

Three-pronged partnership to upskill SA's black farmers

A five-year Agribusiness Transformation Programme has been launched in the Free State. The programme, funded by Standard Bank and supported by the faculties of Agriculture and Entrepreneur Development at the University of the Free State and the Free State's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, brings together government, academia and private sector expertise to enhance the delivery of skills to black farmers involved in crop and livestock production.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

"The objective of the programme is to ensure that farmers receiving financial assistance become sustainable to the point where they can source funding for growing their operations from the traditional banking sector," says Nico Groenewald, head of agribusiness at Standard Bank.

"The University of the Free State has designed several modules that address current weaknesses that are obstructing the farmers' ability to become viable commercial enterprises. The programme is aimed at impacting on 60 farmers engaged in primary agriculture and 15 in secondary agriculture - an activity that includes processing outputs from contracted farmers, small-scale milling, the operation of feedlots and similar activities," adds Diale Mokgojwa, senior manager for enterprise development at Standard Bank.

"The project is seen as a launchpad to increased involvement in agriculture around the country. The intention is to fill agriculture's 'missing middle' and enable small-scale farmers to become viable commercial enterprises that have the potential for further growth. Presently, there is a dearth of these medium-sized operations in South African agriculture", concludes Diale.



SA's black farming community needs sustainable agribusiness support, says AFGRI

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Factors making the programme more relevant includes participants within the Free State's farming activities are ageing, the

numbers of people entering the sector are declining, and that food security relies primarily on production from large commercial farming operations. "The development of this sector and creation of medium-sized enterprises is, therefore, vital to the future of food production in South Africa," says Groenewald.

Once its success in the Free State has been gauged, it is intended that the programme will be introduced in other provinces. Provinces earmarked are the Northern Cape and Eastern Cape. To date, 25 farmers have undergone a selection process supervised by the university.

Skills training, practical support

As the programme progresses, farmers will be offered skills training and practical support. Specially selected mentors will work with farmers to identify and close the operational gaps existing in their day-to-day activities. These could vary from financial and administrative skills through to crop and livestock production.

"The programme is unique in that it provides 'end-to-end' support. The farmer, instead of being given some training and then being left to his own devices, can farm secure in the knowledge that advice is always at hand. He can access the experience required to boost his skills to the points where he becomes a confident, independent operator," says Groenewald.

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