

SA farmers confident local business will support their 'RDP trek' into Africa

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By BRONWYN WILKINSON

The wheels of a scheme for South African farmers to trek into Africa have started rolling, and the farmers are confident they will get backing for their plan from the South African business sector.

Transvaal Agricultural Union president Dries Bruwer said the leaders of the scheme had established a forum to deal with the logistics of their move.

The South African Chamber for Agriculture in Africa (Saca) was set up last weekend while a Mozambican delegation was in South Africa to finalise the legalities of the proposal.

The agreement between the South African farmers and their Mozambican hosts is to be sent to lawyers acting for the department of foreign affairs this week to be finalised.

Bruwer confirmed that many of the inquiries he had received were from businessmen interested in helping the farmers.

"The businessmen know our economy won't survive if we don't establish some kind of RDP in southern Africa," said Bruwer.

Members of the South African Foreign Trade Organisation (Safto)

indicated the plan was the subject of much discussion, although business had not yet taken a formal decision to back the farmers.

"We are getting plenty of interest and people are very positive. It is likely that if the plan works, it will boost our foreign trade in the long run. At least it will keep people fed," said one Safto representative.

Several members of businesses with interests in trade links between South Africa and the rest of Africa were enthusiastic about the farmers' plan. They said they were waiting for the scheme to be ratified before turning their interest into financial backing.

Bruwer said South African and Mozambican delegations had spent last weekend settling their agreement. A formal document will be drawn up by the lawyers and signed by the two governments.

The plan to trek into Africa emerged at the hand of President Nelson Mandela, who has appointed Freedom Front leader General Constand Viljoen as his emissary to Africa. Viljoen, Bruwer and agricultural experts have already visited Mozambique, Angola and Zaire.

Some farmers are due to go to Mozambique to begin grain farming next month.