

Farmers optimistic about the future of SA agriculture, but continued instability and uncertainty could change that

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Despite the hostile operating environment, farmers represented by Agri SA remain optimistic about the future of agriculture in South Africa. This came to light at this year's Agri SA congress when attendees - most of which were farmers - were asked several questions including a question about their sentiments about the future of agriculture in South Africa.



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Using connector devices to choose from three response choices (positive, concerned and negative), 58.2% indicated that they were positive about the future of agriculture, 37.4% indicated they are concerned and 4.4% indicated they were feeling negative.

Challenges, disruption hit business confidence

While farmers' sentiments about agriculture in South Africa remain positive, this perception could change if instability and uncertainty continue.

Apart from other challenges, the agricultural sector is confronted with, among others, the persisting drought, avian flu - both of which lead to some farming operations declaring bankruptcy and left some under enormous financial pressure - and uncertainty around land. The sector also suffers from the disruptions that come as result of the lack of good governance and ethical principles from the government's side.

We must remember that the agricultural sector plays a crucial role to ensure national food security requirements are fulfilled to meet the dietary needs and food preferences of people, for an active and healthy life. In addition, the sector is a lever for economic growth and a significant generator of employment in South Africa.

However, the lack of stability, certainty, and good governance, which are all pre-requisites for business confidence, can have an enormous adverse impact on food security and the sustainability of the whole agricultural value chain.

Cabinet reshuffle undermining efforts to bring about economic stability

The farming community has noted with great concern the recent cabinet reshuffle by President Zuma. Although the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries were not affected, changing the Minister of Energy for the second time this year is concerning for the farming community and many businesses that are heavily reliant on energy for their operations.

Not only does this reshuffle undermine the efforts made by business (including farmers) to bring about economic stability and job creation, but it also takes the country back another step and is delaying the finalisation of a sustainable and affordable energy solution for the country.

South Africa needs policies that will rebuild confidence in the economy, not a political war. With this, the 12th cabinet reshuffle since president Zuma took office, the confidence that the business fraternity needs will remain a pie in the sky.

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