

What Happens When Farms Disappear?

A serious look at one of South Africa's most pressing problems

The first *Decade of Democracy* was celebrated in South Africa in April 2004. What is the outlook after the first 10 years? A new book, "*The Great South African Land Scandal*," by Dr. Philip du Toit, an attorney and specialist on land reform and labor law, warns of "the possibility that South Africa could go the same way as Zimbabwe."

Some background: South African President Thabo Mbeki is currently serving his second 5-year term in office. He was hand picked by former President Nelson Mandela. Mr. Mbeki, a hardcore Marxist, is dedicated to "a better life for all." One aspect of his program is the redistribution of wealth and land. The ANC's *Freedom Charter* demands that "The land shall be shared among those who work it!" Accordingly the government wants to "hand over 30% (64 million acres) of predominantly white commercial farmland to emerging black farmers by 2020."

Agricultural production by black families in Africa has traditionally been on a subsistence basis. That is, each family planted a garden and enjoyed the benefits of it. If there was plenty of rain and there was a bumper crop then they didn't have to plant for the next season. But if there was a drought, then they faced starvation.

Dutch settlers in the Cape introduced the concept of commercial farming 350 years ago. They established a food supply station to provide provisions for ships from Europe sailing out to India and the Dutch East Indies.

Over the last two years the desecration of South Africa's farmland has increased to such an extent that land is being taken out of production at an alarming rate. In 2001 the Minister of Agriculture handed over the 3,460-acre Letsitele Valley farms to the Mamathola tribe of 1,500 people. These farms showed a profit of \$2.5 million annually. The tribe was given \$750,000 in operating capital. But after the takeover none of them came to farm or live on the land. Instead they elected a committee who paid

themselves a monthly salary of \$2,000 each. They did not farm either.

Two years later investigators found that the "avocado trees were dying of thirst. While the farm dam was full the pipes for irrigation were broken. Mango trees were not watered either. The papayas hung from dry trunks, while grass and weeds grew between the expertly laid out plantation rows. Three state-of-the-art packing sheds were empty, loose crates lying about. There was not a soul to be seen. As we drove through this once beautiful farm we came upon neglected macadamia groves. Hundreds of thousands of macadamia nuts lay under the trees unharvested. Further on [we found] citrus orchards gasping for water in the searing heat. These 'ghost farms' are appearing all over South Africa." The loss of the orange harvest alone was \$5 million.

Ironically the 30% target for redistribution has been put in place with no evidence of actual demand for rural land and could have major implications for commercial agriculture. The loss of foreign exchange through exports is further compounded by the loss of tax revenue paid to the government. Dr. du Toit concludes, "The government's promise to return the land to the people as outlined in the *Freedom Charter* is an invitation to famine."

Our longtime friend, Mrs. Dorothy Scarborough of the Gospel Defense League observes, "South Africa's needs have long outgrown subsistence farming, such as most 'emergent farmers' practice. It cannot afford the subsistence mentality. It needs agricultural expertise of the highest standard and a work ethic of singular dimensions. Most of all it needs to look unto God, the great Provider, the Giver of all good things. For it is He who through obedient hands '*raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill, that he may set him with princes.*'" Psalm 113:7,8

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