



agriculture, forestry & fisheries

Department:
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDIA STATEMENT

GOV BURSARY HOLDERS SUPPORT FREE HIGHER EDUCATION

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Two Grootfontein Agricultural Development Institute students, who are beneficiaries of government bursaries schemes, threw their weight behind the growing campaign for free higher education during the government's Imbizo focus week meeting at the Middleburg campus of the Eastern Cape institute.

One of Grootfontein students, Neliswa Zawe, 24, said free higher education would help a number of students to get education as some are restricted by high costs of tertiary education.

"Tertiary education fees are very expensive for people who don't have support system like the some students whose parent's source of income is pension. The bursary I am getting from the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has changed my life and it helps me a lot because they paid for my fees from the first year and now I am doing third year and I will graduate," said Zawe.

Another student Bathandwa Tsewu, (25), who received a bursary from OR Tambo District Municipality said the bursary was helping him to buy learning material unlike other students studying without a bursary who didn't have money to pay learning material.

"As a person getting government bursary, I think also other students must be allowed to study even if they don't have the money they must have access to higher education because its their future," said Tsewu.

Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Senzeni Zokwana said his department has several programmes to help young people join the agriculture sector.

"We have a number of incentives. One of them is a bursary system we put in place. The other one is to ensure that the students work within the system. Most assistance comes from different entities and farmers that form part of the work at the Institute," said Zokwana.

He added that students can go through theory without accessing experiential learning or interacting with farmers and they will not go with all the required knowledge. Therefore partnering with private sector is key if we are to achieve our goals.

The MEC for the Department of Rural Development and Agrarian Reform Mlibo Qoboshiyane said that the province would continue to support agricultural colleges in the province.

“Our department has awarded bursaries to a total of 56 external young people studying Veterinary Sciences, Agricultural Engineering, Animal Production, Soil Science, Plant Pathology and Crop Production with the intention of retaining the skills after completion of studies. Out of the 56 bursaries holders, 23 are females and 33 males. We do this help meet the needs of young people from families who cant afford to pay for high education,” said Qoboshiyane.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Zawe said after completing her diploma, she will use the knowledge she gained from the College to start her own pig farming.

“I am a pig farmer. I would like to work with pigs when I leave Grootfontein. As a student from rural areas, I would love to gain more knowledge to assist in everything we are doing in rural areas and put more knowledge I get here to benefit small-scale farmers in rural areas,” said Zawe.

Tsewu said because he lacks funds to start his own farming business, after completing his diploma, he plans to work for five to ten years to raise capital for his business.

Qoboshiyane said: “We want to ensure that young people are taking keen interest in the sector. It’s about skills that must drive the economy and not vice versa. I believe that institutions like Grootfontein are going to be a solution to the province of the Eastern Cape.”

Zokwana said government would like not to produce people who seek to be employed but produce people whose interest is to be entrepreneurs in the very area of learning.

“Its better for the youth to use the skills they learn from here because we have a problem of aging farmers. This becomes the easiest to introduce black people into farming because you do that with the skills and knowledge when they are young,” said Zokwana.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The college currently has 220 students registered, with 650 local farmers trained on livestock production at the college from the surrounding areas, and eleven learnership students.

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Situated in the dry Karoo Middleburg town, it is surrounded by the Cradock, Graffreinet and Colesburg town, which are dominantly small stock farming areas. It has developed a strong Partnership with the wool and mohair industry and is also well renowned for its research in this field.

A large number of learners who have diplomas and degrees in agriculture are, for a variety of reasons, unable to find jobs. At the present moment the South African Public Service and the sector at large are faced with the challenge of ensuring that there is an adequate supply of critical skills to drive the economy. Research indicates that agriculture has a negative image as a career of choice in the eyes of the youth. It is seen as the “work” of the poor and the elderly and not as something that can be profitable. Furthermore, agriculture is seen in a very narrow context and is equated solely with primary production as opposed to a profitable business, incorporating value-adding elements. Low enrolments in post-graduate studies, that is, at Masters and PhD levels yields a narrow research base that contributes to the slow response of the agricultural education and training to provincial, national, regional and global changes, challenges and opportunities in agriculture.

DAFF has been awarding bursaries since 2004, after introducing an external bursary scheme in response to government’s call to bridge the skills gap, promote rural development and to eliminate skewed participation in South Africa.

The scheme is used by DAFF as a skills pipeline to contribute towards the promotion of inclusive economic growth, job creation and food security by ensuring a constant supply of required skilled personnel in the highly competitive fields of agriculture, forestry and fisheries. A variety of programmes, which include the bursary scheme, have since been introduced to attract young people to the abovementioned sectors, and needless to say the effort is paying off very well.

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