



agriculture & rural development

Department:
agriculture
& rural development
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

KZN Department of Agriculture & Rural Development
Private Bag X9059, Pietermaritzburg, 3200

Enquiries: Nalini Dickson
Tel: 033-3438254 or 0832340475

Fax: 033-343 8255
Toll-Free: 0800 000 996
Email: Nalini.Dickson@kzndard.gov.za

SPEECH BY KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, MR CYRIL XABA AT THE OWEN SITOLE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE GRADUATION CEREMONY 01 April 2016

His Majesty the King, Hlanga Lomhlabathi, Ngangezvelakhe

Abantwana Bonke basebukhosini

Program Director, Ms G.J. Majola

Head of the Department: Dr Sipiwe Felix Mkhize

Mntwanenkosi, Nyambose (representing Inkosi Mthethwa)

Members of the House of Traditional Leaders

Mayor of Umhlatuze Municipality: Cllr M.G. Mhlongo

Mayor of Umfolozi Municipality: Cllr Mgenge

Local Ward: Cllr W Mthimkhulu

CEO of Mjindi farming, Mr Sifundza

Acting CEO of ADA - Ms Phumla Vilakazi

Members of the College Academic Council

Principals of Agricultural Colleges

Principals of Agricultural High schools

Colleagues from the Department of Agriculture Forestry & Fisheries (DAFF)

Strategic Partners

Management, Staff and Students of the College

Parents and guardians

Graduates

Ladies and Gentlemen

I stand before you with a sense of great pride at being able to welcome another batch of graduates into the agriculture fraternity.

Two weeks ago, I presided over the Cedara Agricultural College graduation ceremony. I thanked those students for choosing to study agriculture when they could have chosen any career that they wanted in a free South Africa. I extend my gratitude to you as well, on your choice and to your families for supporting you.

Our province and our country need your expertise as agriculture is seen as key to reviving the South African economy. President Jacob Zuma, in his State of the Nation Address, placed the revitalization of agriculture and the agro-processing value chain at the top of the list of the nine-point plan to grow the country's economy.

Hlanga loMhlabathi, for a long time we have been concerned about young people having lost their connection to the land because of the country's history of land dispossession. I believe that we have turned the corner and our young people are re-connecting with the land and with farming. Proof of this, are the graduates before us today. There was also the impressive report by the OSCA Principal on the people, in excess of 2000, that underwent skills training at the College. Mr. Mazibuko, as you said, this is a remarkable contribution to skills development and I also want to thank your staff for their dedication and hard work. Please keep up this excellent track record.

We all know that it is all very well to train people, but the problem arises when young people cannot get jobs.

Graduates, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am happy to announce that the KZN Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (KZN DARD) is proactively addressing the situation. This is why I welcome OSCA's work integration and graduate placement program. Mr Mazibuko, in your report you said that opportunities need to be created for graduates on land reform farms and in the Department's high impact projects.

This is going to happen! As MEC for KZN Agriculture and Rural Development, I had become deeply concerned at meeting graduates who could not find work. I also received calls from concerned parents asking me to help their unemployed agriculture graduates. This got me thinking, that we have land reform farms lying fallow while there were skilled people sitting at home. I looked at how we could use government resources to bring the two together. The Department has since formulated its own Graduate Placement Program and I will be announcing the details in my Budget Speech later this month. The program aims to ensure that our young people in the agriculture sector can find gainful employment. It will offer mentorships and specialist skills training linked to opportunities. Above

all, the plan is not just for our young people to find jobs but to become entrepreneurs in their own right.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Graduate Placement Project is an initiative that can contribute to agricultural production in our province. We have no choice. If we want agriculture to be a catalyst for economic growth, then we have to grow our next generation of farmers. The drought, which has caused food prices to rise sharply, points to the vulnerability of food security in this country. We must have skilled people in the agricultural sector, who know the science to practice climate smart agriculture and ensure that as government, we are able to feed the nation.

Graduates, you have experienced firsthand the ravages of the drought, because the college is situated in the most drought-stricken district. With the college dam drying up, there were times when you had no water. I can only imagine how difficult this must have been for you and the entire college community, especially while you were studying for your exams. As you go out, take this experience with you and ensure that you practice water conservation in all your agricultural endeavors.

My final piece of advice to you, before introducing you to our esteemed keynote speaker, is that your entry into the agriculture sector is not just about boosting farming. It is about growing the rural economy and helping to eradicate poverty. This is another reason why I welcome your entry into the sector.

In South Africa, 40% of the nation's poor live in rural areas and in KwaZulu-Natal more than half of the provinces population – 54% - are rural dwellers. This is another challenge we seek to address - to recognize the poverty that exists outside of the urban areas and what impact it will have on the country as a whole if we do not implement and build an integrated and inclusive rural economy. I know that you have been well prepared by your training in OSCA because besides getting your formal education, you were also involved in community outreach programs.

Graduates, please do not forget the valuable lessons that you have learnt here and use your knowledge to help others who were not as fortunate to get a formal education.

The motto on the Owen Sitole College badge is "Foundation to Prosperity." I wish you well for your own future prosperity and for the part you will play in building the future prosperity of our Province.

It now gives me great pleasure to present to you, our guest speaker, Hlanga Lwezwe, who as reigning King of the Zulu nation, needs no introduction. However, I can tell you that iZulu eliphezulu, has been hailed as champion of rural development in this province and he is a farmer in his own right. He is also Chairperson of the Ingonyama Trust. In 1994, the University of Zululand conferred an honorary doctorate in Agriculture upon the King.

His Majesty also served as Chancellor of the South African branch of the American-based Newport University as well as the ML Sultan Technikon, which became the Durban University of Technology. In 1999, Coker College of South Carolina in the United States awarded him an Honorary Doctorate in Law.

Hlanga Lwezwe, I know from pronouncements that you have made that you are concerned about issues of poverty and the development of our rural areas. We look forward to your wise words.

I request everyone to please rise up as His Majesty, makes his way to the podium to give us the Keynote Address.

Bayede!!!