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## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

**TO: ALL MEDIA**  
**DATE: 13 SEPTEMBER 2024**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **ENVIRONMENT, AGRICULTURE & RURAL DEVELOPMENT (EARD) COMMITTEE CONDUCTS OVERSIGHT VISIT AT BEKKERSDAL AGRI PARK**

The Gauteng Provincial Legislature's Environment, Agriculture & Rural Development (EARD) Portfolio Committee, chaired by Honourable Jaco Mulder, recently visited the Bekkersdal Agri Park in Westonaria. This visit underscores the committee's dedication to overseeing and enhancing the support provided to subsistence and emerging farmers in the region.

The Committee commended the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) for its initiatives in supporting the 14 farmers at the Agri Park. Noteworthy efforts include the installation of a 30kva solar energy system, which ensures a consistent power supply despite load reductions, and the deployment of a weather station to aid in agricultural planning. Additionally, GDARD has contributed 20 new tunnels to boost agricultural productivity.

A significant highlight of the visit was the committee's recognition of GDARD's support for the Voice Out Deaf Cooperative, which is composed of People with Disabilities (PwDs). Ms Matebogo Victoria, the cooperative's leader and an entrepreneur who is deaf, employs other deaf individuals to work in her ten tunnels. Her work underscores the importance of providing job opportunities to marginalized groups.

The committee advocates for inclusive strategies to tackle food insecurity, emphasizing the need to integrate women, youth and PwDs into comprehensive solutions for hunger

and employment challenges. Furthermore, the committee supports the Agri Park's collaboration with TVET colleges in the region, where students gain hands-on experience in vegetable production, thus positioning the Agri Park as a hub of agricultural innovation. Despite these advancements, challenges remain, including crime, limited water access, insufficient agricultural tools, and difficulties in accessing markets.

The committee urges GDARD to address these issues by for instance seeking sponsorships and partnering with corporate entities. Such measures are crucial for the Agri Park to serve as a model of agricultural excellence in the region.

**ISSUED BY THE GPL COMMUNICATIONS UNIT ON BEHALF OF THE  
CHAIRPERSON OF THE ENVIRONMENT, AGRICULTURE & RURAL  
DEVELOPMENT (EARD) PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE, HONOURABLE JACO  
MULDER.**

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