



agriculture & rural development

Department:
agriculture
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PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

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SPEECH BY KZN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT MEC, MR CYRIL XABA AT THE 92ND GRADUATION CEREMONY, CEDARA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

FRIDAY, 18 MARCH 2016

VENUE: CENTENARY HALL, CEDARA

Program Director, Dr W. Mngoma

Acting Principal of Cedara College, Dr Harry Swatson

President of the KZN Poultry Institute and CEO of New Dawn Eggs, Mr S. Mthethwa

Head of the KZN Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Dr SF Mkhize

Head of Departments, Senior Managers and officials of the KZN Provincial
Government

Management, Staff and Students of the College

Principals and representatives from other Agricultural Colleges

Sponsors and friends of the College

Graduates and their Families

A highlight for me at the Cedara College Graduation is seeing the students who made a conscious choice to study agriculture. We live in a free, democratic South Africa where you could choose any career, but you chose farming and its related fields. I want to thank you for this as well as your families for supporting you in your decision. Our country needs agriculturalists now more than ever.

You must have heard President Jacob Zuma's State of the Nation Speech this year where he emphasized the nine point plan to revive the South African economy. At the top of the list, is the Revitalisation of the agriculture and agro-processing value-chain. In other words, agriculture is seen as a key catalyst for economic growth.

As a country, we are also faced with an ageing population of farmers and we need to grow our next generation of farmers. There are also the challenges of food security, we have to ensure that there is sufficient land under production to be able to feed present and future generations of South Africans. We have seen that this is not easy, faced with the current drought. This is why we need trained

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agriculturalists like you, the graduates here today. You have learnt that farming is not an easy terrain to work within. There are a host of setbacks, but, like farmers the world over, you have a passion and commitment to work the land.

Given this urgent need for agriculturalists, it would have been expected that all of you would go straight from college to work on farms and in related fields. Sadly, this has not been the case. As MEC for KZN Agriculture and Rural Development, I became deeply concerned at meeting agricultural graduates who did not have jobs. I received calls from concerned parents worried that their children who had studied agriculture were not finding work. On the other hand, I was fully aware of land reform farms that were declining and many that were actually lying fallow. When I met with **Trustees and CPA's and even people who are leasing the land**, they complained that they had the land but did not have support and skills to bring land back into production. This got me thinking, how was it possible that we had unproductive farms on the one hand and on the other, there were skilled people sitting at home. I decided that something had to be done about this and we needed to find a way in which the two can meet. In January, we held a Youth Summit to gauge the extent of the problem. We were expecting about 300 students but close to a thousand turned up. A rallying cry from the young people was that they wanted fields on which to work. Since then, I have been working with officials within the Department on a Graduate Placement Project. I will be announcing the details in my Budget Speech next month. Be rest assured that there is a plan for you the Cedara College Class of 2015 as well as young agricultural graduates in KwaZulu-Natal. It is about bringing together unproductive land with skills and passion, it is about mentorship and specialist training. The State has invested a great deal of money in your training, we cannot let that go to waste. Above all, we cannot see your dreams fade and your future disappear before your eyes.

My message to you the graduates, is that you can be proud of the choice you made. Your skills are needed as we forge ahead growing agriculture and agro-processing in this province. Currently, there are a multitude of initiatives that are getting off the ground such as the Agri-Parks being developed in ten district municipalities and as we revitalize our land reform farms.

In fact, we are currently laying the foundations for this future growth. A focus area is to promote the teaching of agriculture in schools. Cedara College is contributing to this initiative where agriculture in schools is part of the science curriculum and as such, requires the selection of mathematics as a co-requisite subject. Similarly in my 2015 Budget Speech, I announced the revitalization of the five agricultural high schools in the province. This process is underway. So you can see we have a long-term plan to grow our future farmers.

An issue that came up during the Youth Summit was a concern by some of the graduates as to whether it was worth their while studying towards a diploma because they were not getting jobs. Dr Swatson has clarified this issue. For those who do not know, Cedara College offers two different types of qualifications, much like the case at many other institutions. The B-Agric degree is offered in partnership with UKZN while the Diploma in Agriculture is offered by the College itself. Both qualifications are the same in duration, but they serve very different purposes and lead to different career paths. My advice to you, is that it is important to understand what career opportunities will exist for you once you have completed your qualifications. This is why as MEC for KZN Agriculture and Rural Development,

I made sure that the Department was proactive in ensuring career awareness and the promotion of agriculture as a career of choice among school-going youth. I must thank the Staff and Students of Cedara College for being actively involved in this career awareness campaign.

To reiterate, the B-Agric is an extension qualification and would mainly equip a student for employment opportunities as agricultural advisors within the government and the private sector. It also lays the foundation for a future career in academia, research and specialization.

In the case of the Diploma, as stated in the College Prospectus, this qualification will equip the student to work directly on agricultural enterprises in various capacities including that of farm managers and owners. The history of Cedara College is in fact, that of farming families sending their sons and daughters to train at Cedara so that they could take over the family farming operations.

I was pleased to hear from Dr Swatson that recently, emphasis at the College has been placed on ensuring that students develop an entrepreneurial mind-set and move away from aspirations of finding employment. Instead, they can opt to create employment opportunities for themselves and others through the establishment of agribusinesses. Dr Swatson, I understand that plans are being explored to support these ventures and I look forward to developments on this front.

Mr Mthethwa, the CEO of New Dawn Eggs, who spoke earlier, stands out as an example of an agricultural entrepreneur.

Cedara College students need to hear the stories of role models like Mr Mthethwa so that you can see that it can be done.

Attending the Cedara College Graduations reminds me of the historic value of this Institution. This is the College's 92nd Graduation Ceremony. Cedara is the second oldest agricultural college in South Africa after Elsenburg in the Western Cape. I must pay tribute to the staff and students who over the years, have kept this proud institution going.

Dr Swatson, your report on the College shows that you have kept up this proud tradition of excellence in agricultural training. Institutions survive if they adapt to changing times. You have demonstrated that you are keeping up with the times in the changes in your curriculum. I am pleased to see the focus on farming as a business and building entrepreneurship. Your Agriculture Skills Development Unit offers an impressive array of agro-processing courses from peach and peanut processing to jam manufacturing. I was happy to see courses offered in record-keeping, agri-finance and marketing. From your report, it is equally clear that you are keeping up the long-time Cedara College tradition of being engaged with farming communities in the province and that you continue to hold farmers days and other extension activities. Staff at the College are also involved in research and some projects like the vermiculture or worm farming, sound intriguing. In the face of the current drought, it is good to see that there is research into urban aquaculture and water-harvesting.

In my many engagements, I often meet people who studied here at Cedara College and they talk about the glory days of the College when it was at the forefront of activities and research.

I believe that you are still on top of your game, but you are not doing enough to promote yourselves and your achievements. You need to use your website to tell your stories and show your photographs of your success on the soccer and rugby fields as well as your many extension activities. Tell the weird and wonderful stories of your students and the successes of your graduates who can serve as role models to other students. By promoting the College, you are promoting the business of agriculture in the province.

Let me conclude by saying that I am extremely optimistic about the future of agriculture in KwaZulu-Natal and this optimism is inspired by you, the students and graduates of agriculture. Dr Swatson it was good to hear about the student leadership that engaged in dialogue with the College Management to resolve disciplinary issues.

However, even more inspiring, are the initiatives started by the students to help you become better agriculturalists and build up your own knowledge-base.

There is Agri-Groomers that was started last year by present and past Cedara College students. I was inspired to learn that this initiative originated from a concern students had about their exposure to and readiness for the market place. You formed this group to create a platform for opportunities for learning, networking and participating in various aspects of the agri-sector. The future needs young people like you who are innovative, show drive and want to help yourselves.

Dr Swatson tells me that the students, while continuing to support and benefit from Agri-groomers, are also initiating another organization this year called ARWCO (**Africa's Rural** Wealth Creators Organisation). He said that these initiatives demonstrate the shift in thinking on the part of the students towards a more business focused future.

Parents and families, you can be proud of your children! The future of agriculture is in good hands.

Congratulations to you the Graduates, go out and make your mark and help transform not only agriculture but the rural landscape in our province. As the National Development Plan says, we need the rural areas to be integrated into mainstream economic development. Please play your part and become a catalyst for this change so that we can fight poverty and become a more equal society.

Help South Africa become a better place. I thank you!