



Researchers say that arid- and semi arid regions, such as the Sandveld in the Western Cape – one of South Africa's top potato and seed potato producing areas – are likely to be severely affected by climate change.

Denene Erasmus

POTATOES

Sandveld exposed to climate change

SOUTHERN AFRICA IS LIKELY TO BE SEVERELY AFFECTED BY climate change, especially in arid- and semi-arid regions, such as the Sandveld in the Western Cape, one of South Africa's top potato and seed potato producing areas, warned Dr Emma Archer of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research at the 12th annual Seed Potato Growers' Forum in Cape Town.

She was part of a research team who studied the possible implications of climate change for potato farming in the Sandveld.

"The findings included a high likelihood of reduced winter rainfall and warmer monthly average minimum and maximum temperatures, resulting in increased heat," she explained.

"Of particular concern for potato farming in this area are the findings indicating reduced groundwater recharge under future climate change," added Dr Archer. "This complicates an already challenging environment for commercial agriculture."

'Stakeholders should devise multi-disciplinary actions to mitigate the effects of climate change.'

According to another study, weather extremes and drier conditions might increase plant stress, making the plants more susceptible to attacks by pests and pathogens, said Dr Jacque van der Waals of the University of Pretoria.

But Prof Roland Schulze from the University of KwaZulu-Natal said farmers will need to adapt to the changes in climate, and realise geographical shifts may open up new areas to grow certain crops.

"We have to look not only at primary agriculture, but also at the whole value chain and then assess what changes can be made," he added.

Prof Schulze also said government and the private sector should invest more in South Africa's scientific capacity because research will play an integral part in learning how best to adapt to possible changes in climate. He suggested stakeholders from different sectors work together and devise multi-disciplinary actions to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Current projections have South Africa's temperature increasing by 2°C within 40 years, and by as much as 6°C within the next 80 years if people do not stop pumping carbon dioxide into the atmosphere at the current rate, he said. – Denene Erasmus