To: All media and government communications
From: Communications division
Subject: Urgent media release
Date: October 27, 2008

No proposal from Mr Marr

The Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture would like to put the record straight and make it categorically clear that it supports the conservation agriculture (CA) or no-tillage concept and it is disputing reported statements that government has “shown no interest” in the concept.

A Stutterheim-based agronomist reportedly told journalists that he and his wife have “tried to sell the idea to various government departments, but none had shown interest” and since then the media has undated our department with queries and this is our response.

The Department has started with the CA concept in the Amahlathi region during the 2003/2004 and examples are a farmer (Mr Sokupa) in Ndakana and the Keiskammahoek irrigation scheme in Zanyokwe and in total 313 has within Amahlathi were cultivated using the CA method.

During 2005, the Amahlathi office was approached by a local medical doctor and assistance was required to establish a garden for HIV patients at the local hospital; an Extension Officer was availed to give the necessary CA training and demonstration to establish the garden at the local hospital.

Coming back to Mr Marr’s claims;

He visited the Amahlathi offices on February 25, 2008 citing that he wanted to assist some of the Siyazondla Homestead Gardens projects and he was requested to forward a written proposal to the manager but that has never happened.

During the first week of March 2008, Mr Marr informed the Amahlathi office that he has identified a piece of land where he would like to do minimum till demonstrations for emergent farmers and extension staff.
He wanted the following assistance from the office; inputs e.g. seed and fertiliser, labour and mentor fee.

Mr. Marr was informed that we do not have any budget to pay him a mentorship fee and the Siyazondla program does not make provision for appointment of mentors or for appointment of labourers – this is the responsibility of the beneficiaries.

The Department has and still is in the process to train Extension staff in conservation Agricultural methods.

Within the Amahlathi office officials attended an intensive training session of 6 weeks and the training is in conjunction with the CAT (Conservation Agricultural Trust) based at Fort Hare.

The Department has therefore made an investment in these officials with this training and it will be better to use our own staff to do the training for our farmers than to pay a mentor to do the implementation of this already known concept.

The information Mr. Marr has could be obtained free of charge from Fort Hare.

Amahlathi office is also in the fortunate position to have the Massive Food Co-ordinator for Amathole in the local office.

One of the main objectives of the Massive Food is to promote conservation agriculture and the Massive Food Co-ordinator is very well equipped to give the necessary advice and training on conservation agriculture to our farmers.

The conservation agriculture (minimum till) is a very valuable and cost effective method of farming and this can bear successful fruits if all stakeholders work together, provided it is done properly.

We hope that this gives you the information you require and should you need more explanation on CA and the department’s progress in implementing it, please do not hesitate but attend a presentation in Dohne on Thursday (October 30) where a senior official will take report on successes.

Issued by Senior Communications Officer, Thozi Manyisana – contact; 040 609 3965 or 073 2633 754