

# Agriculture to promote careers, to be included in career guidance curriculum

A dual effort needs to be made for agriculture to get a bigger share of graduates and thereby build a progressive industry capable of creating even more jobs.



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Career guidance needs to be expanded and industry sectors need to be more proactive in promoting careers. The industry must ensure that it gets a prominent place on the career guidance curriculum at school level, while various sectors within the industry also need to promote themselves proactively to potential graduates.

"There is a perception among youth, as well as many adults, that working on a farm is mostly about doing tough physical work in all weather," says Nico Groenewald, Head of Agribusiness at Standard Bank.

"By its nature, agriculture is primarily an outdoor occupation. However, that is not the whole picture. Agriculture is a science and needs people with degrees in science and engineering to help push it forward on levels such as genetics, soil management, and water management, physical construction such as dams and contouring, and mechanisation. This applies both in primary agriculture, on the farm, and downstream, in processing plants."

## Agriculture is also a financial and business discipline.

Agriculture takes significant investment to buy land, inputs such as seed, implements and equipment, and build processing plants or storage facilities. You need a high order of skill and insight to manage an agricultural operation's cash flow, and physical and human assets, to ensure that it runs profitably and sustainably. Financial institutions, such as Standard Bank, employ agricultural economists and strategists to help agribusinesses to do just that.

The career opportunities in agriculture are extensive, and most of them require at least graduate capabilities. Another consideration is that they pay as well as equivalent executive and managerial positions in other industries.

## "Young people don't always know this and so their career choices are curtailed."

In addition to the shortage of graduates working in agriculture itself, a shortage of certain agricultural scientists has developed. This puts South Africa's ability to stay on par with the rest of the world at risk.

"Because our conditions are different, we cannot simply apply locally what is done in, say, Brazil, or the United States, or Romania," says Groenewald. "We need researchers who can look at how best to exploit international developments here in South Africa, or help local agricultural operations innovate to take best advantage of local conditions."

"This is an aspect of agriculture which would enable bright young minds to stretch themselves and blaze new trails. Learners who would like to be pioneers tend to think that it is possible only in fields like information technology or industrial engineering. They are simply not getting the information that there is just as much pioneering to be done in agriculture. In this field, you could end up doing something as profound as helping to ensure food security for the country - or even the rest of the world."

Groenewald believes some organisations within South African agriculture, such as Grain SA, are beginning to make inroads into the public's awareness of career opportunities in the industry. There is, however, a great deal more work that has to be done in terms of bringing both guidance counselors and learners up to speed.

"When you consider that a relatively small percentage of school leavers enter university, and that agriculture must share that talent pool with all the other disciplines such as law, and medicine, then it becomes obvious that agriculture has to be much more proactive about creating awareness of the interesting careers it actually does offer."

"We shouldn't be losing out on talent simply because we haven't promoted ourselves," says Groenewald.

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