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Finding solutions for unemployed agriculture graduates

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THE government needs to explore ways to put out-of-work agriculture-sector graduates on farms that have become unproductive.

This was one of the ideas discussed at a conference in Durban yesterday that was attended by more than 1 000 mostly unemployed agriculture-sector graduates.

The event was organised by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

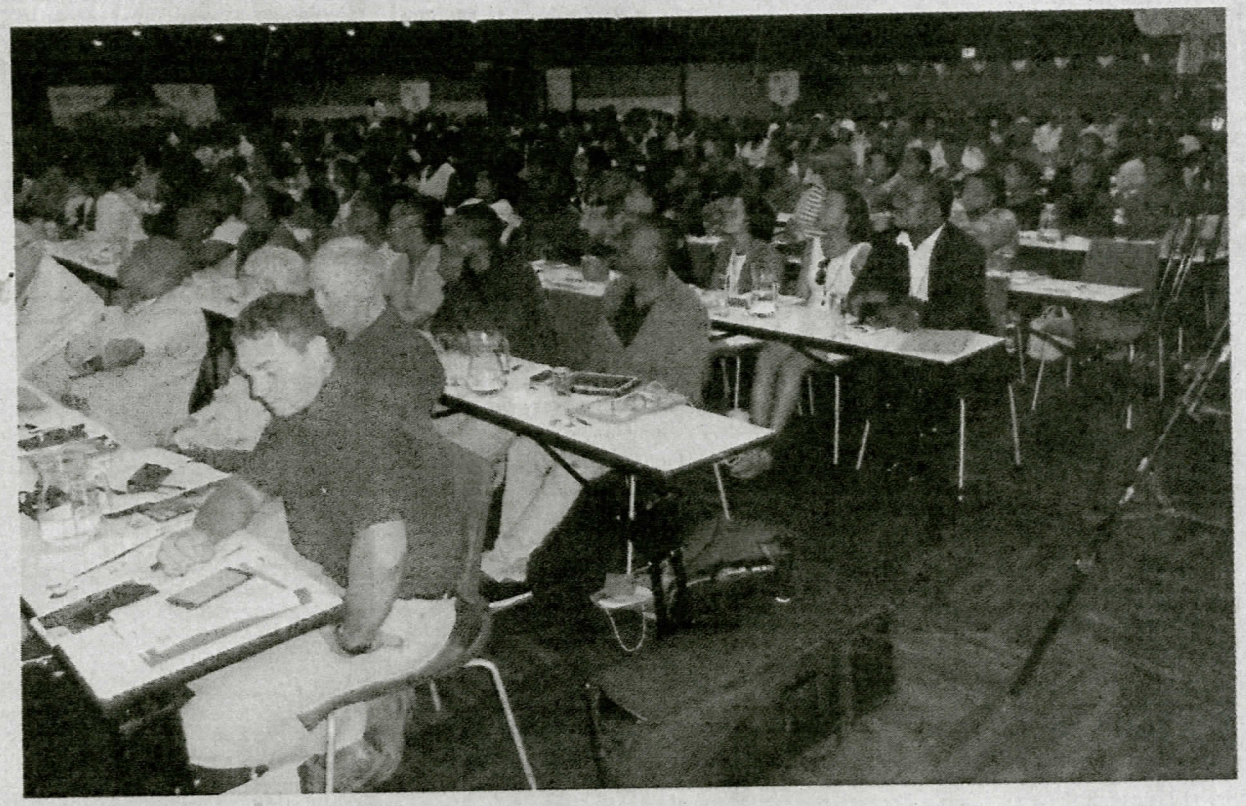
It was evident from the interactions at the conference that the youngsters are frustrated at not being unable to find employment in their chosen field, even though they realised that the sector is caught in the grip of severe drought.

Agriculture and Rural Development MEC Cyril Xaba said the department would consider the Future Farmers programme, that had been started by Howick farmer Judy Stuart in 2005, as part of their plan to develop a model whereby the department can better use the skills, passion and talent of agriculture-sector graduates.

Xaba said financial institution doors were usually closed when it came to funding young graduates who had dreams of starting their own agriculture enterprise or farm.

In the meantime, there were also many unproductive farms in the province, he said.

These included land owners who had no interest in farming, weekend farmers who only returned to their lands on the weekend and who do not farm, and well-meaning land trust beneficiaries who own land returned to them from land reform, but who do not have the skills to farm.



A view of the more than 1 000 spirited and mostly unemployed agriculture graduates who attended a conference at the International Conference Centre in Durban yesterday. The event, hosted by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, aimed to find solutions for the better employment of young people, including graduates, who want to work in the agriculture sector.
PHOTO: EDWARD WEST

"There is so much beautiful, productive land that is lying wasted. During this summit we hope to open up a platform for these two in our province to meet," said Xaba.

"Young people have enormous potential for innovation and risk-taking" and they could be of enormous benefit in the sector, he said.

National Agriculture and Rural Development Deputy Minister Mcebisi Skwatsha said 40 unemployed agriculture graduates from KwaZulu-Natal were participating in the department's Agricultural Graduate Programme, and a further 50 would be recruited in the next financial year.

Skwatsha said the department has a youth development directorate, which graduates should use as a first point of reference if they wished to find work or opportunities to gain work experience through the department.