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MEDIA RELEASE

In containing COVID-19, health and safety should be prioritised in agriculture and agribusiness operations

Agbiz has noted with concern a series of pictures circulating on social media that appear to show agricultural workers being transported in conditions that do not meet the requisite hygiene and sanitation levels required by law at this time of COVID-19 containment. The CEO of Agbiz, Dr John Purchase, stated the following: "Whilst it cannot be verified when these photos were taken, it is disturbing to note that critical restrictions related to hygiene, sanitation and loading capacity appear to have been flaunted. We urge members of the agricultural and agribusiness sectors, who have been granted a special dispensation to continue working under the present circumstances, to strictly adhere to the *Government Gazette* published regulations and to hold each other accountable to comply with the law."

The majority of enterprises in the agricultural value chain qualify as "essential services" under the regulations published by the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Dr Nkosasana Dlamini-Zuma. The Regulations permit entities involved in the production and sale of essential goods, such as food items, to continue operating under the national lockdown, but subject to strict hygiene, sanitation and social-distancing protocols.

"Farmworkers are the bedrock of the agricultural sector and these men and women are currently risking their safety and health to ensure the nation stays food secure during these trying times. Their safety cannot be compromised as there would be no food security without them," says Dr Purchase. "By not complying, the sector runs the risk of more stringent and onerous measures being introduced."

"We urge the sector to hold itself accountable and prioritise the health and safety of everyone in the food value chain. It is our firm belief that the vast majority of employers in the sector have the best interests of their workers at heart and are working under trying conditions to ensure the nation stays food secure. The exception should not be seen as the rule. "The

Industry Master Plans that are currently being drafted should take this public-private-partnership approach as a way to inclusive sustainable development to heart, with a great sense of urgency. We must first and foremost remember that we must contain this catastrophic coronavirus and that the introduced measures are for our benefit in the long term. So let us respect this lockdown process we are all in together.”

ENQUIRIES:

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