

# EXTENSION OFFICERS KEY TO GROWTH OF AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

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**KwaZulu-Natal Premier, Sihle Zikalala, has made a clarion call that extension officers must be afforded all the necessary resources in order to execute their duties properly for the benefit of the agricultural sector in the province.**

“The entire Department of Agriculture must ensure that the extension officers have the improved skills, information, equipment and facilities to develop an agricultural sector that will meet complex demand patterns, reduce poverty, and preserve or enhance ecological resources,” said Zikalala. He was speaking at the recent Extension Summit in Durban.

Every year, KwaZulu-Natal’s Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) hosts the summit where papers and posters related to agricultural extension are presented. The event is followed by an awards ceremony. Papers presented at the summit are in preparation for the South African Society for Agricultural Extension (SASAE) Conference that is held every year around May or June. The theme for this year’s summit was “Agricultural Innovation Systems Approach in Enhancing Effectiveness of Extension and Advisory Services”.

The purpose of presenting papers is to encourage extension officers to showcase their work and have it published more widely. The South African Sugarcane Research Institute (SASRI) has scooped many awards for the best papers and posters at recent SASAE conferences. This led to DARD requesting SASRI to assist their staff in preparing their presentations and papers to be presented at various summits and conferences. The awards ceremony acknowledges agricultural advisors, support specialists and managers who perform outstanding work in servicing their farmers. The overall local winner is entered for the annual national awards which are hosted by DAFF, and where all provinces compete. All commodity groups are eligible to participate, SASRI with its extension and subject matter specialists, being one of these.



*Above top: Kwazulu-Natal Premier Sihle Zikalala delivering his speech at the summit.*





**Above:** SASRI Extension and Biosecurity Manager Rowan Stranack with SASRI GIS Specialist Ingrid Thompson.

Said Zikalala: "We need to examine, analytically and honestly, the services we have been delivering to our farmers. Quite simply, if we have delivered the services and support structures the farmers need, then we have succeeded. On the other hand if those services and structures are not in place or accessible to each and every farmer in KwaZulu-Natal then collectively as a Department of Agriculture we would have failed the people of this province." He added that the department must develop relevant extension objectives with realistic, measurable goals, qualified and quantified over a period of time.

**Zikalala said he believed the extension officers and the department would be able to deliver a sound and effective extension service that is relevant to the diverse needs of the province.**

Turning his attention to the Extension Recovery Plan, Zikalala said he believed the extension officers and the department would be able to deliver a sound and effective extension service that is relevant to the diverse needs of the province.

According to the Premier, the following formed critical tasks assigned to extension officers:

- Transfer knowledge from researchers to farmers;
- Share knowledge from successful and top farmers with others;
- Advise farmers in their decision-making;
- Train farmers in production developments and techniques;
- Enable farmers to clarify and realise their own goals;
- Transfer diverse technologies for sustainable agricultural production, transformation, and marketing;
- Transfer management skills to farming groups and communities;
- Develop local capacity;
- Stimulate desirable agricultural developments.



**Above:** Delegates listening attentively to the presentation.

"As the extension staff of this department, you are in a unique position to ensure that this richly-endowed province realises its vast agricultural production potential. The purpose of the Extension Recovery Plan is to re-establish an excellent extension service within a short space of time. It might not be easy, but it is essential, and it will be very rewarding to those who commit to its goals. I am confident that each one of you here harbour such commitment," said Zikalala.

Both the Premier and MEC for Agriculture and Rural Development, Bongive Sithole-Moloi, stressed the importance of extension in alleviating poverty in rural places. They also highlighted the need for upskilling extension officers and the use of modern agricultural innovation systems. The importance support for land reform farmers was a priority to ensure that production is maintained, and the need to use well-established commercial farmers as mentors for land reform beneficiaries was also stressed. Government departments and Non-Governmental Organisations were encouraged to work closely with each other in order that they effectively complement one another in the services they provide to farmers.

Zikalala emphasised: "Just as we need to be talking with the farmers in rural areas, we also need to interact with these urban food producers. But even that is not enough. As extension, we also need to establish formal linkages between extension and agricultural research and agribusiness. We need to inform researchers of the farmers' needs, as well as of our needs, so that we can serve the farmers better."

## SASRI papers

SASRI staff presented three papers. These were:

1. Linking specialist research knowledge and extension services: An example of knowledge transfer using soil and water analyses to improve herbicide selection and application by farmers. By Dr PL Campbell.
2. Is agricultural extension relevant in facilitating sugarcane farming development among land reform recipients in a market driven environment? By NE Mkhabela.
3. A holistic and sustainable approach to community stakeholder relations: A case study of the KwaMthethwa small-scale grower sugarcane producing project. By SN Hlela. Showing the partnership that SASRI has with DARD, this paper was presented by a co-author, Mrs C Dlamini.

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