KwaZulu-Natal Invites Farmers to Support Agricultural Graduates Through Development Programme

https://farmersmag.co.za/2026/09/kwazulu-natal-invites-farmers-to-support-agricultural-graduates-through-development-programme/

Last updated: 2026/09/14 at 1:35 PM
Farmers Mag



The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is calling on farmers and agricultural enterprises in uMkhanyakude and Harry Gwala Districts to participate in a programme aimed at developing the next generation of agricultural professionals. Led by Hon. Thembeni KaMadlopha-Mthethwa, the department is inviting eligible agricultural businesses and farmers to host unemployed agricultural graduates for a two-year workplace development programme.

The initiative is designed to give graduates practical experience while strengthening their understanding of farming operations and agricultural enterprises. It also provides an opportunity for experienced farmers to share knowledge and mentorship with young professionals entering the sector. The programme creates a link between agricultural skills development and the practical needs of farms and agricultural businesses.

The Two-Year Unemployed Agricultural Graduates Farm/Agricultural Enterprises Development Programme will run from June 2027 to May 2029. During this period, participating graduates will have an opportunity to gain workplace experience within real agricultural environments. Practical exposure can help graduates apply the knowledge gained through their studies to actual farming and agricultural business operations. It can also help them develop skills in areas such as production planning, farm management, record keeping, problem-solving and day-to-day agricultural operations.

Providing this type of experience is important for graduates who may struggle to enter the agricultural workforce without previous practical exposure.
Mentorship forms another important part of the programme, allowing experienced farmers and agricultural enterprises to contribute to the professional development of participating graduates. Farmers have practical knowledge that cannot always be gained in a classroom, including how to respond to production challenges, manage resources and make decisions under changing conditions.

Graduates can benefit from observing these processes while receiving guidance from people with experience in the agricultural sector. Mentorship can also help young professionals understand the business side of farming and the importance of planning for productivity and profitability. For participating farmers, hosting graduates can create an opportunity to contribute directly to skills development while gaining access to young people with formal agricultural training.

The programme also has an entrepreneurial development component, which can help graduates consider opportunities beyond traditional employment. Agriculture offers a wide range of potential business opportunities across production and the broader value chain. Graduates can potentially develop enterprises linked to farming, agricultural services, processing, marketing, technology and other areas of the sector. Practical workplace experience can help them identify gaps in the market and better understand what is required to operate an agricultural business.

Combining workplace experience with entrepreneurial development can therefore help graduates prepare for both employment and potential self-employment.
Farmers and agricultural enterprises in uMkhanyakude and Harry Gwala Districts have an important role to play in the programme because they will provide the practical environments in which graduates can develop their skills. Hosting a graduate requires a commitment to providing meaningful exposure to agricultural activities and opportunities for learning.

Participating enterprises can share their operational knowledge while helping graduates understand the demands and responsibilities associated with agricultural work. This can also strengthen knowledge transfer between experienced producers and younger agricultural professionals. Greater interaction between farmers and graduates can contribute to the development of a skilled workforce that understands both agricultural theory and practical production.

The programme is also relevant to the long-term development of the agricultural sector in KwaZulu-Natal. Agriculture requires skilled people across a wide range of disciplines, from primary production and livestock management to agribusiness, environmental management and agricultural support services. Creating opportunities for unemployed graduates to gain practical experience can help build a stronger skills base within rural communities.

It can also give agricultural enterprises access to young professionals who bring formal training and fresh perspectives. Developing this connection between agricultural education and practical farming experience can support the sector's future workforce needs.

The department has set 30 September 2026 as the closing date for applications. Farmers and agricultural enterprises that meet the requirements are encouraged to submit their applications before the deadline if they want to participate in the programme. Early preparation is important because applicants may need to review the full advert and ensure that they have all the required information and supporting documentation.

Interested enterprises should carefully check the eligibility criteria and application instructions before submitting their applications. Meeting the deadline will be essential for those who want to be considered for participation.

The programme will focus specifically on uMkhanyakude and Harry Gwala Districts, creating an opportunity for agricultural businesses in these areas to become directly involved in youth skills development. Rural agricultural enterprises can provide graduates with exposure to the realities of farming and the challenges that producers manage throughout a production cycle.

This practical environment can help graduates develop stronger technical and business skills while building professional networks within the agricultural sector. For farmers, participation can also strengthen their contribution to developing skilled agricultural workers in their communities. The programme therefore offers benefits that extend beyond individual graduates to participating enterprises and the wider agricultural sector.

Supporting unemployed agricultural graduates requires collaboration between government, farmers, agricultural enterprises and young professionals. Government programmes can create the framework and resources for workplace development, but practical participation from farmers is essential for graduates to gain meaningful experience. Agricultural enterprises can provide the workplace environment, mentorship and industry knowledge that help bridge the gap between academic training and professional practice.

Graduates, in turn, have an opportunity to build their skills, gain confidence and explore possible career and entrepreneurial pathways. This shared responsibility can help create stronger connections between agricultural education, employment and the needs of the farming sector. The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's two-year programme provides farmers and agricultural enterprises in uMkhanyakude and Harry Gwala with an opportunity to contribute to developing future agricultural professionals.

Running from June 2027 to May 2029, the programme combines practical workplace experience, mentorship and entrepreneurial development to give unemployed graduates a stronger foundation for their careers. Farmers who participate can play an important role in transferring practical knowledge while strengthening the skills available within the agricultural sector.

With the application deadline set for 30 September 2026, eligible farmers and agricultural enterprises should review the full programme requirements and submit their applications in time. Developing skilled young professionals today can help strengthen the capacity, productivity and resilience of KwaZulu-Natal's agricultural sector in the years ahead.