

# The Weekly

## AGRI ADVISORS AWARDED FOR HELPING FARMERS

February 17, 2012 | Filed under News, Previous news | Posted by editor



### **Farming expertise rewarded ... Bridgette Malete receives an award for helping farmers grow the Free State economy from MEC Zwane.**

The provincial Department of Agriculture has rewarded extension officers for assisting struggling farmers to come up with economic initiatives.

Extension officers provide a service to farmers intended to provide information about assistance on the business side of agricultural production.

According to the MEC of Agriculture, Msebenzi Zwane, the aim of awarding the extension officers is to improve the image of services within the agricultural service.

There are several categories for the awards, which were held in Bloemfontein last week. These include agricultural technicians, extension officer/worker, agricultural advisors, supervision and management, support services (district), and support services (head office).

One of the winners of the awards, Bridget Malete, assists different kinds of farmers in Thaba Nchu, including a large number of communal farmers. "If you are able to manage them, then it means you are good." According to Malete, she advises them and gives them tips on how to grow their farming businesses to turn them into viable and independent enterprises.

She said one of the challenges she experiences while working with farmers is a lack of commitment from their side, which might prevent them from achieving their objectives. Malete said infrastructure is also a challenge which hampers farmers' productivity.

# The Weekly

“With regards to livestock production, farmers need fencing and technologies where we can do animal health activities.”

Malete added that she trains the farmers on marketing and markets, the use of the latest agricultural technology, and the business side of farming.

“We use Extension Online Suite which stores all the information required by farmers and also the green book which farmers write down the daily activities of their businesses.”

This book assists both the farmer and agricultural advisor to assess, analyse, and evaluate what they have agreed upon. She said small-scale farmers, in particular, do not realise that they can make a profit out of farming.

“We can now see some changes. They are more motivated now and are beginning to see some improvements in the daily running of their businesses.

“Some are even able to stand on their own and have learnt a lot through study groups and teambuilding activities.”

Malete said it is important for any agricultural advisor to do a situational analysis and not just tell people what to do.

“Then look at the loopholes and find solutions for the farmer, advising them about the different plans they can implement on their farms.”

Malete has diplomas in Agricultural Management, a B.Tech in Rural Development and Extension, and Information Technology (IT). She began working in Thaba Nchu in 2008. According to Zwane, it is important to shape farmers into commercial farmers, utilising extension officers.

“As the department alone we will not be able to cover all the farmers in the province. We call those who can to put together their resources to help those who cannot.”

The MEC said technological know-how is important to agricultural production. “Agriculture is a science, so our engineering services are geared towards that.” He added that technology has accelerated far beyond what agriculture has. “It is impossible to acquire all technologies available to implement on farms.”

[source: [www.theweekly.co.za](http://www.theweekly.co.za)]