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Agri SA calls for urgent investigation into problems with diesel supply

Agri SA is calling on government to launch an urgent inquiry into the continuous shortage of diesel to various industries. One of the key reasons is the continuous vandalism and theft of diesel by well-organised syndicates from the diesel supply lines from Durban to Johannesburg. This poses a serious challenge to Transnet who is responsible for managing and maintaining the pipeline.

It has resulted in diesel being transported by trucks from our ports which in turn increases the cost. Farmers harvesting produce such as maize, citrus and other commodities at this point in time are particularly hard hit due to the increase in cost and the limited availability of diesel in particular provinces.

Agri SA has been monitoring the diesel supply disruptions from the onset and has been part of a weekly meeting with the South African Petroleum Industry Association (SAPIA) to receive feedback and to convey the status of the diesel supply constraints experienced by our members in each province. The situation on the ground however differs from the picture often painted by those responsible for managing the supply of diesel that there is enough diesel available. Farmers are battling to buy diesel for harvesting purposes. Many other industries too.

The agricultural value chain is heavily dependent on diesel for harvesting and to transport produce to offset points. Hence, disruptions in supply can paralyze the industry completely. All commodities can potentially be affected. Farmers in the northern parts of the country are busy harvesting summer grains. Given the fact that there currently is a high demand for white maize meal, prolonged shortage of diesel holds the risk of impacting negatively on food security.

The logistical linkages in the dairy and fresh produce supply chain is particularly vulnerable. High value export commodities such as citrus, fruit and macadamia's will also be affected.

Transnet owns, manages and operates an underground network of 3 800 km of high-pressure petroleum and gas pipelines. Since April this year, more than 30 fuel theft incidents have occurred on the pipeline during which more than 2 million liters of fuel were stolen. Thieves are increasingly damaging the pipelines and associated infrastructure to steal diesel.

This is extremely dangerous as culprits are not just endangering themselves and cause extensive damage to the environment, but their actions also endanger the lives of people living near the pipelines. The thieves also trespass on farmland and threaten the safety of farming communities in the vicinity of the pipeline.

Agri SA and its various provincial affiliates, in collaboration with Transnet yesterday launched a campaign encouraging farmers to report any criminal activity aimed at vandalising the pipeline to steal diesel.

Suspicious activities can be reported at the following numbers: 0800 203 843 or 031 361 1500 or to call the SAPS Crime Stop on 08600 10111. Agri SA is also in continuous contact with Transnet regarding the safety of the farming community near the pipeline, as well as the pipeline itself.

As the economy opens up it is imperative that fuel supplies are secured. Agri SA urges Transnet, industry stakeholders and government to act swiftly on the matter to avoid further damage to an already fragile South African economy.

Enquiries

Christo van der Rheede
Agri SA, Deputy Executive Director
(C) 083 3803492