

Small businesses hit by Botswana government's vegetable imports ban

The vegetable imports ban implemented by the government of Botswana has thrown supply and demand off balance. The nation's small businesses are bearing the brunt of it. The ban is expected to protect local vegetable farmers, improve Botswana's food security and reduce the country's import bill and grow local production. However, there have been growing pains.

According to small scale traders, the big chains have sown up the limited vegetable supply market, shutting out small green grocers. With most vegetable farmers having signed up their produce to big supermarkets, small businesses are facing up to this harsh new reality.

A number of Botswana traders and representatives of the small-scale traders who have petitioned the Office of the President mentioned how scores of their colleagues have gone out of business as a result of the policy. They further claimed that the Office of the President and the Ministry of Agriculture are turning a deaf ear to their complaints.

"The shortage is experienced mostly on potatoes, watermelon, maize, different types of onions and lettuce. We kindly request that the restrictions on vegetable importation be lifted for a short period, as this has affected a lot of families that live off proceeds from small businesses," one trader said.

Another group of Botswana traders which identified itself as Dipilara Traders Association, also petitioned Masisi's Office and the Ministry of Agriculture. While they appreciated the government's intention to empower the value chains and the citizens by ensuring that the local market is protected, they requested the government to consider - among other things- that the current vegetable producers do not meet the demand for most of the vegetables outlined in the list of restricted commodities.

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