

Agri grads' hopeful future

Youth in Agriculture Summit offers graduates hope and options for a successful future

NOKUTHULA NTULI

THE KwaZulu-Natal department of agriculture has brought hope to more than 500 unemployed agricultural graduates who converged at the Youth in Agriculture Summit in Durban yesterday.

"We've brought in all the relevant stakeholders from the department of rural development to the Future Farmers Foundations and experts in the field of agriculture because we want to find a way to get these young people working," agriculture MEC Cyril Xaba said.

Held under the theme, Back to Production, the focus was on getting unemployed graduates in agriculture to create successful employment in agriculture and enterprise in agribusiness. "These graduates already have the knowledge. They are ready but they need the experience. We want property owners who are not using their land to allow these young people to come in and make it productive," Xaba said.

He said the department had committed some of the state land available for the graduates to work as part of its youth development programme. Funding and small business agencies such as the Land Bank, National Empowerment Fund, National Youth Development Agency and Industrial Development

Corporation also made presentations on how they could assist the graduates.

Leaders in agri-placement and experiential training, Isulabalimi and the Future Farmers Foundation spoke

about the importance of putting one's knowledge into practice.

"Associations like Kwanalu have thousands of members and if we can get each and every farm in the country to



BACK TO PRODUCTION: The department wants land owners to allow agriculture graduates to farm their unused plots for experience. PICTURE: GETTY IMAGES

take on at least one graduate then we would have all of you employed and get the necessary training to go out there and make a success of your life," Future Farmers' Judy Stuarts said.

The organisations also send graduates for internships to farms abroad to learn the necessary skills before starting their own farms back home or working in big dairies around the country. She called on the government to fund apprenticeships where farmers were unable to directly pay the graduates salaries.

While their peers were gaining valuable information from the presentation, about 30 graduates who turned up for the summit were only allowed into the venue more than three hours after it started. The Durban ICC security team kept them out of the venue saying it was full to capacity and there was no place for them to sit. Eventually extra chairs were brought in to accommodate them.

KZN agriculture spokesperson Lelethu Manentsa said: "It was per invite only and we went to the institutions they graduated from to get their contact details to invite them. We suspect those we sent invites to forwarded them to their friends because we were expecting fewer than 500 people but a lot more turned up."

nokuthulan@thenewage.co.za

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