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## Small Africa Farmers seen Vulnerable to Climate Change

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SOUTH AFRICA: October 18, 2005

**JOHANNESBURG - Small farmers in Africa will be hardest hit by climate change and will have to switch crops and livestock to adapt, South Africa's environment minister said on Monday.**

"It is small scale agriculture and rural farmers who will be hardest hit -- especially because they are not capital intensive," Marthinus van Schalkwyk said at the start of a national conference on climate change.

"As climate change threatens our herds and crops with changes in rainfall patterns and temperature ranges, our farmers will either be forced off their land or they must stand ready with new management strategies," he said.

Food security is a huge regional issue at the moment with around 12 million rural dwellers in southern Africa in need of food aid to see them through to the April harvest. Almost all of these people are poor, small-scale farmers.

A raging AIDS pandemic that is killing off rural workers is seen as a key reason for the food shortages but erratic rainfall during the last growing season is the other culprit - and more regional droughts are seen because of climate change associated with the emission of so-called greenhouse gases.

### WHEN GLOBAL PATTERNS SHIFT

"Why do our crops fail and our rivers run dry more often? Although there are many variables that influence weather in the short term, when global patterns shift over many years it is climate change that emerges," van Schalkwyk said.

Africa needed to begin switching crops now to be prepared, he said. The staple maize crop grown in much of southern Africa, for example, is not very resistant to harsh drought conditions.

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"We will need more resistant crops and animal varieties, more sustainable land management practices, and better support for farmers," van Schalkwyk said.

"If the choice is between losing a farm or switching crops - say from dairy to meat production, or from apples to olives and grapes -- then these decisions we must begin to address today," he said.

The four-day conference will explore a host of issues ranging from climate change policy in South Africa to the ability of species to adapt to changing weather patterns.

Africa is the world's poorest region and emits less greenhouse gases than any other inhabited continent.

Some analysts warn that Africa could suffer the most from climate change, with changing weather patterns exacerbating crop yields in regions already vulnerable to boom and bust cycles of plenty and drought.

"I hope that there is ongoing recognition that the ecological footprint of the poor is tiny compared to the massive consumption patterns of the developed world," South Africa's Science and Technology Minister Mosibudi Mangena said.

"This creates special obligations for the developed world to partner with the developing world to find sustainable solutions for the future," Mangena told the conference.

Story by Ed Stoddard

REUTERS NEWS SERVICE



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