

### Is there any chance of claims being reopened?

Anything can happen. But this is a matter for parliament to decide, not the commission. Our position has always been that this should not be encouraged. It is in the national interest to wrap this matter up. Our new democracy was founded on the principles of peace and reconciliation. Reopening claims is like revisiting Codesa – you are opening old wounds. We can't place the country's farmers and landowners in perpetual uncertainty. It would act as a disincentive to production.

### Farmers say the commission has gazetted claims that weren't lodged by the 1998 cutoff date. Is this possible?

We should be fired for doing that. We would not be complying with the act. We have rejected many late claims, that's why we are facing pressure to reopen claims.

This matter stems from a misunderstanding farmers had about the claims process. We only gazette claims once they are validated. We also consolidate claims when the same community is claiming many farms. Initially, we had over 3 000 claims that were consolidated into a total of 1 666. That number has never changed. There were also database problems that have now been ironed out. There were claims that were not captured on our system and allocated reference numbers.

### How widespread is fraud in your department?

There was an official dismissed a few years ago for trying to defraud a claimant. But as far as I know, there is no one under investigation. Most fraud cases we get are from people trying to collect restitution money with fake IDs. However, to do this they must have help from officials, probably in Home Affairs.

### What measures are in place to prevent fraud?

The greatest area of risk is valuations. This could operate on the level of valuer and landowner, valuer and claimant communities and in the relationship officials have with all three. To deal with this risk we evaluate the valuer's report. It's like other similar valuations get information from banks about property prices in certain areas, or ask the council of valuers to look at the report.

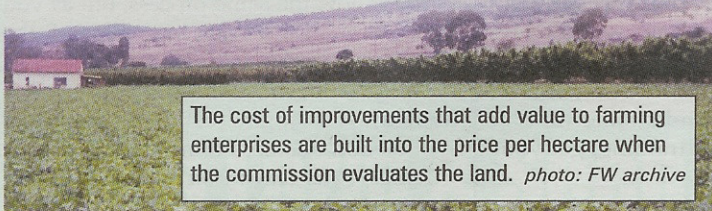
### Farmers complain they are being sidelined in the land claims process, that their offers to share expertise and experience are rebuffed.

I don't think there's substance to that allegation. If we weren't open to cooperation, we wouldn't have strategic partnerships, share equity schemes and lease-back plans. We recognise previous and new owners are both critical to the success of agriculture in this country. They form part of the same economic unit. White farmers face pressures from the global economy, and new owners will face greater pressures.

When we hand over land, economic realities kick in. Our role is to create a conducive environment for them to cooperate meaningfully. The former owners can help the new owners get up to speed in modern technology and should be given the opportunity to invest profitably in the second economy.

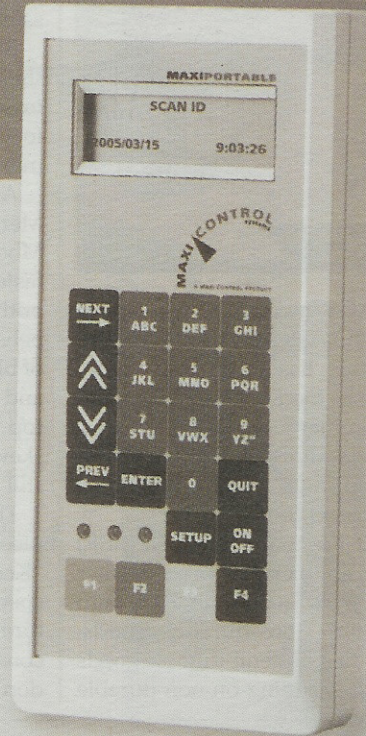
You can't put the obligation on white farmers to commit to an act of charity. It must make business sense. Production and posturing don't go together.

• Contact the Gauteng Land Claims Commission on (012) 310 6500. **FW**



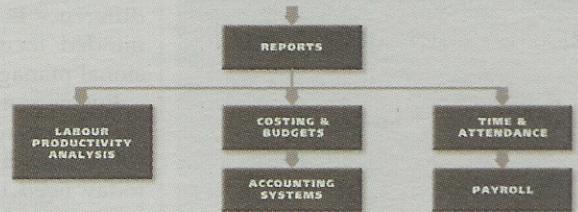
The cost of improvements that add value to farming enterprises are built into the price per hectare when the commission evaluates the land. photo: FW archive

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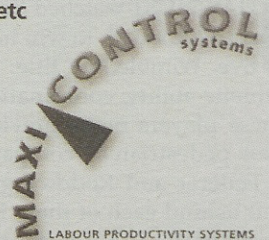


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