

Maize theft in Free State raises serious concern

By Annelie Coleman | 15 April 2024 | 7:09 pm

The large-scale theft of maize in the Free State is being carried out by highly organised crime syndicates, resulting in severe losses for maize producers so far this year. This is according to Dr Jane Buys, Free State Agriculture's (FSA) safety risk analyst.



Highly organized crime syndicates are stealing maize from Free State farms, causing major losses for farmers.

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She described maize theft as a crime of greed, not a crime of need. Buys told *Farmer's Weekly* that thousands of maize cobs had been stolen so far in the 2024 maize production season.

"If one considers that the cobs are usually carted away in bags that can hold up to 150 cobs, the extent of the crime becomes clear. Although difficult to quantify, we can safely assume that hundreds of bags of maize are lost to producers. The crime

occurs all over the province, but the districts of Allanridge, Odendaalsrus and Wolwehoek near Sasolburg are particularly hard hit," Buys said.

Rudi Jansen van Vuuren, FSA safety representative in the Allanridge/Odendaalsrus area, pointed out that some farmers spent as much as R200 000 monthly on security guards to patrol fields.

"We are extremely worried about the fact that the suspects are operating in increasingly bigger groups. We've come across cases where taxis drop off five groups of between eight and 15 people in one area, and pick them up after the crime has been committed. The criminals simply overpower the security guards and rob them of their equipment. The guards are often assaulted as well," he added.

According to Buys, this crime has a direct impact on the overheads of a maize production concern.

"Don't be mistaken, the robbers are extremely well organised and have access to very lucrative markets for the stolen maize. This is not limited to dried maize, but maize on the cob as well," she said.

The situation is exacerbated by the fact that producers farming on the border between the Free State and Lesotho, in areas such as Fouriesburg, are increasingly targeted by maize thieves from that country crossing the border to steal maize.

"The impact and extent of this type of crime in the area indicates that it is taking place in an organised manner and that it should be classified as an organised crime," said Buys.