

Agricultural sector paves the way for unemployed youth

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Picture: IOL.

CAPE TOWN - South Africa's dire unemployment rate paints a despairing picture to youth who face the struggle of establishing themselves in their career. However, the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) provides opportunity for youth.

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According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), SA's unemployment rate is stagnant at 27.7%, the highest in 14 years.

Meanwhile, the agricultural sector has for the second consecutive quarter been crucial to SA's GDP growth, with a 2% GDP in quarter 3.

Although the agricultural sector shed 25 000 jobs in the same quarter this year, most of it was attributed to the drought in the Western Cape.

This sector continues to hold huge potential for growth and employment.

The citrus industry recognises the link between education, employment and financial freedom. Also, the importance of investing in human resource development.

In light of this acknowledgment, the Citrus Growers' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) established the Citrus Academy in 2005.

The Academy awards bursaries to students studying in qualifications related to the industry. This includes production management, plant sciences, agricultural economics, and industrial engineering.

The Academy awarded 645 bursaries to 247 students at academic institutions around the country since its inception in 2006.

Of the almost 200 students who had graduated through the Bursary Fund by the end of 2016, more than half are employed in the agricultural sector, with half of those employed in the citrus industry (many of them in management positions). All of these graduates are contributing to growing the industry and improving the prospects for future graduates.

The Academy, in alliance with the CGA's Grower Development Company (CGA GDC) also provides local farmers with training and support.

This is done through enterprise development training in order to provide farmers with a full range of services.

Industry initiatives like study groups, information days, extension services, and roadshows are also critical to building growers' skills capacity and competencies. During these events growers gain invaluable access to industry experts, the latest research findings, and industry intelligence, while being able to voice their concerns.

The CGA urges the nearly 8 000 learners who are writing their final matric examinations this year to pursue a career in agriculture and receive the necessary assistance.

The CGA expressed their commitment to continuing to work closely with government to bring fresh entrants and hope to our sector, as well as to the whole of South Africa.

"We need to continue to find ways to maximise the talent amongst the many aspirant youths in our country. They could contribute significantly to economic growth all round", concluded the CGA.

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