the health and well being of our people. We are conscious that poverty and malnutrition go hand in hand. But we are equally conscious that increasing food production is an absolute precondition in our national war on poverty. Jeffrey Sachs special advisor to the United Nations Secretary General and one of the foremost economists in the world recently published a book titled "The End of Poverty: How we can make it happen in our lifetime". In that book he asked a very important question: "how is it that some very poor countries escaped the ravages of a poverty trap, while others did not?"

After comparing those countries that made it with those that did not, he concluded that "the most important determination, it seems, is food productivity" (p. 69).

Sachs noted that the so called poverty trap is predominantly a rural phenomenon of rural small farmers and peasants caught in a vicious cycle of increasing population and falling food production. He concluded that: "The biggest difference between Africa and Asia is that Asia has had rising food

production per capita during recent decades, whereas Africa has low and falling food production per capita.”(p. 70).

So your work is essential to the well being of our country and our democracy. You must continue in your efforts to improve agricultural productivity. Your work is essential to the feeding of our population.

You have an obligation to produce food in an efficient and affordable and productive fashion and we in government have an obligation to ensure that the food you produce is affordable and accessible especially to those who need it the most. We need to assist you with increasing your yields, with ensuring that the transportation infrastructure is in place to get your produce to the marketplace and to ensure that technological advances in food production is affordable to you.

Our Constitutions requires our government to improve the quality of life of all South Africans in the context of dealing with the socio-economic injustices of the past. And food security for the poor is an important vehicle to improving their quality of life.

Section 27 of our Constitution speaks directly to the topic at hand. It is very clear about the relationship between fundamental human needs and the Constitutional rights of South Africans. The Sections reads:

27. Health care, food, water and social security

1. Everyone has the right to have access to

a. health care services, including reproductive health care;

b. sufficient food and water; and

c. social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependants, appropriate social assistance.

2. The state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights. Everyone has the right to sufficient food and the state has to take reasonable measures to achieve the progressive realisation of this right. We can not do this alone. We need the partnership of organisations like NEPRO and SAYA Co-Op in order to realise the vision of food for all. This vision is not about food handouts to the poor. This is about the alleviation of poverty. This is about the dignity of our people, it is about their right to food clothing and shelter, and it is about sustainable growth through which our people can be gainfully and meaningfully employed.

NEPRO's vision is laudable: "To create successful farmers out of its predominantly disadvantaged members". This vision which is about transformation is perfectly consistent with our government's broader transformation agenda.

We understand that one of the legacies of apartheid has been to concentrate agricultural land ownership and vital agricultural resources in the hands of the minority; while the vast majority of the black people of our country were agricultural labourers. So we need proactive measures to affect the transfer of assets to those who have historically worked the land. It was Engels who said that "The first fundamental condition for the introduction of community of property is the political liberation of the proletariat through a democratic constitution". We have political liberation. We have a democratic Constitution and now we need to continue to transform the relations of production on land. Social property, land redistribution, food for all, must be accomplished in the context of the respect for the rule of law and in the context of constitutional imperatives for transformation.

Jeffrey Sachs also notes that one other possible reason for the persistence of poverty, especially in the rural areas, is that in many countries women face discrimination. Your mission seeks to address this for you clearly and succinctly state that you seek to ensure economic empowerment of members, youth and women through the creation of business opportunities within the supply chain. This empowerment designed to improve the social and economic well-being of women and youth is consistent with the goals of our government.

Active encouragement of youth and women to enter agriculture is essential. But it must be done with sincerity, and with a keen strategic sense of the future. It must not be tokenism. If the findings of the Sachs report are correct then encouraging and empowering women is an essential ingredient in the fight against poverty and underdevelopment.

Indeed you should work hard to realise one of your stated goals – which as you articulate it, is to “Ensure institutional capacity building and lobbying ability for strong government legislation, which promotes and supports emerging red meat producers, cattle breeders and feeders”. But there should be more to this. You should do this lobbying conscious of another goal for your advocacy campaign – “Affordable and Accessible Food for All”.

One of your service delivery focus areas is about wanting to “Influence policy and legislation in favour of farmers”. Again this needs to be articulated in the context of fighting poverty, unequal access to food and other goods and services, malnutrition and fighting unemployment and underdevelopment in our country. In this way there is a conscious link between your goals and our national goals.

Globally, over 8 million people a year die from disease, poverty, hunger, starvation and malnutrition. In other words between today and tomorrow over 20,000 people in the world would have died from poverty. Extreme poverty no longer exists in the rich countries of the world, and it is disappearing in many middle income countries. The overwhelming majority of those 20, 000 who die daily from poverty, die in the impoverished countries of the world, and this is a socio-political catastrophe.

We must be moved to end poverty in our lifetime. We must be moved to provide food for all in our lifetime. Empowering women and youth in the sphere of food production is one nail in the coffin of poverty. But we need more such nails. We need partnerships, we need sustainable development and we need to increase both our capacity to produce food and our actual production of food. And then we have to make that food affordable and accessible. These are not production challenges, they are political challenges. And our government has the political will to fight poverty. We are committed to halving poverty and unemployment in South Africa by 2014. And in that battle we need you.

Thank you very much.

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