# **Movement for Democratic Change.**

# AGRICULTURE, LAND AND WATER POLICY STATEMENT

# 1. THE ZIMBABWE LAND QUESTION IN PERSPECTIVE

# 1.1 **Introduction**

The following policies will be the responsibility of a expanded Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Environment and Water under the MDC's "Manifesto for the New Millennium" which **emphasize** *sustainable*, *people-centered development*.

### 1.1.1 The Broad Economic Problems to be Tackled

The structural problems of poverty, unemployment and inequitable land distribution must be tackled with urgency under transparent and systematic programs, for political, social and economic stability to be ensured in the country. It must be recognised the land question is one of unfinished business for the Nation, it is not a political Party issue. The present government has made extravagant promises on this issue in the past 20 years and failed to deliver any meaningful progress because of poor policies and corruption. An MDC government will pursue three main objectives in the respect: -

- a) It will seek to empower the majority of Zimbabweans who depend on the land for their living. It will do this by making land available within the framework of a legal, transparent process with stakeholder participation and granting security of tenure to all farmers with the required technical and other support required for viability.
- b) It will seek to establish equity on the land issue to the satisfaction of all stakeholders.
- c) It will protect the economic viability of the agricultural industry and pursue its growth and expansion on a sustainable basis.

# 1.1.2 One of the MDC Government's Four Key Areas of Economic Policy: Jobs and Resources for Income Generation

The MDC Manifesto Economic Policy has one of its four core components as being "Strategies to facilitate job creation and make resources such as land, available to the majority of the people for income generation".

# 1.1.3 <u>Linking – up the Marginalised Economy (Rural Sector and Urban Informal Sector) with the Rest of the Economy</u>.

The strategies that fall under the Economic Core Component in 1.1.2 are targeted at linking up the large marginalised Economy (Rural Small Scale Farming Sector and Urban Informal Sector) with the rest of the Formal Economy in order to foster broadbased economic development.

# 1.1.4 Importance of Land and Agriculture in the Economy

Land underpins the economic, social and political lives of the majority of the people of Zimbabwe because of the country's strong dependency on agriculture and natural resources. Official demographic statistics suggest that about 52% of Zimbabwe's population live in Communal Areas deriving their livelihoods from the largely non-viable small-scale communal agriculture (CSO 1992). Other sources suggest that this proportion less because of increased rural-urban migration since the CSO 1992 census. However, generally the issue of whom is a Communal or an urban dweller is not easy to distinguish as most black Zimbabweans in urban areas has strong rural or communal area links.

It is estimated that 7 million of Zimbabwe's population of 12 million people live in the rural areas largely as small scale Communal Area (CA) farmers or as Large Scale Commercial Farm laborers. This makes agriculture the largest employer of the total labour force of the country (CSO 1992 and 1998 see also TABLE IIIA under section 1.2). Agriculture contributes 15% of real GDP coming second to manufacturing at 15% contribution to GDP. Agriculture accounts for about 40-60% of manufacturing inputs and contributes 40-50% of total export earnings. It also accounts for around 30% of formal employment, followed by manufacturing at 16% (CSO 1998). Contribution to the formal economy sited above is largely from the large-scale commercial farming sector (LSCF).

# 1.2 <u>Structure of Agriculture in Zimbabwe: Land distribution is highly skewed in Zimbabwe. The status quo is not politically, socially or economically sustainable.</u>

Zimbabwe's total land area is estimated to be 39.072 million hectares of which about 32.74 million hectares is classified as agricultural land (CSO 1998). The distribution of land by land use and natural region in the early 1990s is summarised in Table IA. It is important to note that these reported land figures referring to the distribution as it was in 1992, are still the ones being used as the official statistics for analysing the land question in Zimbabwe by the Government, World Bank and many other agencies and researchers.

However, since the publication of the Land Commission Report in 1994, there is no doubt that some land re-distribution has continued to take place and the 1992 land distribution in official use, is not the most accurate reflection of the current status of the land distribution in Zimbabwe. Taking cognisance of this data constraint, this policy document is based on both the 1992 land distribution as well as 1997 updates from the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) the Surveyor General's Office and unofficial updates from the Ministry of Lands and Agriculture. Zimbabwe has four major land tenure regimes, namely, the Commercial Lands, Communal Lands, Resettlement Areas and State Lands.

#### TABLE IA

# Agricultural Land by Classification and Land Tenure – 1992.

Natural	Communal Lands	Large Scale	Small Scale	Resettlement Lands
Region	Sector (1 000ha)	Commercial Lands	Commercial Lands	Sector (1 000ha)
_		Sector (1 000ha)	Sector (1 000ha)	

I & II	1 410	3 890	250	620
III	2 820	2 410	530	1 240
IV	7 340	2 430	500	810
V	4 780	2 490	100	620
TOTAL	16 350	11 220	1 380	3 290

Source:

Zimbabwe Report on the Commission of Inquiry into appropriate Agricultural Land Tenure Systems; Volume One: Main Report; October 1994; Chaired by Prof. Mandivamba Rukuni.

# 1.2.1 <u>Summary Interpretation of Land Use Classification as Reflected in Table 1A</u>

A total of 16.35 million hectares (41.8% of total land area) is Communal Land farmed by up to 1 million households. The Communal Lands are of the lowest agricultural potential with 74% of the land falling into Natural Regions IV and V, areas receiving less than 650mm of rainfall a year.

Large Scale Commercial Land totals 11.22 million hectares, (28.7% of total land area), 35% of which lies in the best Natural Regions I and II and the land is farmed by about 5 000 farmers. Most (4 000) of these Large Scale Commercial Farms are owned by whites as well as about 500 new LSCF black Zimbabweans and large public companies.

Small Scale Commercial land totals 1.38 million hectares (3.5% of total land area), also largely in low potential areas and farmed by about 10 629 black farmers. By 1994, about 60 000 former Communal Area households farmed Resettled Land, totaling 3.29 million hectares (8.4% of total land area) mostly in Natural Regions III, IV and V. The remaining 6.88 million hectares (17.6% of total land area) is largely National Parks and Forest Areas.

TABLE IB

Land Use Classification by Sector and Natural Region in 1997/8 (estimates).

	Comm. Area (1000) ha	Resettle. Area (1000)ha	SSCF (1000)ha	ICF (Black) (1000)ha	LSCF (White) (1000)ha	Parast./ State (1000)ha
NR I	1 405	30	10	2	178	6
NR II	1 275	589	240	475	3 247	6
NR III	2 810	1 240	530	198	2 122	96
NR IV	7 337	809	500	248	2 142	36
NR V	4 778	622	101	67	2 181	156
TOTAL	16 340	3 290	1 380	990	9 870	300
Share of Total						
Agric. Land	50.79%	10.23%	4.29%	3.07%	30.69%	0.93%
Number of	800 000 to	50,000	10.700	2 000	4.000	20
Farms	1 mill	60 000	10 500	2 000	4 000	30
Average farm						
Size	16.34 ha	55.00 ha	162.35 ha	493.64 ha	2194 ha	10000 ha

Source: Ministry of Lands and Agriculture 2000 (Unofficial Statistics)

Comm. - Commercial Area Resettle. - Resettlement Area

SSCF - Small Scale Commercial Farming Sector ICF - Indigenous Commercial Farming Sector LSCF - Large Scale Commercial Farming Sector

Parast./state - Parastatal / State Lands

On Communal Area average farm size of 16.34 hectares includes communal grazing land is considered sub economic from a viability point of view. On Resettlement Area average farm size of 55 hectares also includes grazing lands, otherwise an average resettlement area household has access to 5 hectares of arable land, which is assessed to be sufficient to provide a decent livelihood from rain fed agriculture.

Table IB shows the emergence over the 20 years of independence of a "new" group of black large scale commercial farmers represented by the Indigenous Commercial Farming Association (ICFA) owning about 3.07% of agricultural land by 1997/98. This land is either former white owned LSCF land or State Land on long lease. However, what is interesting in both Tables IB and II is that nothing much has happened in terms of resettling people from the overcrowded communal areas since 1992.

Table II: Summary of Land Use in Zimbabwe 1992 to 1997.

LAND USE	1992(a)		1997(b)	
	HECTARES	% OF TOTAL LAND AREA	HECTARES	% OF TOTAL LAND AREA
Communal Land	16 350 000	41.8%	16 331 260	41.8%
White LSCF	10 020 000	25.65	8 087 490	20.7
Black LSCF	1 200 000	3.07	1 289 310	3.3
SSCF	1 380 000	3.50	1 367 450	3.5
Resettlement	3 290 000	8.40	3 555 370	9.1
National Parks & Forest*	6 880 000*	17.60*	6 055 850	15.5
State Land*	*	*	1 406 520	3.6
Multi-National Co. Land*	*	*	937 680	2.4
TOTAL LAND	39 072 000	100%	39 030 930	100%

<sup>\*</sup> The figure 6.88 million hectares in 1992 is largely National Parks and Forest and the remaining 20% or less is State Land and land owned by Multi-National Companies.

- (a) The Source of these 1992 figures is the Zimbabwe Land Commission Report, 1994 used in TABLE IA above.
- (b) The Source of these 1997 figures is the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) in 2000.

If most of the State Land and part of the Forest Areas are used for Resettlement Purposes, there will be at least 2 million hectares available for immediate resettlement of communal people with no financial resource requirement to buy land. The other interesting feature of the land settlement pattern above, is the density of settlement and the average size of land holdings as shown in Tables IIIA and IIIB.

Table III: Density of Settlement and Average land Holdings in 1992.

Land Use	Population (Millions)	Population (%)	Population Density	Average Land Holding
			(ha per)	(ha)
Communal Areas	6.22	51.81	2.63	17*

Small Scale Commercial	0.20	1.63	6.90	225
Farms				
Large Scale Commercial	1.40	11.67	8.01	2250-3000
Farms				
Resettlement Areas	0.50	4.18	6.58	55*
Urban Areas	3.69	30.71	0.43	-
TOTAL	12.00	100	2.73	-

Source: CSO 1992, 1998; Land Commission Report 1994

Land Holdings	Population Millions	Population/km2	Unit Size
Communal land holdings	4.50	30.5	35ha
Large Scale Commercial Farms	2.00	19.6	2250ha
Small Scale Commercial Farms	0.185	10.1	225ha
National Parks and Forestry Areas	0.15	2.2	
Resettlement Areas	0.15	5.9	
State Land (CSC, ADA etc)	0.10	10.5	
Development Trust of Zimbabwe		0.37	
Urban Land	5.00	312.5	

Source: Surveyor General's Office, Estimates, 2000 on land. Urban Councils Estimates of Population Distribution, 2000.

98.8% of Zimbabwe's population (estimated at 11 856 000in 2000) are of African ethnic origin while 1.2% are of European, Asiatic and mixed ethnic origin. Considering the above facts, the new MDC Government strongly believes that Zimbabwe needs to effect substantial land re-distribution and resettlement. Disputes can only arise in respect to: -

- on the manner whereby land re-distribution it is effected,
- the time period during which effective dynamic but pro-poor land re-distribution occurs, and
- the equitable identification of the beneficiaries of such actions, but not on the need for a redistribution programme (Zimbabwe Independent, March 17, 2000).

Unfortunately, for the past 20 years, there has been no coherent Government policy or commitment to support agriculture and rural development in the small-scale sector. This is reflected in the patterns of public sector investment over the period. Access to land and the necessary support services are the only sure way to stimulate the rural economy and reduce poverty for the majority of Zimbabweans.

# 2. <u>LAND REFORM VERSUS AGRARIAN REFORM: Is There a</u> Difference? What do we Require in Zimbabwe?

Land reform can be defined as a programme for the transfer of control and ownership of agricultural land. Land reform therefore necessarily addresses changes in tenurial relations.

Agrarian reform has a broader scope as it requires a more comprehensive approach to restructuring the agricultural sector. It is land reform plus a package of support services such as credit, marketing, pricing, rural infrastructure (dams, roads, bridges, hospitals, school).

It is important to note that MDC has concrete policies for the provision and maintenance of rural infrastructure such as roads, bridges, hospitals and schools. This leaves the agrarian reform program to take care of the more direct agriculture land and water issues

Thus the MDC government recognises that what Zimbabwe needs is an agrarian reform rather than just a land reform. The need for a comprehensive agrarian reform in Zimbabwe is based on the need to address the following issues:

- uneven distribution of land;
- a shortage of land for the rural population;
- under-utilisation of land mainly in the large scale commercial farming sector;
- low productivity and "tragedy of the commons" mainly in the Communal Areas. The "tragedy of the commons" describes a situation whereby communally owned natural resources are not used sustainably resulting in resource depletion and degradation. Communally accessed forests, grazing lands, water resources provide typical examples of the "tragedy of the commons" in Zimbabwe's Communal Areas.
- lack of private farm investment mainly in Communal Areas, Rural Areas and Small Scale Commercial Farming.
- customary law clashing with common (Roman-Dutch) law; mainly in the Small Commercial Farming Sector and
- environmental degradation mainly in the Communal Areas.

# 3. <u>AIMS OF THE PROPOSED MDC AGRARIAN REFORM IN</u> ZIMBABWE

- 3.1 Resettlement of people from Communal Areas to reduce the current congestion and address the historical land hunger. Special groups such as war veterans, the youth and women will need to be given special attention in this process.
- 1.2 Entry of more black Zimbabweans into commercial agriculture.
- 1.3 Broadening formal sector capacity to create employment.
- 1.4 Efficiency concerns to maintain the competitive nature of the agricultural industry.
- 1.5 Creating smaller more intensively uitilised farms.
- 1.6 Settling people on smaller farms with freehold title and the requisite support services.

By fully addressing the above concerns MDC will ensure social and political stability, which are important prerequisites for economic development. Equity and efficiency can be enhanced concurrently i.e. the two are not mutually exclusive.

# 4. <u>STRATEGY AREAS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PROPOSED</u> <u>AGRARIAN REFORM.</u>

In order to effectively implement the desired agrarian reforms in Zimbabwe, the MDC will implement the following concrete and transparent strategies:

# 4.1 Land Acquisition;

To control and manage the complex issue of land acquisition and its subsequent settlement, an MDC government will set up a Land Commission comprising of all interest groups. The Land Commission will be as free as possible of political interference and will operate as a professional agency with all required support. The Land Commission will acquire 6-7 million hectares of land for resettlement through the identification and acquisition of:-

- Under-utilised land;
- Derelict and multiple-owned land already identified and designated for the purpose; and
- All corruptly allocated land. It must be noted that there is a considerable area of land acquired by the state since independence on which no proper settlement has as yet been effected.
- An MDC government will be committed to setting aside the required resources from the national budget to support land reform; and
- The proceeds of a new land tax and resources from stakeholders and international development partners would raise more resources.

The bulk of this land would be used for resettling marginalised population groups. All land settlement will be on the basis of the principles agreed at the Land Conference held in 1998 namely, an orientation towards poverty reduction, transparency, full application of rule of law, flexibility in tenure reform and full stakeholder consultation.

# 4.2 Incentives For Voluntary Sub-Division Of Large Scale Commercial Farms

Voluntary sub-division of LSCF will be encouraged and facilitated rather than hindered and discouraged as is currently the case. Young agriculture graduates and other aspiring commercial farmers who are Zimbabwe citizens will be encouraged, facilitated and given priority in acquiring these farms.

### 4.3 Sub-Leasing

In the same vein of broadening the commercial farming base, long term sub-leasing with option to purchase will be encouraged and facilitated.

# 4.4 Progressive Land Taxes

A progressive land tax can be charged in such a way as to discourage farmers from owning unutilised land and facilitate land release onto the market. The land tax would be used for infrastructure development for the farming communities.

# 4.5 Land Ceilings

Optimum commercial farm sizes will be determined (with the help of agricultural experts) and enforced, depending on the farming activity to be undertaken and the Natural Region within which the farm lies. The likely recommendation of much smaller farms than is currently the situation in the LSCF sector will complement the voluntary sub-division efforts and sub-leasing efforts recommendation in 4.2 and 4.3 above.

### 4.6 Restriction on Number of Farms Owned.

Barring multiple-farm ownership by a single entity in the short to medium-term period (next 5 years) will go a long way in facilitating land release and acquisition, creating a vibrant land market.

# 4.7 Security Of Tenure

While flexibility of tenure needs to be maintained during transition, there is need to ensure that all such tenure arrangements offer reasonable security and investment incentive to the farmer. Leasehold tenure in the first instance with the option to purchase the farm, is a viable option to ensuring tenure security in all sectors of the Zimbabwe's Agriculture. Within 5 years all farmers will enjoy security of tenure over the land they occupy and use.

# 5. <u>ADDRESSING THE PROBLEMS OR CONSTRAINTS BY SUB-</u> <u>SECTOR</u>

The general problems faced by the Agricultural Sector in Zimbabwe by sub-sector are summed up as follows:

# 5.1 In Communal Areas

# 5.1.1 Summary of Problems or Constraints in Communal Areas

- low productivity and "tragedy of the commons"
- land rights and conflicts;
- inappropriate use of land;
- fragmentation of holdings;
- inadequate social security; and
- poor land administration.

#### 5.1.2 Recommendations.

The Land Tenure Commission undertaken in 1994 and chaired by Professor Rukuni, made far reaching recommendations regarding land tenure in the communal areas. This was in recognition that the present system of tenure was partly at the root of

many of the problems of these areas and unless some form of security of tenure was offered to farmers in these areas, these problems would persist. It is therefore proposed that the Land Commission under the new MDC Government, will take these earlier recommendations of the previous Commission, review them and then seek to implement agreed tenure systems in all communal areas within a 5 year time frame.

In support of these changes, an MDC government will increase substantially the level of technical and financial support for small farmers in areas adopting the new tenure systems and will maintain and improve market access and physical infrastructure.

Attention will also be given to improving the social services infrastructure in communal areas to encourage whole family settlement there.

Communal Area Re-Organisation will be possible after de-congesting the Communal Areas in the first 5 years using an effective Land Resettlement Programme. The Communal Area Households after the first 5 years of land redistribution in the country can be re-allocated bigger pieces of land in the Current Communal Area Lands, Under Leasehold tenure with option to buy (Freehold title) in the medium to long-term period.

# 5.2 <u>In Resettlement Areas</u>

# 5.2.1 Summary of Problems or Constraints in Rural Areas

- low productivity;
- insecurity of tenure;
- poor land administration;
- dual land rights in Communal Areas;
- low investment:
- environmental degradation; and
- fragmentation of holdings.

# 5.2.2 <u>Recommendations</u>

As far as possible all land resettlement will be on the basis of secure freehold tenure rights or leasehold in the first instance moving progressively towards freehold tenure.

All resettlement areas will enjoy similar support to that which is provided in the former communal areas. This will include the required social services in terms of health and education as well as market access and the required physical infrastructure.

Resettlement farmers will be given the required technical and financial support required to ensure that they follow sound farming practices.

# 5.3 Summary of Problems or Constraints in Small Scale Farming Areas

- low productivity;
- poor infrastructure
- contentious inheritance problems; and

• discrimination against women

### 5.3.1 Recommendations

MDC will revisit the question of the provision of infrastructure, credit and marketing services in all small scale farming districts. The provision of social services, especially health and education facilities will be raised to the level that pertains in the re-organised communal areas and revamped resettlement areas.

All aspects of gender discrimination will be removed from allocation, inheritance and acquisition policies and access to technical and financial support services will be improved.

# 5.4 <u>In Large Scale Commercial Farming Area</u>

# 5.4.1 <u>Summary of Problems or Constraints in Large Scale Commercial Farming Areas</u>

- under-utilisation of land;
- absentee land owners;
- multiple farm ownership;
- insecure farm-workers; and
- racially skewed land distribution.

### 5.4.2 Recommendations

Full implementation of the principles outlined in this statement in respect to land reform in the commercial farming areas will be achieved in 5 years.

The settlement of farm workers in secure rural villages with security of tenure will be promoted under the MDC program for housing.

Systematic settlement of trained farmers of Zimbabwe citizenship, with full support in terms of finance and other services will be pursued with the objective of increasing the intensity of farming in suitable areas.

Sub-division of farms will be encouraged to foster small holder commercial farms on leasehold and freehold more efficient intensive farming by trained young Zimbabwean farmers. A progressive land tax to encourage development of a land market and money to go into infrastructure development. Multiple farm ownership should be discouraged and land acquired will be sub-divided into smaller commercial farms and used for resettlement.

# 6. The Provision of Agricultural Services.

# 6.1 Research

An MDC government will maintain the Agricultural Research Council as an independent, non-political advisory body, reporting direct to Parliament. The Council

will advise government on all aspects relating to agricultural research and will recommend the provision of grants for research by central government.

All agricultural research will be supported by grants from central government, agricultural associations and development partners. The government grants would be tied to agricultural research to benefit the small-resettled farmers who may not afford research output on their own.

# 6.2 <u>Training</u>

An MDC government will expand and upgrade all agricultural training institutions in the country. It will also place such institutions under independent Councils selected from the agricultural industry. The objective being to ensure that there are adequate numbers of trained personnel to take up the many opportunities to be created in the farming sector by the MDC Agricultural and Land programme. Government will support agricultural training through the same facilities that are available to students at Universities and Colleges.

#### 6.3 Extension Services

An MDC government will provide basic extension services to all farming communities through a system of extension agents who will work with local farm communities and research establishments. Particular regard will be paid to extension services in small scale, resettlement and communal farming areas. Private sector firms with an interest in the agricultural industry will be encouraged to support extension services.

#### 6.4 Marketing Services

The Grain Marketing Board will remain a part of central government but will be required to operate on commercial principles. However they will also be required to maintain a network of buying and supply depots throughout the country and to act as a residual buyer of the food grains and oilseed industry. The GMB will also be required to maintain a strategic stock of all basic food grains.

The national system of livestock sale pens will be maintained but outsourced to the private sector under conditions negotiated annually by the Livestock Marketing Trust.

An MDC government will maintain the system of commodity Councils made up of representatives of all stakeholders in the production and consumption side of each industry and will require these Councils to publish regular information on prices and activity in general in the industry for which they have responsibility. The commodity councils will also take responsibility for the approval of both import and export permits to be issued by the Ministry of Agriculture.

# 7. Water Policy

The Water Policy of the current Government which has been largely based on construction of dams and in some instances has not been very effective in creating a broad based small scale farming irrigation sector. Since independence (past 20 years)

only 20 000 families have become plot holders in small scale irrigation schemes and these are in most cases crippled by lack of marketing linkages and user friendly irrigation technologies.

The new MDC government will encourage and facilitate self-employment rural activities through the provision of water for productive uses, not just through expensive formal irrigation schemes, but by investing in a wide range of technologies to benefit as many rural households as possible. Examples of such simple but effective technologies include solar pumps, windmill pumps, boreholes, deep wells fitted with rope and washer pumps, collector wells etc. Such simple technologies benefiting the mass of the population and requiring no on-going government subsidies as is the case with the dam technology, are likely to be viable, sustainable and bringing reasonable levels of income to the participants. The productive water strategy is consistent with the broad agrarian reform policy of the MDC.

Large dam development will still have its place in the farming sector but must incorporate funded investments to allow small-scale producers to benefit. In the past, dams have been justified in part by their contribution to the small scale, but incompetent planning and a lack of commitment has meant in practice that little new small-scale irrigation has taken place. Large dam projects can go ahead with capital cost subsidies, but they must be viable on a recurrent cost basis. This will put pressure to produce high value crops, which justify the huge investments in formal irrigation schemes.

The issue of productive water rights will be made consistent with the broad land redistribution programme and more secure leasehold/freehold tenure systems, to avoid a situation where people have access to productive farming land in the former large scale commercial farming areas but with no accompanying productive water rights.

The key to success and high levels of income is providing small-scale producers with access to markets for high value crops. Development of marketing intermediaries for horticultural exports has enormous potential to make significant inroads into rural poverty.

When a productive water strategy has been implemented successfully, the bulk of the rural population will be in a better position to provide themselves with clean water sources, a battle, which the non-governmental organisations have fought for several decades without much success in the midst of massive rural poverty.

# EXPECTED OUTPUT FROM IMPLEMENTING THE PROPOSED AGRARIAN REFORM

Successfully implementing this Agrarian Policy Reform is expected to yield the following output:

- It will stimulate growth;
- It will increase participation in viable farming by the majority of Zimbabweans;
- It will enhance agricultural productivity;
- It will increase rural employment and therefore reduced rural/urban migration; and
- It will foster investment in decentralised rural agro-industries.

The MDC program of Agrarian Reform in Zimbabwe is designed to achieve three main objectives:

- 1. Equity in access to land as a productive resource and equity in terms of support for agricultural production in all areas.
- 2. Transformation through a transparent and legal process that is supported by all stakeholders and is completed within 5 years.
- 3. Protection and expansion of the production of agriculture to ensure that the economy continues to enjoy the support of a vibrant and viable farming industry.