

Time to celebrate and support farmers in SA

According to a new report released by WWF South Africa and Nedbank, the challenges of feeding South Africa's growing population in a climate-altered, resource-constrained future are significant. Yet, we do not have to be victims of an inevitable crisis, says the report.



© Fotolia.com

The report, *Farming Facts and Futures*, unpacks the status of the country's natural resources and highlights how these resources are likely to be affected by a changing climate which is expected to redraw the agricultural map of the world in terms of what can be grown, where and when.

"Now is the time to celebrate and support the role of the farmer in South Africa," says Inge Kotze, a programme manager at WWF. "Our farmers are the key custodians of our natural systems and freshwater resources. However, we are dependent on a food production system that is affected by, but also contributes to, resource depletion and climate change. Many of the solutions to live within these constraints are found in this sector.

"We can feed our growing population and support a vibrant food economy through better current production, rather than just increased production, by managing our current food waste, making more informed food choices and supporting farmers who are implementing sound farming practices."

Food choices

"We are often not aware that our daily food choices connect us very directly to the current state of the planet. Our food choices as consumers impact significantly on water, land and energy resources. Food demand and future consumption patterns will play a key role in determining the future health of our planet. We all have a direct and active role to play in creating a sustainable, equitable food system that can benefit both current and future generations," Kotze explains.

Brigitte Burnett, head of Sustainability at Nedbank, says that the agriculture sector in South Africa is at a pivotal point in its history. "Nedbank chose to participate in this report because of the valuable insight it provides to our agricultural sector clients and because water, land and energy are such vital cogs within our economy."

The agricultural sector is most directly exposed to increasing risk and vulnerability due to climate change. Changing weather patterns will alter rainfall patterns and water availability, resulting in shifting, unpredictable growing seasons and crop yield variability. The current physical and economic energy insecurities, driven by a failing national power grid and volatile global oil prices, places further pressure on an already strained system.

Policy shifts

In addition to the limitations of a highly constrained resource base, the numerous proposed policy shifts, focused on land issues, including new recommendations for land reform and redistribution aimed at readdressing the injustices of the apartheid system, add to the heightened sense of uncertainty.

South Africa's economic growth and development will increasingly be based on trade-offs between the competing sectors (mining, urban, industrial, energy and agriculture) for access to limited and constrained resource base. This includes increasing competition between these sectors for limited available water, land and energy resources.

Rising wealth, urbanisation and a fast-growing middle class have changed the country's consumption patterns, with more South Africans eating more processed and high-protein foods, especially meat, dairy products and empty calorie high sugar diets. These foods are more land and water-intensive than fruit, vegetable and grain crops, and further stress existing resources.

In an effort to address these challenges, WWF South Africa, in partnership with Nedbank, has developed a Sustainable Agriculture Programme. The programme works in collaboration with the agricultural sector and other key stakeholders to effectively maintain healthy, functioning ecosystems within our farmlands through the development and implementation of sustainable production practices.

[Download the Farming Facts and Futures report.](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>