

Female entrepreneurs gear up for top awards

By Mojalefa Mphapang

Bloemfontein - As part of enhancing the living conditions of women, including young women and women with disabilities, the Free State Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – in partnership of National Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries - will be hosting the annual Provincial Female Entrepreneur Awards in Welkom.

This year's event, which will be happening on August 5, will be held under the theme *"Reaffirming the commitment towards Women empowerment in Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries sector."*

The awards seek to acknowledge the role women play in the Agricultural sector.

The female farmers continue to play a critical role in improving food security, creating job opportunities as well as participating in economic growth and poverty alleviation initiatives.

"The department has a long-term ambition of leveraging women entrepreneurs from being subsistence and smallholder producers to commercial entrepreneurs," said Oupa Khoabane, MEC for Agriculture and Rural Development.

The entries for female farmers closed on the 30 May 2016. The entries received were judged by an appointed team of independent adjudicators from within the Agricultural sector.

The potential winners from all five districts will compete for different categories at provincial level. They will go through a rigorous adjudication process.

All categories:

- **Best Female worker in the sector:** this category is intended for women who do basic work in the sector, have minimum levels of education. People who do mundane operational work.
- **Best Subsistence producer in the sector:** is for beginners who can demonstrate that they have been involved in subsistence activities for at least a period of two years.
- **Top entrepreneur in the sector (Smallholder):** the entrants must demonstrate the actual activities which have been in progress for at least a period of two years.
- **Top entrepreneur in the sector (Processing):** changing the form of a product produced while adding value, at times can be added to products without changing their physical form. Entrepreneurs must demonstrate the actual processing activities which have been in progress at least a period of two years.
- **Top entrepreneur in the sector (Commercial):** demonstrate a degree of innovation and creativity in improving farming methods and deliver a consistent supply of products of high quality and quantity attractive to consumers through adherence to requirements.
- **Top entrepreneur (Export Market):** in this category enterprise must be producing for export markets with products distributed across the provincial boundaries.
- **MECs special award:** recognition to an outstanding young entrepreneur and/or a person with disability.
- **Overall winner:** award on a scale of 1–10 points on individual achievements on all the evaluated areas.