

CFU President's Address Open Session Congress 2018

Honourable Minister, Deputy Ministers, our Guest Speaker Dr Theo De Jager, President of the World Farmers' Organisation, members of the Diplomatic Corps, distinguished guests, sponsors, farmers and friends:

Welcome to you all and thank you for coming.

2018 marks the 75th Anniversary of the Commercial Farmers' Union as a representative body for commercial agriculture in Zimbabwe. It is moot to reflect just what was going on in 1942 when the body pulled together, under one umbrella, the various farmer organisations around at the time. World War II was on and there was a push for the colonies to send both men and food to assist in that effort. A recent report in the local press points out that, shortly after that time, in 1948 Rhodesia actually sent food-aid to a post-war Britain that was struggling to feed itself.

It was in those post-war years that Britain also saw fit to resettle ex-servicemen in its Colonies and this country was the recipient of many, some of whom in later years became household names in agriculture and contributed significantly to the success of organised agriculture. They joined a group whose roots elsewhere had already been severed and many were already second generation. Those post war years led to significant expansion in the economy of the country and its rapid development. The 50s to the 80's saw also the growth in agriculture as land, skills, capital and labour combined effectively to produce, mostly reflected on commercial farms.

At the same time, the impact of a dual agricultural land tenure system strongly manifested itself as increasing population put pressure on land in communal areas and people, living in subsistence, watched across the fences as large tracts of land remained the domain of white farmers. Simmering discontent grew and as Britain progressively gave independence to its colonies, the call for such hit deadlock in Southern Rhodesia. The self-governing colony saw itself differently and resisted the terms set down. At the forefront of that dispute, and amongst its leaders, were prominent farmers. Of note, in those days, civil servants could not be both farmer and state employee as this was seen as a conflict of interest.

The Liberation war that followed caused great suffering to all its citizens and it was with relief in 1980 that Zimbabwe was born. The commendable policy of 'National Reconciliation'

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and with security once more in the land, led the country to a time of renewed hope. Farmers across all sectors focused on a new era of development and the country experienced what Mandy Rukuni referred to as 'a second Agricultural Revolution,' particularly in the small scale sector where there was a dramatic increase in the production of maize and cotton driven by government support. Government also, not only acquired considerable areas of land for resettlement and but there was significant support for infrastructure and inputs provided for those resettlement areas. For a time, all seemed well but the process floundered and stalled, regrettably.

Over time in the post- independence years of the 80's and 90's, the CFU and its members became progressively more productive and prosperous. Although drought was a regular feature, along with the institution of the Farm Irrigation Fund by the government, this programme saw farmers push hard to mitigate the drought risk with the introduction of irrigation and the building of many dams. Government support for this saw farming businesses grow and as external markets opened up, many farms diversified and sectors such as horticulture thrived.

But all was not well and commercial farmers, confident in their economic contribution to the national economy became detached from the harsh realities of the rural communities where the vast majority of the country's population continued to live and subsist. Indeed, the simmering pain of loss of land had never gone away and whilst only one of a raft of causes of the liberation struggle, land became the top item on the balance sheet of discontent for many.

In 1998, efforts were made to resolve this unsuccessfully with international engagement with the UNDP and others. The CFU proffered proposals under ZIJIRI but these were rejected and in 2000, the precipitous introduction of the fast-track land reform left the country ill-prepared for the social, political and economic impact.

At the height of the CFU's influence, it employed over 150 professional, technical and support staff, with offices in all regions. There were 14 Commodity Associations with over 4,500 affiliated members whose levies and licence fees made the organisation a formidable one – formidable and self-assured because of its economic contribution to the country both in terms of domestic and foreign revenue. Is it any wonder that we were a target when the

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entrenched advantages of its largely white members had grown so far ahead of the bulk of the population?

For the CFU and its members, the past 18 years has indeed turned that tide and we emerge a different group, more aware of the painful reality that has divided the country – more aware of the real need to take stock and focus not so much on ourselves but on the good of ALL the country. We have lost and learned and become more Zimbabwean in the process. Those ties that once made our forefathers settlers are long gone. The ties that bind us now are those of the birth of the Second Republic and we stand ready to work hard in organised agriculture to restore and extend productivity to the country's farmland and to engage with government in finding solutions to the outstanding issues of compensation and to support its efforts to bring the necessary skills, capital and investment onto the land so as to improve the livelihoods of many in the nation.

Today marks a new era for us as CFU as we pass our 75th Anniversary. We pay tribute to the efforts of past members who worked hard to build this country and we are saddened by the trauma that the process of change has witnessed and would note that a significant number of those affected purchased their farms long after independence, many with certificates of no present interest. None-the-less, we want to be a part of the new Zimbabwe and we want to assist in a process that creates space for all who want to be involved in agriculture and that simultaneously sees all resettled farmers transition from being dependent on the State, to being the pillars of the country's recovery through a transfer of skills and the necessary components of secure land access that attracts long term investment.

As with any business, commercial agriculture is subject to the laws of economics; in the past many failed and moved on whilst others succeeded and filled the space. It is also now time for a shake-down on the land that encourages genuine farmers to manage and husband it productively and sustainably. We do not wish to dictate to government how we feel that should be done. Rather we would prefer to work together without fear or favour as Zimbabweans intent on building a better future in a transparent accountable and competitive environment.

Our Union is committed to doing this alongside other farmer organisations; we acknowledge the leadership and membership of our sister Unions here present and reaffirm our

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commitment to work with them for the good of all farmers. We hope with a vibrant young and inclusive membership, leveraged by the experience of the old and the advantages of new innovations, technology and creative ideas we can be a part of the Second Republic's ascendancy to the regional and global stature this country deserves.

We can do this if we embrace new technology on land and soil through diversification with new crops such as hemp; by engaging and training the youth. There are so many on-going issues that relate to the competitiveness of our crops and livestock products. Matters such as pest and disease control and infrastructure and utilities and labour laws, financial services, land tenure and the ease of doing business etc. For now, let's leave these to the side-lines where engagement on a more focused level with joint farmer advocacy can help find solutions.

In closing, we commend the government on the determined efforts to boost farm productivity which in the last two seasons has seen the country significantly reduce the need to import our staple maize and also record tobacco production. We hope that long term sustainable ways of financing production and development can be implemented and a policy environment introduced that truly empowers all farmers including our members and which promotes rapid and sustained short , medium and long term agricultural investment.

With regard to the compensation issue we are greatly encouraged by His Excellency Pres. Mnangagwa's statement made at Davos and we as a Union are willing to do all in our power to facilitate the process, as envisaged in his statement. We are convinced that the settling of this issue will be one of the major keys that unlock the door to the International assistance that we so desperately need to help our economy recover.

To the International Community we say: with your support and investment, help Zimbabwe again become a hub of business and a full and prosperous member of the global community

To Britain in particular: help us restore our special relationship and our re admittance as a member of the Commonwealth

To Business Partners we say: let's make Zimbabwe great

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To our fellow Farmers' Unions: Let us work together to bring stability to organised Agriculture and provide a powerful and coherent voice for farmers on matters of policy and advocacy

To The Young we say: stay committed and involve yourselves in organised agriculture, we welcome your membership, you are the future

To The old we say: thanks for your enduring support, share your knowledge and experience and assist and encourage Zimbabwe to work out its recovery as it simultaneously seeks ways to resolve the issues of compensation bolstered by a thriving economy driven by organised agriculture.

God bless and thank you.

Peter Steyl

27th September 2018