

RESEARCH

Food security 'low on national agenda'

THE latest research indicated that about 54% of South African households still experienced either hunger or the risk of hunger, the Centre of Excellence in Food Security said.

Despite this, food security received only two passing references in the State of the Nation Address two weeks ago and not a single mention in Finance Minister Tito Mboweni's Budget speech on Wednesday, said professor Julian May (University of the Western Cape), Dr Jane Battersby (University of Cape Town), Prof Rina Swart (University of the Western Cape) and Dr Bruno Losch (GovInn Centre, University of the Western Cape).

The four are executive and research members of the centre, which is hosted by UWC and the University of Pretoria.

Mboweni announced that he would allocate R1.8 billion for the implementation of 262 priority land-reform projects over the next three years and had set aside R3.7bn to help emerging farmers to acquire land to farm. He also increased the sugar tax on soft

drinks, "but perhaps more as a revenue raising measure than an attempt to improve the health of South Africans", said the academics.

"Necessary as these measures are, they are not enough. Food security is not merely a function of food production. In fact, South Africa already does well in this regard. Our supermarket and spaza shop shelves are well stocked, albeit often with foods that (cause obesity), sometimes with foods that are counterfeit, and, in 2017/18, with food that was laced with listeria.

"But we are failing at making sure that more, if not all, of our households are able to put enough of that food on their tables. This food must be safe, nutritious and affordable, too."

The outcome of a production-focused approach to food security was that the government was being myopic in its planning, they said.

Certain immediate steps needed to be taken to ensure nutritional food security. This included zero VAT on foods such as peanut butter.

"We had hoped, in announcing his Budget, that the minister would increase funds for drought relief and flood damage to the farming sector in anticipation of future impact of climate change. That he would set funds aside to improve the implementation of food safety regulation. That funding be increased for research and innovation in the food production, processing and distribution sectors, some of which would be from the 4th Industrial Revolution that was mentioned in Sona," they said.

"And most importantly, we would like to see the child support grant (CSG) increased to at least R550 per month – the cost of securing a basic but nutritionally complete diet for a child between the ages of 3 and 9 years; instead, the minister announced increases of 5% (from the current R400 to R420 in April) and a further 2.5% (to R430) in October. The CSG is still the most important intervention to reduce the food insecurity of children." |

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