

## Farmer support heading the way of public-private partnerships

Since President Ramaphosa took the reins last year, the focus for growth in South Africa has shifted towards public-private partnerships. It is well known that agriculture is a key focus of the Public-Private Growth Initiative and the policy direction finally seems to be shifting in that direction as well.

Last year, the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries published the draft Comprehensive Producer Development Support Policy, a framework policy that sets out the policy direction for farmer support. The policy places a very strong emphasis on blended finance as well as multi-plural extension services. This is a very welcome development as several agribusinesses and commodity organisations have been providing technical support, training and de facto extension services to farmer-clients for long time. The state likewise provides extension services through Provincial Departments of Agriculture but the approach has always been somewhat disjointed between private and public sector support. This policy recognises the positive role that both can play and seeks to coordinate the manner in which it is undertaken to make the best services available with the resources at hand.

Whilst this is all very positive, the wheels of policy typically turn slowly. One of the first steps, it would seem, is to include private sector participants in the annual National Extension and Advisory Services Awards (NEASA). Traditionally, this competition was limited to public sector participants but there are movements taking place to include the private sector. The exact form this will take remains to be decided, i.e. whether more participants will simply be invited or whether a separate category with distinct criteria will be created for private v public sector. These details are set to be thrashed out at a consultative workshop planned for the 31<sup>st</sup> of May in Pretoria. This may be a small step towards a fully integrated extension framework, but it is certainly a step in the right direction.