

# Technology 'can boost jobs, in agriculture'

The agriculture sector in SA needs to acquire the latest technology to reduce negative environmental impact practices and increase land productivity, says Marcos Fava Neves, from the School of Business at Sao Paulo University in Brazil.

With SA having limited agricultural land and scarce water, Prof Neves said last week technology was one of the items on a list of urgent targets to be achieved by the business sector, policy makers and agricultural scientists in reviving slumbering agriculture so that it increases its contribution to job creation and gross domestic product.

He said agricultural scientists and engineers must focus on developing local technologies to realise "precision plant nutrition", while making plants much more resistant to adverse conditions such as diseases, droughts and other damage.

In an analysis of SA's economic potential through the development of key agro-businesses that could propel the country's agriculture to better heights, Prof Neves, who also heads Brazil's agricultural think-tank, the Markestrat Research Centre, has teamed up with the Agricultural Business Chamber (Agbiz) and the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC). They are lobbying the government to consider prioritising and boosting at least 13 key agri-processing industries in order to advance the agriculture sector and create sustainable jobs.

The suggestions are contained in a booklet entitled *Surviving the Global Food Jungle: Realities, Options and Strategies for SA*. They flag industries such as bioethanol, food and beverage, animal feed, construction and furniture, shoe and leather, textile and clothing, plastics, electricity, tourism, and medicine.

Agbiz CEO John Purchase said SA needed a focused, co-ordinated and coherent strategy between the private sector and the government to achieve these two major goals. Agbiz therefore trusted that Prof Neves's work done across the world in the global food business, and largely captured in this book, "will stimulate the necessary debate, partnerships and required strategies to grow agriculture and agribusiness, and ensure improved food security and opportunity for all".

Mr Tshililo Ramabulana, CEO of the NAMC, said food value chains had become increasingly sophisticated in order to cater to the diverse needs and preferences of consumers, including guarantees in terms of safety and quality, health consciousness, and the demand for accountability from value chain players.

*Source: Business Day*