



**Battle:** lack of skills, funds blamed

# Black farmers selling land back to whites

MYOLISI GOPHE

SOME new black farmers in the Western Cape are selling their land back to white farmers. Many emerging farmers battle to make a go of farming and some opt out, defeating the essence of black economic empowerment (BEE).

At the centre of the problem are inadequate skills and mentoring coupled with a lack of funds and suitable land, according to a draft report by Agri-BEE given to the provincial government. Agri-BEE is a joint venture between the government and organised agriculture to promote black farming. But black farmers say teaching them how to farm is unnecessary as black people already know how to farm. They need training in marketing and economics.

According to the report, the reality is that instead of black farmworkers benefiting from empowerment, a few members of the black elite tend to benefit.

There are 5 000 land-reform beneficiaries in the Western Cape, but it is difficult to tell how many of the 8 500 farms are owned by previously disadvantaged people as race is not reflected when farms are registered.

The report, given to agriculture MEC Cobus Dowry a few weeks ago, was drafted by an interim steering committee comprising all stakeholders in the agriculture sector as an outcome of the provincial growth and development summit held in 2003.

It states that most of the emerging farmers rely on intuitive knowledge to manage their farms, while the existing training mechanisms are inadequate and the results negative. Added to that are allegations that most of the land distributed or sold to emerging farmers is marginal and requires extensive capital investment to

make it productive.

Few black farmers can afford it and some beneficiaries end up selling the land back to the original owners.

The report also states that there seems to be widespread reluctance by white farmers to procure goods and services from farms owned by previously disadvantaged people as few of them produce quality goods.

Agri-economist Danie Cillie said the government should focus on a few schemes that were successful instead of embarking on many projects that were not financially viable. He said a lack of skills, a shortage of funds and the slow pace of the government buying bankrupt farms were the main problems. "Farming is not simple, it is a capital and technical-intensive sector and unskilled farmers cannot compete world-wide with farmers from Brazil and Europe."

Although commercial farmers were willing to help, there was not enough mentorship and that had to be investigated.

But Motsepe Matlala, president of the National African Farmers Union of SA, said black people had been farmers on behalf of white people for a long time and educating them on how to farm was a waste of time and resources. "The mentoring process has failed and not one farmer was taught by the apartheid government how to farm. What we need is full participation in the agriculture sector and schools should offer agriculture economics."

Dirk Troskie, co-ordinator of the Agri-BEE in the Western Cape, said like in any other sector there were successful and unsuccessful cases in the empowerment process and he acknowledged that there were problems. However there were issues that stakeholders agreed on and these would be identified and a draft proposal developed.