

Innovative support towards a brighter future in agriculture

"Agriculture is facing several challenges both locally and internationally, which include a reduction in the number of farmers, a decrease in the size of land that is suitable for agricultural production and finding innovative ways to combat the effects of climate change," said Dr Joyce Magoshi Chitja, food security lecturer at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, during the 3rd Agricultural Research Symposium of 2019.



Image via [AgriOrbit](#)

The symposium was recently held at the Kleinkaap Boutique Hotel in Pretoria under the theme of effective national agricultural support systems toward a vibrant agricultural sector.

Dr Chitja, who facilitated the event, said that rising above on-going challenges in the agricultural sector will require long-term planning and an innovative mindset. "The agricultural sector should not be left behind when it comes to fast-paced developments such as urbanisation and technological advancement," she added.

Expanding the domestic market

During the first panel discussion, the keynote speaker, Prof Mandi Rukuni, a development analyst, strategist and director of the Barefoot Education for Africa Trust, discussed international trends and best practices in agricultural support. He emphasised South Africa's need for proper methodology when it comes to governmental and public policy in order to expand agricultural productivity.

He also acknowledged that in order to jump-start the stagnant economic growth rate, South Africa needs proper implementation of long-term goals. "Serious economies consume most of their own manufactured products, but South Africa can't cope with its own domestic demands. To get out of this middle-income trap you need major policy shifts so that you can expand your domestic market. Secondly, South Africa needs a small family-farm policy. This policy needs to be translated into legislation, so there is an even greater need to invest in innovative policy research," he added.

Click on the video link below for more of Prof Rukuni's insights in supporting and expanding the South African agricultural landscape.

“ Prof Mandi Rukuni, an agricultural development analyst and strategist from Zimbabwe, talked about international trends in agricultural support at the [#AgriSymposium2019](#) in Centurion. [@ARCSouthAfrica](#) [pic.twitter.com/SRe7nS4qO5](#)— Stockfarm magazine (@Stockfarmmag) [July 17, 2019](#) ”

Panellists who joined Prof Rukuni on this topic included Dr Theo de Jager, president of the World Farmers' Organisation and Dr Francesco Maria Pierri, policy officer from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.



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Prioritising crop insurance

Dr de Jager elaborated on the type of support already available to farmers, both locally and globally. According to Dr de Jager, indirect support consists of research and development, which makes farmers more competitive, sustainable and profitable, whereas direct support can include anything from enhanced access to markets, subsidised financing or easier access to inputs such as fertilisers or mechanisation.

He added that many countries also support their farmers via co-operatives, however, when it comes to South Africa, cheaper crop insurance must be made more accessible to every farmer. "By giving farmers access to affordable crop insurance we eliminate many issues with one blow. Firstly, insurance gives you greater access to important agricultural

data. Data is vital when it comes to managing your yields in any agricultural sector. Therefore, we should support the bankability of farmers.

"When we support crop insurance, we support the agricultural value chain, better risk management and we incentivise innovation," he added.

New innovations

New innovations toward a brighter future in agriculture was discussed by the second set of panellists, which included Khathu Mashau, managing director of U-Move Group, Dr Litha Magingxa, executive manager for Agri-Economics and advisory at the Land Bank, Joyene Isaacs, head of department of the Western Cape Department of Agriculture and Gwynne Foster, a traceability facilitator.

Joyene Isaacs provided some insight into the kind of innovation required that will provide proper agricultural support to South African farmers. According to her, any new technology a farmer utilises must fit the environment and specific profile of that specific farmer, for it to be truly useful. "Innovation has to be practical. Leaders in the agricultural landscape have to ensure that the technology they are using will give them the results they actually need," she added.

Isaacs also stated that she has decided to be a major disrupter in her own department when it comes to data. "No consultant asks any farmer for money for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). This is part of the enabling environment we've established for farmers to work in. Secondly, we track every visit our extension officers, who are responsible for sending relevant information to our department, make to farmers in the Western Cape," she added. – Claudi Nortjé, Plaas Media

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