



MEDIA STATEMENT

DATE: 24 June 2022

MEC SITHOLE-MOLOI LAUNCHES THE UNEMPLOYED AGRICULTURAL GRADUATES PROGRAMME

The KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Agriculture and Rural Development Mrs. Bongiwe Sithole-Moloi has called on the agricultural sector to spearhead efforts to reduce the unemployment rate among the youth with agricultural qualifications.

She was speaking during the launch of the Unemployed Agricultural Graduates Programme at Ntathakusa Citrus Farm in Eshowe on 24 June 2022 where she met graduates who are already placed in the workforce following the intervention of the programme.

“We all know how our young people struggle in the South African labour market. The official overall unemployment rate in the 4th quarter of 2021 was 35,3%. This rate was 46,3% among young people aged 15-34 years. This implies that almost one in every two young people in the labour force did not have a job in the last quarter of 2021,” she said.

She said young people carry a burden of unemployment as they account for 59,5% of the total number of unemployed persons in South Africa.

Sithole-Moloi said it is concerning that the youth, those aged between 15–24 years are more vulnerable in the labour market with an unemployment rate of over 63%.

The KZN DARD Unemployed Agricultural Graduates portal is part of the Department’s interventions in efforts to rescue the youth from the worrying unemployment figures.

“We, as a Department, want to ensure that this portal becomes a more valuable tool/network for opportunities and information to unemployed graduates, even linking them with sector role-players towards employability within the entire agricultural value chain,” she said.

She said the Department is hard at work in order to change the portal into a key tool in empowering young agriculturalists towards entrepreneurship and employability in the agricultural sector.

The KZN Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is currently planning a new programme which allows for graduates who have exited the on-farm placement programme to apply for opportunities to become incubators/instructors/coaches on DARD-funded projects or identified small to medium-scale enterprises.

Sibusiso Gumede, who is the owner of Ntathakusa Citrus Farm and mentors two unemployed graduates, said the programme is quite helpful in adding value in the farm.

“It helps a lot because these young graduates are people who are energetic and willing to work. The youth gets the valuable practical experience and they get the chance to be employable once they complete the programme. I have noticed that in the first year of mentorship they are usually not clued up about how the farm operates. It is the second year when they show signs of progress and knowledge. Unfortunately, that is the final year of the programme. I wish the programme could be extended to three years,” he said.

Siyabonga Mhlongo, a beneficiary of the programme, said when he arrived on the farm he had no knowledge of how a citrus farm operates but after receiving mentorship, he feels that he is ready to work on his own farm.

“I would like to get a farm where I can work on my own after having acquired the experience on the farm. This is a very important programme and it helps us a lot. We also appreciate the stipend we receive under the programme. I only need to familiarize myself with the farm payroll system so that it would be easy when I’m carrying on my own to deal with employees,” he said.

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Ends.

#Phez’komkhono