



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: 033-3559300 or 0832340475

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

SPEAKING NOTES FOR MEC OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, MR CYRIL XABA AT THE KZN YOUTH IN AGRICULTURE SUMMIT; DURBAN ICC, 19TH JANUARY 2016

Program Director

Deputy Minister of Rural Development and Land Reform, Mr Mcebisi Skwatsha

Members of the Provincial Legislature

Chairperson of ADA, Ms T. Mbatha and other members of the Board

Acting CEO of ADA and other officials

KZN DARD HOD

Leaders of Youth in Agriculture

Leaders of Women in Agriculture

CEO of Future Farmers, Ms Judy Stuart

CEO of the Isulabalini Development Trust, Mr Thula Mkhwanazi

The University of KwaZulu-Natal's Head of Agricultural Extension and Rural Resources Management Programme, Dr Steve Worth

Representatives of Financial Institutions

Representatives of Agricultural Organisations

Graduates

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are here to talk, I do not have answers. The answers are in this hall. **Let's** agree on how to move forward and I am here to support you.

Our aim today is to boost agricultural production in KwaZulu-Natal by utilizing the skills, talent and goodwill available at this gathering.

There is a full programme and you will be loaded with information. So to ease **you into the day's proceedings**, let me begin with a story to explain why we are here and what we hope to achieve.

Last year, I was invited to visit some dairy farms in the province. At one of the farms I was introduced to the farm manager, a young man who looked as if he was barely out of school. He was in charge of a large operation. I saw the full extent of his skills when I **visited the farm's high-tech dairy**, complete with a bank of computers. The milking process was highly mechanised and this young manager ran the entire operation.

His name is Sifiso Ntshiza and he had matriculated from Zakhe Agricultural College and was one of the first youngsters to be sent overseas as part of the Future Farmers Internship Program. You will be learning more about this impressive program later today. One of our aims from the Summit is to look at projects like Future Farmers and see how we can develop such models to help aspirant young farmers get a foothold in the agricultural world.

I learnt much more that day. I learnt how difficult it is for young people like you and Sifiso, to break through barriers to pursue your dreams.

I was nearly brought to tears as he described his efforts to realise his dream to buy his own farm. So far, all he has met are closed doors at the many financial institutions that he has visited.

This was when the seed to hold this summit began to germinate. In KwaZulu-Natal, we have a Strategy for Agrarian Transformation. The basis of this strategy is that Agriculture is both a scientific and business enterprise. Sifiso met these criteria. He was skilled in the science of dairy farming running a sophisticated high-tech milking operation. He was studying Business Management through Unisa to **be able to successfully run a commercial operation. I've since learnt** that he has completed his studies. So why the difficulty in accessing funding? There will be a panel discussion involving various financial institutions later this afternoon where we can get answers. We can also find out what more needs to be done for aspirant agricultural graduates to access funding.

Sifiso's struggle to acquire a farm also reminded me of the number of unproductive land reform farms around the province. Many of these farms are in the hands of people who have no interest in farming. We have the weekend farmers who live in the city and who are proud to be farm owners but do little to realise the agricultural potential of his or her land. We have well-meaning Trusts that own land but do not have the skills to farm. Many land reform farms have collapsed and beautiful productive land lies dormant. At the same time, we have agricultural graduates who acquired skills at great cost to the State and your parents, but they are staying at home and these skills are not being utilised. Then there is the State that has the resources to cause the two to meet.

With this Summit, we are opening up and creating a platform for the two to meet and as Government, we are committed to facilitate this. Let us look at this

Summit as the start of the building of a bridge to span the divide between unemployed graduates with skills, talent as well as a love for agriculture and the land that is lying fallow and unproductive.

Deputy Minister for the Department for Rural Development and Land Reform, Mr Skwatsha is here to tell us more about his plans to make this land productive and how you as graduates, can play a role. Our Premier was going to talk about **the critical role that agriculture has to play in driving the province's economy** and why you are needed to get us back to production. I wish to apologise for the Premier's **absence** as he was called to an urgent meeting in Pretoria.

There are many changes going on in the agricultural sector. The **KZN Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (KZNDARD's) Strategy for Agrarian Transformation** is being implemented with work being carried out in reviving crop production. An interesting project that will be taking off in 2016 is the commercialization of cattle, goats and sheep to enable communal farmers to participate in the mainstream economy. We are also building infrastructure like silos, mills and abattoirs to help farmers gain control and better manage their products. In conjunction with this, partnerships are being formed with commodity organisations to assist with improving products and enhance the marketing of produce. While all of this is going on there are the development of Agri-Parks in different districts that are aimed at developing agro-processing and building up the secondary agricultural sector. So you can see the space is opening up and there are opportunities developing for you to channel your skills, energy, passions and creativity in the agricultural sector. The bridge that we are building will also have to serve as a communication highway where you can readily learn about these opportunities that are becoming available.

I am well aware that we are having this conversation at a difficult time when the province is in the grip of a severe drought. However, that is the challenge of agriculture, not just here in South Africa but the world over. Climate change is a reality and the terrain that we have to learn to work within. From my interaction with the farming fraternity, I know that you are a hardy bunch and challenges are what you thrive upon. Creativity and innovation can form important links in the chain as we find each other to build agriculture in the province and improve our land reform farms. Young people have enormous potential for innovation and risk-taking; we want this potential to be unleashed in the pursuit of growth and development of our rural areas.

In building this bridge, the partners – you the graduates, government and the private sector will all have to play their parts. This bridge is not about handouts to graduates, it is not about the State bankrolling farms or doing the farming for you. It is about creating an enabling environment and supplying the support so that you can become farmers in your own right. Or, you can take up positions in the agricultural value chain and become employees or entrepreneurs and work at building up your careers.

I mentioned to you the story of Sifiso and I have no doubt that many of you have stories of your own struggles. After graduation, the next thing you expect is to be in the workplace and when that does not happen, you literally see your future disappear before your own eyes. This Summit is to help you rescue that future, to get you working and to get all of us back to production.

I thank you