

Press release

SUBSISTENCE FARMERS NOT SOLUTION FOR LAND REFORM

Fanie Brink - Independent Agricultural Economist

"The only solution for land reform is the establishment of small black commercial farmers and not to plunge small black subsistence farmers in poverty and hunger," says independent agricultural economist Fanie Brink.

Brink responded to view of Professor Ben Cousins of the Institute for Poverty, Land and Rural Studies (Farm) that "commercial farming is not the only land reform solution" and suggested that "unproductive and marginal farms" should be given to market-oriented small farmers.

Professor Cousins was a speaker on land reform at the two-year conference of the Agricultural Business Chamber, Agbiz, held in Port Elizabeth last week.

Brink says that, as a purely political objective, a million or maybe more small subsistence farmers, according to the National Development Plan, can be established on small pieces of land, but they will only suffer from huge poverty and hunger. The ANC will then be able to say that they have created a million jobs, regardless of the fact that these farmers cannot feed themselves and cannot make a contribution to food production.

However, the ANC does not care as long as these subsistence farmers can help to keep the party in power after the next election only to again be left on their own in poverty and hunger until the next election. It is precisely the old "African ideology" that almost all the politicians in Africa always followed, by capitalising on human suffering before an election.

Professor Cousin is totally wrong because it has been proven worldwide that there is no other way to guarantee the sustainability of food security than through profitable commercial agricultural production. Famine and poverty are predominant in Africa and Asia because they rely on the unprofitable and unsustainable production of food by small subsistence farmers. About 60% of all people in the world who suffer from malnutrition are small subsistence farmers. In fact, the latest figures show that famine in the world has begun to increase once again after it has declined over the last few years.

The general mistake that is made when talking about land reform is not to draw a very clear distinction between "small black subsistence farmers" and "small black commercial farmers" that can be developed as full-fledged commercial farmers. The development of black commercial farmers is, in my opinion, the only answer for land reform that can deliver market orientated and sustainable production if it is profitable because profitability is the prerequisite for sustainable food security

Professor Cousins's proposal that unproductive and marginal farms should be transferred to small farmers would create just the same problem that commercial farmers in the maize industry experienced, for example, and who had to withdraw almost a million hectares from production in the late 1980s because of the extremely high production risks attached to it. Even large commercial farmers will not survive financially because it is not economically viable, while small farmers will experience the worst possible poverty and hunger circumstances. Professor Cousin

makes a very big mistake if he thinks that the "commercial model is not the only way agriculture can be successful" because it has been proven worldwide.

He is, however, correct to say that "insufficient support for small farmers causes problems with access to credit, training, guidance, transport, technical services, veterinary services and access to productive resources and markets," but it will not change in South Africa as the political leadership has already proved that they do not have a plan to solve these problems.

To try to protect small farmers with a "broader set of regulations" against "dominant market players" will not be successful because the "market forces of supply and demand" will exclude economic unfeasible farming practices, according to Brink.

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