



agriculture, land reform & rural development

Department:
Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Mr Mpho Sekgala,
Deputy Director: Biosecurity Promotion and Awareness
Lenyenye Community Hall, Republic of South Africa
International Day of Plant Health, 12 May 2022
Member of the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions (SACNASP)
Member of the Global Science Committee

Local leadership (Cllrs, Ba Moshate)

Farmers

Government Officials

DALRRD officials

Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations

Agricultural Research Council (ARC)

Limpopo Department of Agriculture and all our strategic partners

Colleagues and compatriots

Ladies and gentlemen

Programme director, I would like to take this opportunity and convey greetings on behalf of the leadership of Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development. It was our wish to have the Hon Minister Didiza in this very august event in the calendar of the agricultural sector but due to the budget vote, she couldn't make it. Allow me to pass convey our words thanks to the organising team.

Why are we here? Programme Director we are gathered here because of two things in the context of plant health

1. STORSAR (Support towards the Operationalisation of the SADC Regional Agricultural Policy Project
2. International Day of Plant Health (12 May) under the theme - ***“Plant Health Innovation for Food Security”***

The STOSAR project is a project that started in 2019 with the rationale to intensify the management of transboundary pests and diseases, doing that as part of deepening the implementation of the SADC

Regional Agricultural Policy. In this project we are working together with FAO and the European Union. When this project started, all the Provincial Departments of Agriculture (PDAs) were convened in Birchwood hotel in Johannesburg on the **25 July 2019** by the FAO and DALRRD. On the side of plant health, 6 pests were prioritised, namely *Tuta absoluta* (present in South Africa), Banana bunchy Top virus (Present in South Africa), Maize lethal necrosis disease (**not present in South Africa yet**), Panama disease (**not present in South Africa yet**), Oriental fruit fly (Present in South Africa) and Fall armyworm (present in South Africa). Part of the activities of this STOSAR project include among others, raising awareness and education on transboundary pests management, intensifying the surveillance and diagnostic systems, improving the early warning and rapid response as well as assisting provinces with relevant material. To this end, we want to appreciate the support from our strategic partners FAO, the ARC, the European Union and the SADC Secretariat. But of critical importance we want to acknowledge the participation of the provincial departments and farmers in this crucial project.

On the animal side the STORSAR project prioritised HPAI, FMD and Peste des Petists Ruminant (PPR) and similar workshops and similar support is also taken care of as part of building a resilient biosecurity system. The strength of our biosecurity system is amongst the factors that are instrumental to the sustainability of our food security programmes.

The other important reason why we are here today is that, today marks the first International Day of Plant Health, for the first time ever in the global calendar of the agriculture and environmental matters. The United Nations General Assembly has on the 29 March 2022 adopted the resolution proclaiming the annual International Day of Plant Health. A day aimed at raising awareness on the need to take care of plants because by so doing we will be taking care of our health. It therefore means that, each year we are going to have celebrations all over the world as we recognise the importance of plants to our health and the environment. This is a day that requires everyone from government, general public, private sector, policy makers, farmers, youths, NGOs, learners, media professionals, donors, transportation and trade sector, athletes, importers, exporters, travellers, academics, school children etc to get involved in protecting plants and protecting life.

You can get involved in many ways, applying integrated pest management at farm level, taking care of your soil and plants, establish dialogues, planting trees, fun walk, bring IDPH in your home town, organise an event, promote IDPH in your web page, join the global eventso it is quite an endless package of activities that we can do on this day going forward as part of celebrating the Plant Health Day and making

a commitment to protect plants. Plants are under a huge threat from diseases and pests, humans, climate change, international travellers travelling with unauthorised material that may serve as carrier for pests and diseases and we seriously need to intervene on that.

At the level of the ports of entry, country, municipal jurisdiction, farms and households we have a role to play in order to safeguard our plant resources, conserve them and sustain them for the future. Through plants we can fight hunger, through plants we can fight unemployment and through plants we can grow our economy. To the farming community, we must work together to reverse the 40 % crop loss by pests and diseases in the globe.

As South Africa, the region and African continent we must rejoice and be thankful because is the brain child of the SADC region, interestingly **Zambia** came with a proposal for establishment of this day. Year 2020 was the International Year of Plant Health and so in the same year on the 01 October 2020, the FAO Committee on Agriculture endorsed the proposal tabled by the government of Zambia to proclaim 12 May the International Day of Plant Health (IDPH). On the 29 March 2022, the United General Assembly adopted the resolution proclaiming 12 May as the International Day of Plant Health. On the 07 April 2022, the international Plant Protection convention secretariat reported at the Commission for Phytosanitary Measures about the United Nations' decision to observe the International Day of Plant Health on 12 May each year.

Progressively speaking, the proclamation of the International Day of Plant Health found us some miles away thus we found it befitting to showcase our plant health awareness workshop as part of celebrating the International Day of Plant Health. I must indicate that since 2010 to date, the pests like Oriental fruit fly, Fall armyworm, Tomato leaf minor (*Tuta Absoluta*) kept us united because their gradual introduction into our territory (at different intervals) needed us to stand up about bring about collective solutions. These exotic pests caused huge damage at farm level and household or home gardens and of course affecting the household food security. We have seen farmers, ARC, the provincial department, national and international researchers, private sector, FAO, SADC region and agrochemical companies coming up with innovative solutions to deal with these pests and we would of course see demonstration of such innovations either today or tomorrow.

So with these words, I hope you now understand the reasons why we are here today. We are here to celebrate the International day of Plant Health through GETTING INVOLVED in combating pests and

disease of plants in many possible ways. Today as we celebrate we will do so through collective reflections and or demonstrations on the plant health work we are doing at level of Limpopo province and in particular the entire South Africa working as the 3 spheres of government together with the farming community and our strategic partners.

South Africa had started making significant progress towards reducing the number of people with food inadequacy challenges from 14.6 million in 2015 to 11.4 million in 2019. About 96 % of the population in Limpopo has adequate access to food, WC = 76%, EC = 79% NC = 74 %, FS= 73 %, KZN = 83%, NW = 64% , GP = 81 %, MP = 67 % . So Limpopo is doing well in its population of **5 926 724**.

With these words, I therefore wish you a fruitful celebration, enjoy !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!