New Farmer Indaba

By: Toni Xaba, FSD

The Department of Agriculture: Western Cape recently hosted an Indaba with new farmers as the predominant participants. About 200 farmers attended the occasion at Goudini Spa.

The Minister of Agriculture, Mr Cobus Dowry, delivered an inspirational opening address highlighting the challenges and successes of new farmers in the Western Cape. Inputs from a few of our champion new farmers, Ms Jeanie Fletcher, Ms. Wadea Jappie and Mr. Ismail Motola crystallised the reality of the energy, self-believe, strategic brilliance, knowledge, skills and passion that goes into being a new farmer with limited resources. This set the scene for open dialogue on Land and Agrarian Reform in the Western Cape which was the aim of this engagement.

A presentation on LARP (Land and Agrarian Reform Programme) delivered by Chief Director: Farmer Support and Development of the Department, Mr. Dudley Adolph, sketched out a framework that has been designed to facilitate the reaching of specific goals such as redistribution of land (462 321ha in Western Cape); increase in black entrepreneurs (10%); universal access to agricultural support services; increase in agricultural production (10-15%) and an increase in agricultural trade (10-15%).

This means that agricultural transformation and development will be addressed in a holistic manner where promotion and support to produce specific products in targeted areas in development corridors, could be one of the outcomes of this approach.

Land redistribution was also given attention and the conclusion was that targets will only be met if the Area Based Plans developed by the Department of Land Affairs form an integral part of the land acquisition prioritisation process. Drawing in all the relevant stakeholders using this approach will make it possible to transfer bigger portions of land more quickly and efficiently.

Information on climate change and its effect on agriculture was also one of the key presentations which clearly indicated that most areas in the Western Cape will get hotter and drier and over next few years. Also, rainfall periods (winter) will grow shorter and drier periods (summer) longer. An increase in the occurrence of extremes regarding maximum temperatures can also be expected. The implications for agriculture are real, because effectively there will be less water available for production. The agricultural community should therefore be proactive in areas of planning, technology development and management. Hence, the survival of agriculture will depend on our ability to adapt!

Farmers were also reminded about the utmost importance of knowledge and skills. Also, that a significant number of people might think that they have adequate knowledge because of years of exposure in agriculture. However, there is a big difference in the requirements needed to be good farm worker versus that of being a successful farmer. To acknowledge these gaps is a brave step towards personal development and victory in the agricultural arena. The department is proud about the quality, suitability and value of the courses that are provided by the Cape Institute for Agricultural Training. Also, that it has decentralised training facilities where farmers can be trained closer to their farming operations.

After the presentations pertinent issues in various commissions were discussed, providing the department with valuable feedback and ideas. The issues covered in these commissions are as follows:

- Increased agricultural production
- Developing black entrepreneurs
- Land reform in the Western Cape
- Universal access to support
- Increasing trade

This has also added to the participants’ and the Department understands of the broad range of important challenges that must be faced. The recommendations and issues raised will be documented and made available to all the delegates.

This occasion was about agriculture, farmers and their development. Messages were bold, clear and uncompromising. The transformation of agriculture is a daunting task whilst securing domestic food security and creating new economic opportunities within an ever changing environment. Together Agriculture’s stakeholders can do it!

Wadea Jappie, a successful new farmer, also won the category Top Producer for local Markets in the Department of Agriculture: Western Cape’s Female Farmer competition in 2006.