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Zimbabwe's Farm Deadline Lapses

By Staff Reporter

HARARE — The last remaining white farmers in Zimbabwe are resisting a government deadline for them to leave their land. Many of the 400 farmers had until the weekend to hand properties over to new black owners or face prosecution.

But the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) has advised members to resist - saying arrest and prosecution is their only way of getting a hearing in court.

Zimbabwe's food production has plummeted since land reforms that saw thousands of white-owned farms seized.

A government deadline for almost all the remaining farms to be transferred lapsed on Saturday.

But CFU official Emily Crookes said the farmers hoped they would be allowed to stay on to harvest their crops - as President Robert Mugabe has promised.

"Some farmers are still a bit anxious about what the future is going to be," she told AFP news agency.

Sugar farmers contacted by the BBC said they expected arrests to begin on Monday.

Zimbabwe, once the breadbasket of southern Africa, has had to rely on food imports since the seizure of white-owned farms began seven years ago.

President Robert Mugabe launched the programme with the aim of redressing economic imbalances left over from British colonial rule.

But critics say the often violent campaign has devastated Zimbabwe's agriculture-based economy, leading to massive food shortages.

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