Call for land reform clarity

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THE Agricultural Business Chamber, which represents various agricultural processing business entities, has called on Rural Development and Land Reform Minister Gugile Nkwinti to speedily release the latest green paper on land reform, saying this will provide clarity on the state's intentions and enable business to plan ahead.

The call follows President Jacob Zuma 's statement to the Congress of South African Trade Unions earlier this week in which he gave highlights of the green paper . Mr Zuma said pending legislation would place limitations on foreign ownership of land.

He also revealed plans to set up a valuer-general's office, which would ensure that the government and citizens were protected from "exploitation by unscrupulous players in the land market".

The president proposed a Land Rights Management Board to regulate agri-villages to be created in terms of the New Growth Path.

Agricultural Business Chamber CEO Dr John Purchase said yesterday that agri-business told Mr Nkwinti at a meeting on Wednesday that the industry needed certainty on land reform and wanted to be involved in land reform programmes.

"We realise that the land issue in SA is complex and emotive, but what remains a critical point is not to destroy value.

"Therefore, the chamber urges that it is extremely important to engage on a continuous basis," Mr Nkwinti said.

Mtobeli Mxothwa, spokesman for Mr Nkwinti, said that the green paper on rural development could be submitted to the Cabinet within a month and soon after it would be open for public comment.

The green paper on land reform would be ready at the beginning of September.

Dr Purchase said agri-business was encouraged by the recent statements by Mr Zuma and Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe about "land reform taking place within the confines of the constitution of the country".

Mr Nkwinti emphasised to the chamber on Wednesday that state land should be leased, to ensure that "people with interest, passion and commitment receive it".

The minister said there would be limitation on the size of land ownership, and that the government wanted "to reduce mega- corporation of agriculture".

However, Mr Nkwinti also urged commercial farmers to assist government come up with an understanding on "what is a commercially viable entity" in different regions and enterprises.

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