

SA farmers in Libya land deal

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Pretoria - South Africa's largest farmers' union expects to conclude a multimillion hectare farmland deal with the Republic of Congo and agree on a smaller land lease with Libya next month, its deputy president said.

Theo de Jager, deputy president of farmers' grouping AgriSA said on Wednesday the union expected to finalise its 10 million hectare deal with the Republic of Congo in mid October.

"The minister of agriculture of the Congo Republic will visit us from 14-22 October to finalise the agreement," De Jager told an agriculture conference.

The deal, one of the biggest land agreements on the continent and part of Congo's plan to improve food security, would allow South African farmers to lease the land for up to 105 years to grow maize, soya beans as well as for poultry and dairy.

De Jager said the union had received offers of farmland from several other African countries and expected to sign a 35 000ha land deal with the Libyan government in October.

"We'll be leaving for Libya in the next three weeks to finalise the deal," De Jager told reporters.

Property protection

"The agreement would mainly be to grow grapes and olives."

He said the union will finalise details about investment and property protection agreements with the Libyan government during the trip.

South Africa has one of the most developed agriculture sectors on the continent and its farmers are looking to expand into other countries.

They are joined in the scramble for land by rivals from Italy, France, Turkey, China and Israel.

"We're thinking about this as an investment. It's not a matter of negativity about South Africa in the least ... it's simply that we are positive about the rest of Africa," De Jager said.

Analysts point to potentially huge rewards in investing in farmland as the world population grows, while many see climate change and biofuels choking off the supply of arable land.

Advocates of such land deals say they can act as a motor for development of the farm sectors of poor countries, while critics warn of a land grab to the detriment of local farmers.