

FarmSol empowers SA's youth and women in agriculture

Experts have warned that food security could face severe challenges by 2050, when South Africa is expected to have a population of 73 million, requiring double the current production capacity. FarmSol, a black-owned agricultural services company and an implementation partner to the South African Breweries (SAB) farmer development programme, in response to this, plans to attract and empower more young farmers through its national programme - as a means to impact smallholder farmers and contribute towards growing South Africa's agriculture industry to become a net exporter of hops and barley, which are key focus commodities for the SAB supply chain.

According to Stats SA, the country's unemployment rate increased from about 27% earlier this year to 29% in the second quarter of 2019. This figure involves a significant number of young people; and people who have stopped looking for work.

Aron Kole, FarmSol MD, says that the company has supported 420 farmers across seven provinces in South African to date, with a total of 113 female farmers of which 32 are young female farmers in the FarmSol programme. "We have a number of leading young producers in our programme, but I think it's not enough. We plan to involve more young people and women in our programme, through partnerships and a targeted outreach initiatives.

"For us, the involvement of young people in agriculture is not just a symbolic issue, but a social and economic imperative that should be an integral part of the sector's development."

Farmer development and 2019 milestones

During the 2018/2019 summer season, notwithstanding the severe drought that impacted many farmers in the programme, especially in parts of Mpumalanga, Gauteng, North West and Free State; the farmers collectively delivered 25,000 tonnes of yellow maize to SAB.

Studies show that addressing some of the constraints to empower women in agriculture, particularly in rural areas, have greater returns on investments, the economy, and society. FarmSol has a three-tier transformational agenda that is focused on creating and sustaining agricultural jobs, skills development and sustainable farmers.

Njabulo Mbokane (24), a young maize producer from Ermelo won this year's SAB and FarmSol young emerging farmer of the year award for her resilience and growth as a farmer. Before graduating onto a commercial scale of her current 200 hectares, she nurtured her passion on a vegetable school garden in Mpumalanga in 2016.

"Our focus is not just aimed to positively impact on individual farmers, but also communities and the country. Although agriculture cannot solve the current unemployment crisis alone, the sector is a fundamental part of the solution through collaborative solutions across sectors and on multiple fronts," emphasised Kole.

Other award winners include:

- Vivian Gosekwang Pico from Taung in the North West won the 2019 SAB and FarmSol barley female farmer of the year in recognition of her contribution to supply SAB with 91 tonnes of barley last season.



Njabulo Mbokane

- Solomon Masango from Morgeson in Mpumalanga won the maize farmer of the year and supplied SAB with 636.72 tonnes of yellow maize.
- Senokwane Matthews also from Taung in the North West won the best-performing barley producer of the year achieving a yield of 6.45MT/ha.

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