

Limited funding, access to land constraining young farmers

Limited access to funding and land, including bureaucracy, are among the key challenges facing young people in the agricultural sector. These issues were raised on Monday, 14 June, by young farmers during a webinar on the role of youth in agriculture.



Image source: Gallo/Getty

The Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), hosted the webinar which aimed to highlight the role that young people must play in the agricultural sector, and address issues of land reform and opportunities available for young people in terms of access to land, finance and access to markets.

The webinar also aimed to educate young people about the sector, giving senior officials from the department an opportunity to share existing government programmes to support young people in the sector.



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Eradicating unemployment

A crop and livestock farmer from the Free State, Nkosana Mtambo, said while he wants to grow as a farmer, the small land he currently has is restricting him.

“The channels of getting land must be looked into because you have to get land with certain requirements, which some of us don’t have.

“We also struggle to get hold of officials within the provincial offices, and there must be a formula of communication within our agricultural sectors,” Mtambo said.

He insists that agriculture is the solution to unemployment in South Africa.

“We [farmers] are the people that can eradicate unemployment. If we can push hashtags like ‘one household, one food garden’, and if we bring back agriculture at schools at primary level, it will go a long way because agriculture is the solution,” Mtambo said.

He also challenged young farmers to be innovative.

“Funding is a need for young farmers, but one challenge is that you get funded once in a lifetime, whilst in farming, you need it consistently because farming is cyclical,” Mtambo said.



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Echoing Mtambo’s sentiments, poultry farmer Kamohlele Bombe, 28, emphasised the need for young farmers to be innovative and come up with ways that can make farming easy and attractive.

“We need to be innovative. If you are an IT specialist, you can come up with an app to help young people to farm. We just need to be creative so that when we approach government [we have something to show], which makes things easier.... There are so many things that can be done,” said Bombe.

Bombe commended the initiative of AgriParks, saying they help young people who want to get into agriculture but don’t have land.

“It’s a great platform for small-scale farmers to make mistakes and learn from that. I was part of the AgriParks for three years, and I was allocated a hectare,” Bombe said.

An Agri-park is a networked innovation system of agro-production, processing, logistics, marketing, training and extension services, located in a district municipality. As a network, it enables a market-driven combination and integration of various agricultural activities, and rural transformation services.

Bombe advised small-scale farmers to start small and focus on supplying small businesses like local butcheries and bakeries within their areas, as opposed to worrying about big retail shops.



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Assisting young farmers

DALRRD minister Thoko Didiza said government must take criticism to heart as it tries to work with the new generation of farmers to assist them to take the lead in the agricultural sector going forward.

Didiza said the sector must continue to attract more young people, as “the generation of the current producers is becoming more mature, and soon will be exiting the system”.

“How do we ensure that our young people take over, learning from the old, but bringing in the new knowledge and innovation? For us as government, it’s important that we listen more and hear what it is that young people are saying to us in terms of this sector, and how can we plug in to ensure that we resolve and provide solutions to enable them to actually succeed,” Didiza said.

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