

Land Minister Seizes Ostrich Farm From Beneficiaries

Written by Rudi Prinsloo
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Agriculture and Land Affairs Minister Lulu Xingwana this week put the "use it or lose it" principle to action and seized an ostrich farm from land restitution beneficiaries.

"Land must be fully utilised... No farm must be allowed to lie fallow," Xingwana said in Hammanskraal outside Pretoria in a speech released to the media on Friday.

She visited the ostrich farm on Wednesday and lamented its deterioration since it was sold to the department in 2007 for R3.5 million and then leased to Phaphamang Ma-Africa for R168,000 per annum.

"Of the 77 ostriches originally on the farm, only 57 could be accounted for. Several of the birds were limping and they were in a chronic condition [and] would therefore probably not respond to treatment.

"This would consequently result in infertility. None of the birds have bred since 2007," said Xingwana.

The previous owner gave the beneficiaries three months of training and donated a bakkie, ostrich feed for two months, a tractor and several other loose assets.

"In addition the group received about R70,000 from Metsweding District Municipality to help them start the project," said Xingwana.

"It is also important to note that despite all these support systems, it is apparent to me that the beneficiaries are not passionate about farming."

She said equipment had been sold, tools were missing and the once viable restaurant had been stripped of all chairs and tables.

Xingwana said the department was now working with veterinarians to improve the health of the ostriches who were "not being fed properly".

A broad-scale programme was under way to resuscitate the farm.

They had started fixing all fencing, removing sharp objects and covering all exposed wires with piping to prevent injury.

They were making a list of all the ostriches' ages and sex for each of the camps and to identify bullied birds that need to be herded into another camp.

"As a matter of urgency we are looking for workers, preferably those that worked the farm previously to assist in herding the birds."

She said criticism against the "use it or lose it" principle was unfounded.

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"Those who are not committed to farming must be removed from the allocated farm and be replaced by those who have a passion for farming including agricultural cooperatives," said Xingwana.

"I would like to add that our objective is to ensure that 'emerging' farmers do not stay 'emerging' for decades and centuries... If we succeed in this, naturally a class of successful black farmers will emerge."

Source : Sapa /fg/jog

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