

Agri-Teen Symposium to foster youth participation in agriculture

With the launch of the Agri-Teen Symposium in Pretoria - the brainchild of journalist and media personality Ayanda Allie Paine working in conjunction with Land Bank - youth involvement in agriculture is set to get a boost as 300 grade 10-12 learners from schools in the greater Soweto area are brought together to learn about various learning and vocational opportunities across the agricultural value chain.

The symposium aims to establish a practical network of mentors for South African youth to tap into enhanced programmes that not only encourage greater youth participation in the sector but also facilitate this in a sustainable manner.

“ *The future is bright. Some of the youngsters who attended the inaugural Agri Teen Symposium in Pretoria today.*

[#AgriTeen2018 #PlantTheRightSeed #HumanRightsDay2018 pic.twitter.com/Sx7BoFS61b](#)— Agri Teen (@AgriTeen) [March 21, 2018](#) ”

The National Development Plan (NDP) provides a clear and overarching policy approach to agriculture that is being implemented across government and within the agricultural sector. As one of the primary economic activities, agriculture has the potential to create close to one million jobs by 2030. However, the implementation of activities that will encourage and support more youth entering the agricultural sector hinges on the ability of sector players to fully understand their challenges and how best to respond to them.

“Through the Agri-Teen Symposium, we will be working with sector specialists to unlock the untapped potential within the sector for our youth, finding solutions to some of the current barriers to participation in the process,” says Paine.

The youth challenge

During 2017, Land Bank concluded a survey to understand the perceptions, attitudes and challenges faced by young people participating in the agricultural sector. The main findings raised a number of areas to be addressed:

- The data suggests that young people’s perception of, and attitude towards the agricultural sector, is largely influenced by a lack of information and exposure to the industry. It is concerning that several of the respondents noted that they did not know what agriculture was or what it entailed;
- Others only associated agriculture with subsistence farming, manual labour and being poor; and
- Respondents also had little knowledge of opportunities in the sector, and the variety of careers that feed into agriculture. Thus, a majority of the respondents preferred a career in one of the tertiary sectors, over a career in agriculture.

This is in addition to existing challenges for new entrants including a lack of access to arable land, a lack of funding and poor access to industry information and statistics.

“ *The Expo at the Agri Teen Symposium is a call to action! Teens interacting with produce, institutions, departments etc. This helps to ensure that the event is not just a talk shop, cards must be exchanged, relationships built etc* [#AgriTeen2018 #PlantTheRightSeed #HumanRightsDay pic.twitter.com/9mZYGhf39Q](#)— Ayanda-Allie Paine (@AyandaAllieP) [March 21, 2018](#) ”

Getting our youth to tap into agriculture

For Land Bank CEO, TP Nchocho, these insights play a crucial role in guiding the bank in fulfilling its transformational mandate by customising programmes focussed on supporting young people in agriculture: “The Agri-Teen Symposium represents an important part of Land Bank’s broader response to the youth challenge facing the agricultural sector. We will be working closely with stakeholders across the sector to impart the knowledge, skills and time to ensure that South African youth are exposed to the best opportunities to tap into the agricultural value chain.”

Learners at the launch event this year will benefit from a wide range of inputs, including first-hand experience from emerging black farmers who are creating their own agribusinesses as well as established players on both the production and operational side and educational institutions offering agri-focussed courses.

Following its launch in Gauteng, there are plans to host the event annually, to extend the reach of the initiative to benefit learners nationally as well as to establish connectivity to existing support programmes for youth in the agricultural sector.

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