

The Weekly

GOVERNMENT EMPOWERS FEMALE FARMER

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A proud moment ... The MEC of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mosebenzi Zwane, at the Glen College of Agriculture graduation ceremony.



Women in power ... The three women who received awards are Lesimole Letsie (21), Sandy Snyers (23), and Malenake Blom (21)

The Free State provincial government is making strides in producing skilled emerging black female farmers.

The Department of Agriculture is recruiting and training females in specialised agricultural skills through the Glen College of Agriculture. The initiative is part of a wider strategy by government to transform the agricultural sector in the province, which has been dominated by white males.

The progress made by government in training young women in agriculture was evident during a graduation ceremony at Glen College of Agriculture last Friday. Amongst the 28 graduates were 14 women, three of whom were awarded Dux student prizes for being top achievers.

The MEC for Agriculture, Mosebenzi Zwane, said the provincial government is proud of the academic achievements of young, black, female students at the college.

“I am not surprised by the fact that these young women are dominating the agricultural field. This reminds me of the old days when women were looking after the fields in order to sustain their families while the men were taking care of political affairs,” said Zwane at the graduation ceremony.

According to Zwane, the struggling agricultural sector needs qualified farmers who can bring innovation into farming and develop sophisticated and affordable solutions for the day-to-day challenges facing the sector.

Zwane said the agricultural sector continues to be confronted with challenges such as global warming, limited compliance to the green economy, negative economic growth, and the decline in productivity, which is having a negative impact on farming and rural communities.

“The department needs innovative thinkers who will bring about effective planning and innovative ways of doing business to ensure the best possible use of the limited resources available to this sector.

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“This day represents an end to a short-term goal that you have worked hard for and prepared for a long time. But most of all it represents the beginning of your journey in the field of agriculture. With education and development, we shall achieve our strategic goal of vertical integration in the agricultural sector and contribute to economic growth in the Free State.”

Thirteen of the 28 students were awarded higher certificates in agriculture. Nine of them specialised in crop production and four in animal production. Fifteen were awarded national diplomas in agriculture, nine specialised in crop production, and six in animal production.

The three third-year students who were awarded higher certificates in agriculture and received various awards as the top achievers and dux students are Lesimole Letsie (21) from Bothaville, Sandy Snyers (23) from Oppermansgronde, and Malenake Blom (21) from Wesselsbron. Letsie received the best scores in pasture science, agronomy, agricultural engineering, agricultural economics, animal health and soil science. She also received a Farmer’s Weekly medal and a Central Agricultural Union shield as Dux student.

Letsie, who was born and raised by her grandmother in the province’s maize capital, specialised in crop production. “The agricultural field requires you to be both patient and a risk taker, challenges which I love. The challenge to wake up at six in the morning, tend to your plants in the field or animals on the land, take chances with formulas, and wait a few months to see the results...” Letsie said she would like to complete her B.Tech and intends to further her studies in the field of agriculture. She is just one of the many female success stories of the Glen College of Agriculture, which has a rich history.

In 1886, a memorandum was developed and tabled which requested the establishment of a training farm. In 1912, land was purchased by government for this purpose.

This government backing made it possible for the commencement of activities in 1919 during which the first 21 students were enrolled for a diploma – all white students. Since then the college proved effective to the agricultural sector by producing almost 3 000 certificates a year.

Post-1990 developments in the country saw black students enrolled at the institution for the first time. However, in 1996 when rumours started to fly that Glen College would be closed, lecturers became disillusioned and student intake declined.

In 2012, it was announced that Glen would be repositioned to ensure that it contributes to the skills development strategy of the country. The national Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries investigated the status of agricultural colleges in the country and developed norms and standards with the purpose of establishing transformation within agricultural colleges.

In his budget speech earlier this year, Zwane said the province is repositioning Glen College as a centre of excellence and training in the agricultural sector.

The repositioning of Glen College of Agriculture is part of the department of Higher Education’s strategy to revive agricultural, nursing, and education colleges. It includes the delivery of Further Education and Training through accredited programmes at NQF level 1 to 5; learnerships and recognition of prior learning for farmers and farmworkers to ensure that higher and further education training programmes fulfill the required quality assurance in line with standards set by HEQC and the AgriSETA; and the management and provision of effective and efficient administration, support and stakeholder management.

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“This year has been marked the year of a better tomorrow for the Glen College of Agriculture. Since the MEC’s announcement of repositioning the college toward an Agricultural Training Institute, the number of students has increased from a mere 56 to 127 in this academic year. Institutions such as CUT, Dove, and FET have come together to work with us,” said the college’s Student Representative president, Vuyisile Mdutyulwa.

He called on the private sector and organised agriculture to share the responsibility in providing quality education to the youth to create a sustainable agricultural sector.

“Government cannot act alone in securing food for us all in this country. Private sector should also consider lending a helping hand in making sure that technology, skills and expertise pass on to benefit future generations. Our contribution to this country is not that of the youth in the forties or seventies who defied their government. It is not of the period of a young Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, or Steve Biko who felt it necessary to leave their homes and go to take up arms against an unjust system, but to treasure the fruits of their labour and to do our part in building this nation.”

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