**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 2 / NW 2E**

**MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES:**

**Mrs C Dudley (ACDP) to ask the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:**

**QUESTION:**

(1) Whether the Government is concerned about the increasing wheat consumption linked to population growth and increasing urbanisation, as local production is continuing to decrease while imports increase annually;

(2)does the Government intend to implement any measures to assist technically with the production of wheat to improve the profit margins and outputs to make wheat a viable crop to farm; if not; how does he intend reversing this situation in which the country will have to import at least 1,8 million tons this year to meet the local demand; if so, what are the relevant details? **NW2E**

**REPLY:**

1. The Department of Agriculture, Forestry & Fisheries is concerned about local wheat production since wheat is the second most important grain crop produced in South Africa (after maize). Local production averages 2.3 million tons which is far below the levels of consumption which is provided for through importation of approximately 1.7 million tons per annum.
2. Wheat farming in South Africa is confronted by high production cost, fluctuating commodity prices, climate change, outbreaks of pests and diseases and many other challenges. The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries supports wheat producers with technical advice which includes cultivar choice, production site selection, soil preparation, cultivation practices, pest and disease control measures, harvesting, as well as postharvest practices. The Agricultural Research Council (ARC) is also conducting breeding programmes for wheat. These programmes are aimed at developing appropriate and high yielding cultivars. There is also more focus placed on developing cultivars that are drought tolerant as well as those that are pest and disease resistant.

Private and public sector stakeholders are also working with government to increase productivity and competitiveness of the wheat industry. One such initiative is the Wheat Breeding Platform which aims to serve as a pre-breeding facility which develop suitable varieties at a rapid pace which are then available to industry for further targeted breeding.

In addition, a statutory levy was introduced to provide research and technology development funding for open pollinated cultivars. This will also encourage seed growers to make the latest breeding material available to South African farmers.