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AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEC INTRODUCES ASSISTANT AGRICULTURAL PRACTITIONERS AND NEWLY APPOINTED GRADUATES

The KwaZulu-Natal MEC for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs. Thembeni kaMadlopha-Mthethwa, has pledged to involve more young people in agricultural activities, saying that the sector is adapting to modern methods favoured by the youth. This commitment was made as the MEC introduced 133 young people to the unemployed agricultural graduate programme (UAGYP) and 109 assistant agricultural practitioners (AAP) at Mandeni's Sibusisiwe Community Hall, on 31 March 2026. Both programmes are in line with the mandate issued by the MEC, to her departmental officials to prioritise young people, including those with disabilities and women, in their initiatives.

The UAGY programme aims to empower unemployed agricultural graduates with on-the-job entrepreneurial skills, contribute to increased food production, and bridge the gap of aging producers.

Meanwhile extension services play a vital role in South Africa's agricultural sector, focusing on boosting productivity, ensuring food security, and improving rural livelihoods. During the department's Strategic Planning Session earlier this month, kaMadlopha-Mthethwa stressed the focus on serving young people in agriculture this year. "We have dedicated 2026 to supporting our youth engaged in agriculture, and I am pleased that we are fulfilling our promises today. These two programmes form part of many youth initiatives that show that agriculture as an important sector to transform young people's lives for the better," she said.

"The programme for Assistant Agricultural Practitioners is crucial, as South Africa severely lacks extension officers. Currently, they advise over 1,700 people instead of the ideal 250 farmers per person," kaMadlopha-Mthethwa added.

According to the General Household Survey Report of 2025, the unemployment rate among youth in Quarter Four of 2025 was 43 percent, with 10.3 percent of unemployed young people between 15 and 34 years old. The number of unemployed graduates has doubled since 2008.

"Without claiming to be the solution or panacea and without overpromising more than the Department of Agriculture can deliver, we are fulfilling a commitment to finding deployments for our unemployed graduates and employment for extension assistants," kaMadlopha-Mthethwa concluded.



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All 242 beneficiaries of the two programmes have been deployed across all 11 districts in the province.