

Western Cape young farmers geared for the future

On a cool autumn evening this past Wednesday, Mr Johan van der Schyff was recognised as the Western Cape's young farmer of the year. Whilst the winner's achievements should be recognised and applauded, the it is the positive attitude of all the young farmers present that impressed on the day. In the build-up to the event, Theo Boshoff from Agbiz was fortunate enough to take part on a panel discussion alongside Mr Johann Norman, the reigning farmer of the year Mr Pieter Graaf and Mr Philip Oosthuizen from Sernick. The Panel was tasked with exploring the role which transformation will play in the sustainability of the agricultural value chain and was expertly led in its task by Mr Johann Kotze from SAPPO.

Despite its controversial nature, the dominant message that came thorough was very encouraging. Young farmers in the Western Cape see the value of transformation in the industry and are ready and willing to take up the challenge to make a success of it. It was acknowledged that uncertainty persists regarding the current regulatory framework and will likely continue to be the case for the foreseeable future. However, the risk can be mitigated by agriculturalists by taking proactive steps and driving the transformation agenda from within their businesses. It also came out clearly that the value in driving transformation and empowerment schemes lies with its ability to unlock the human potential within your value chain. To this end it should not be driven by outside pressures to comply but rather by an internal desire to strengthen your value chain by fostering pride and dignity amongst the people involved in your business.

Another aspect which featured prominently in the day was young farmers' eagerness to embrace technology. A second panel comprising of Wesgrow' Cornelis van der Waal, Daneel Rossouw from Nedbank, Technology and innovation expert Arie van Ravenswaay and last year's young farmer of the year, Mr JP van den Berg. The panel emphasised the role which technology will play to improve competitiveness and enable South African agriculture to remain a leader on the continent. Competition from the global market is likely to increase and technology is seen as a critical component as agriculturalists will have to produce more with less resources if they are to remain competitive. Interestingly, the panel emphasised that technology and mechanisation is not intended to replace human capital, but will rather be used as a tool which enables better decisions to be made and input costs reduced. Technology is, however, merely an enabler and can never replace the role which human capital plays in a farming enterprise.