



POOR, BLACK CAPE FLATS FARMERS FACE EVICTION THREAT

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“IS IT A CRIME TO HELP OURSELVES?” ASKS THE ITHEMBA FARMERS ASSOCIATION

AN APPEAL TO NEW PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT NOT TO DESTROY LIVELIHOODS OF THE POOR

The iThemba Farmers Association consists of 300 poor, black households that have been surviving for as long as 25 years by keeping livestock and growing crops on a flood-prone, sandy piece of land between Khayelitsha and Eersteriver. Now they face a catastrophic attack on their already precarious livelihoods. The provincial department of housing, which owns the land, have approached the courts for an order to evict these farmers from the land.

“We don’t have the money to go to court,” said Craig Jonkers, chairperson of the iThemba Small Farmers Association. “All we can do is call on government to change their minds and on the public to support our fight. We are poor and government is not giving us jobs, so we try to help ourselves. Now they want to take everything away.”

In court documents the housing department has stated that the land is earmarked for ‘mixed’ housing. The farmers have questioned the suitability of the land for this purpose as it is flood-prone wetlands and is zoned as agricultural land.

According to Ricardo Jacobs of the Surplus People Project, an NGO supporting the farmers, the arguments of the housing department is totally unacceptable. “No one knows of these plans for housing. When will they learn that housing developments without proper consultation fail, like it failed in Delft, Langa and Crossroads? Government has no excuse to attack the poor like this.”