

Hempcrete: Afrimat looks to rapidly grow its new hemp business with local suppliers | News24 | Nick Hedley | 13 Mar 2023

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- **JSE-listed construction, mining and building materials group Afrimat is looking to scale up its hemp consumption, which can be used as a building material.**
- **President Cyril Ramaphosa said in February that efforts will be made to ensure traditional communities benefit from legalisation of hemp and dagga.**
- **Turning to local suppliers will significantly reduce costs, but 'hempcrete' will likely remain about 15-20% more expensive than cement.**

JSE-listed Afrimat is looking to develop a local hemp supplier base as it prepares to scale up a fledgling business unit that uses the plant as a building material.

Launched in mid-2021, Afrimat Hemp has relied on imports from the UK and France for its pilot projects in South Africa and neighbouring countries.

– though domestic supply remains limited for the time being, says Boshoff Muller, co-founder of Afrimat Hemp, which was one of the first companies to receive a hemp permit from the department of agriculture, land reform and rural development.

“There’s lots of excitement and opportunity in hemp, and some local material is coming online, but it’s not enough for us yet,” Muller tells News24. “Hopefully in 2024 we’ll see larger volumes coming online.”

Hemp and cannabis have long been grown in rural parts of the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga, and President Cyril Ramaphosa has said government is working to ensure that these communities benefit from legalisation.

Government will allow “outdoor cultivation and collection of harvests from traditional farmers”, Ramaphosa said in February.

Boshoff says Afrimat Hemp aims to work with commercial farmers as well as community cooperatives – where small-scale growers aggregate their output.

“We’re working with a few hemp-licensed NGOs in rural communities, which already have knowledge in this space and can probably come online faster than commercial farms.”

Afrimat’s “hempcrete” product is not intended to replace traditional materials such as steel and cement in the construction of a building’s substructure and frame. Rather, hemp is used as the infill material that provides insulation.