



agriculture & rural development

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agriculture
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SPEECH BY KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT MR CYRIL XABA AT THE 91ST GRADUATION CEREMONY: CEDARA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, 20 MARCH 2015

Program Director

Acting Head of Department

Senior Management and officials of the Department

Principals of Cedara and Owen Colleges

Management, Staff and Students of the College

Representatives from the Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries

Principals and representatives from other Agricultural Colleges

Sponsors and friends of the College

Graduates and their Family and Friends

I dedicate this speech to the memory of the late Minister Collins Chabane who died tragically this week. As Minister of Public Service and Administration he was the overall boss of the staff of the College and all officials who work in the Department.

Minister Chabane was credited with introducing National Planning as a Ministry when he restructured President Zuma's Cabinet.

The result is the National Development Plan (NDP) produced by the National Planning Commission. The NDP sets agriculture as a primary activity to grow the rural economy and sets a target of creating one million jobs by 2030. The NDP as a blueprint and other government policies have provided the framework for my own strategy for Agrarian Transformation in KwaZulu-Natal. As agricultural graduates you will be

pleased to learn that agricultural education which includes scientific research, technology development and transfer is the foundation on which the strategy is built. The message that I have been drumming home in just about every forum that I speak at is that agriculture is Science and agriculture is Business. The other building blocks of the strategy are to use a commodity approach that will allow for the optimal use of resources. Sound business models will be used to support the development and running of the “farming business”. Agro-processing has also been built in to add value to primary agricultural production. This foundation will support four pillars which are the post-settlement support and re-capitalization of land reform farms, the development of Agri-Villages, river valley farming and communal agricultural estates.

There are already exciting developments on the Agri-Village front. Premier of the Province, Mr Senzo Mchunu has chosen Emadlangeni Municipality as a site to develop a model Agri-Village.

An Agri-Village is an agricultural community in which the members have equal shares in the village and its activities. Each family has land to grow its own household food as well as a share in the village commercial agricultural system. Agri-Villages will have their own schools, crèches, social services, and places of worship. At the heart of the village will be a Training Centre where agriculture and business skills can be learnt.

Listening to the Acting Principal’s report on the activities of Cedara College over the past year, I was pleased to hear that the re-positioning of agricultural education is underway.

There are other exciting developments that are on the horizon that I will share with you.

Looking at the proud graduates seated here, I would like to commend the staff of the college for all their hard work and upholding the tradition of Cedara as a leading agricultural institution.

I am well aware that you have been understaffed and worked under difficult conditions, yet you preserved and produced this crop of bright sparks. Well done!

In the new structure there will be additional posts to complement the lecturing staff.

It is good to know that Cedara’s courses are fully accredited and internationally accepted. I share the Acting Principal’s sentiment that the college cannot produce graduates who cannot find work. Your efforts to team up with the agricultural industry and other institutions to ensure opportunities for learnerships and employment must be commended.

It seems to have paid off if you say that 36 of the 39 students graduating today already have gainful employment. This is heartening news, it shows that the job market is open to our graduates.

We must however, not just produce graduates to get jobs we also need to produce graduates with entrepreneurial spirits who will go into farming and become competitive players in the commercial agriculture sector.

Over its 110 year history, Cedara has seen farmers send their sons and daughters to the College to get an agricultural education to take over the running of the family farm. Hopefully this tradition will continue in years to come with the sons and daughters of our current generation of graduates attending their parent's alma mater.

Equally heartening is your collaboration with other educational institutions and the close ties you maintain with the Universities of Zululand and KwaZulu-Natal.

Just last week the MEC for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in the Eastern Cape, Mr Mlibo Qoboshiyane and a delegation from his department visited our department and toured the College.

Several agreements were reached on the education front to strengthen the links between colleges and schools of agriculture in both provinces. This inter-provincial collaboration is exciting and could certainly open up new avenues in the way we conduct the business of agriculture going forward.

According to the history of the College, it was established as a research and training center to find ways to solve the many problems of farmers and food production in the province.

We have come full circle and the new strategy for Agrarian Transformation has similar aims more especially ensuring food security. We cannot continue with our current levels of poverty, were it has been reported that 12 million children go to bed hungry at night.

The Strategy for Agrarian Transformation also responds to the very exciting challenge of opening up opportunities for people who were dispossessed of their land and were not able to learn the highly scientific skills required for farming or to acquire the business acumen needed to run a farm.

This is why education is central to the success of growing agriculture as an economic activity and some major developments are taking place in this regard. It is still not widely known that since January last year agricultural extension work has taken on a whole new meaning. To become an agricultural extension officer you would have to undergo

training and be registered with the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions.

This means that no agricultural advisor can give advice to any farmer if he or she is not qualified and registered. It also means that given the strategic role that agriculture is to play in the country's economic development many more extension officers will have to be trained and registered leading to more job creation.

Many of you may ask where is this training going to take place given the paucity of training facilities in the province.

I have been painfully aware of this problem as it has been evident from our own Institutions. This year Cedara and Owen Sithole Colleges were able to admit 50 students on each campus, with Cedara having an additional 20 Bachelor of Agriculture students. Yet, Owen Sithole had 967 applicants wanting to study there and Cedara had 702.

To address the issue, I have announced my intention to introduce a revitalization grant as my token of appreciation and expression of support to the four agricultural schools in the province. The Agricultural Schools Revitalization Grant will assist in the provision of equipment and other infrastructure necessary to improve the quality of agricultural education and practical training. More details will be announced in my forthcoming budget speech.

I have been passionate about working on changing the mindset of young people and getting them to understand that it is not about being farm laborers. My vision is to take agriculture to our schools and introduce learners to opportunities in the field. These range from the diversity of farming activities that can be carried out to becoming agricultural engineers or soil scientist or veterinarians. My schools program is based on a three pronged approach which includes career awareness, agricultural skills transfer and the promotion of innovation in agriculture.

In response to the President's call for action, Operation Phakisa the MEC for Education and myself have agreed to collaborate in introducing more schools that will offer agriculture as a discipline as part of building more future farmers.

We have no choice. The land mass is not increasing and yet the population on the other hand is rapidly increasing placing competing demands on land use type. This will demand that we multiply our efforts on whatever land that is remaining to increase production to keep up with the increased demand for food. New technologies, sound extension advice, increasing the number of adequately trained farmers and collaborative strategies will make us build a sustainable and vibrant agricultural sector.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the parents of our graduates for supporting their career choice. To the graduates, I wish you everything of the best in your future endeavors. Whatever you pursue, do it with passion a commitment. Go out and be ambassadors for agriculture and champions of rural upliftment!