

SHORT, NON-REFEREED PAPER

## **YOUTH IN AGRICULTURE: SECURING THE FUTURE OF SUGARCANE FARMING IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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### **Abstract**

*“By 2050, there will be around 10 billion hungry people in the world and less farmland and resources. We believe there is a need for young leaders to be engaged in finding sustainable agricultural solutions to the growing global need for safe, nutritious food.*

*Only by inspiring our youth to pursue careers in science and agriculture can we continue to advance sustainable and innovative agricultural practices and ensure the security of our future food”*  
*(Youthagsummit, 2017).*

Young people are the future of farming and their participation in the agricultural sector is crucial for sustainable development. Succession planning is therefore needed to avoid the decline in family farming, poor transfer of knowledge and skills to subsequent generation of farmers (Naamwintome and Bagson, 2013).

This study aims to provide the benefits of promoting youth participation in the South African sugar industry; it also aims to identify existing programmes to support youth in agriculture in South Africa, while assessing the extent to which youth in agriculture programs promote future sugarcane farming in South Africa. Lastly, the study will recommend strategies to better promote young future cane farmers.

*Keywords:* youth, agriculture, sugarcane farming, succession planning

### **Introduction**

The South African sugar industry, like other agricultural sectors in South Africa and abroad, is faced with the challenge of an aging rural population and the perception of limited incentives for the youth to invest in agriculture. This study was therefore born out of the South African Cane Growers Association's (SACGA's) strategy to lead, protect and promote the sustainability of growers and cane growing.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) states that most of world's food is produced by ageing smallholder farmers in developing countries, and older farmers are less likely to adopt new technologies needed to provide sustainable agricultural productivity. According to the FAO rural youth are the future of food security, and yet around the world, few young people see a future for themselves in agriculture or rural areas (FAO, 2014).

## Factors that hinder youth participation in the agricultural sector

Youth<sup>1</sup> around the world face many challenges that make it hard to start or maintain farms. Much research has been conducted around the world to measure youth perceptions about the agricultural sector, and the factors that discourage their participation within the sector. The common challenges include the lack of access to funding, land and other productive resources necessary for farming (FAO, 2014). Also, in developing countries youth find themselves having to decide to relocate to urban areas due to lack of opportunities available for young people in rural areas.

The FAO has identified six principal challenges that hinder global youth participation within the agricultural sector:

- (i) Insufficient access to knowledge, information and education
- (ii) Limited access to land
- (iii) Inadequate access to financial services
- (iv) Difficulties in accessing green jobs
- (v) Limited access to markets
- (vi) Limited involvement in policy dialogue.

## Programs available for youth in agriculture

Appendix 1 shows lists of programs at a National level and at provincial level focusing on KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and Mpumalanga as provinces of interest, since this is where sugarcane is grown in South Africa. There are various programs at a national level that cater for various requirements for young entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector. The KZN province has more structures available for youth in agriculture than does the Mpumalanga province. Also, the KZN province has more agricultural training institutions compared to the Mpumalanga province, meaning that one could expect that more young people in KZN are exposed to agricultural subjects and farming than in Mpumalanga.

## Case Study on Youth Perceptions around Agriculture and Sugarcane Farming

The SACGA recognises the importance of engaging youth in the formulation of policies, to attract young people within the sugarcane industry to ensure the sustainability of the industry. To do so, a survey was conducted, aimed at capturing perceptions regarding the agricultural sector in general and the sugarcane industry, specifically. An opportunity was provided for participants to express their suggestions on what can be done by government and SACGA to attract and retain youth within the industry. A total of 24 young people participated in the survey, consisting of:

- 13 young people from Matholamnyama<sup>2</sup>, ages 17-25,
- 2 young people from the Umfolozi Mill, ages 26 and 27,
- 1 medium-scale grower in Mpumalanga, age 31,
- 3 South African Sugar Research Institute (SASRI) students, ages 23, 27 and 29,

<sup>1</sup> South Africa's National Youth Commission Act, 1996, defines youth as those from ages 14 to 35 years.

<sup>2</sup> Matholamnyama is a rural area in Ndwedwe with small-scale grower fields and surrounded by commercial sugarcane farms.

- 2 National Youth in Agriculture award holders, ages 29 and 35,
- 1 young person working at Illovo Mill in Sezela as a scheduling clerk, age 33,
- 1 young person working at Tongaat Hulett as a Project Manager, age 25,
- 1 young person working at TSGRO as a Development Officer in Mpumalanga, age 30.

All participants were given questionnaires to complete to capture individual opinions. Table 1 provides a summary of key findings from the survey.

**Table 1: Summary of key findings from the surveys.**

<b><i>What kind of support is required by youth to start agricultural businesses?</i></b>	
<b>Responses</b>	<b>%</b>
Access to information	25%
Access to land/machinery	25%
Access to funding	17%
Entrepreneurial and business training	17%
Experience	8%
Access to market and contract for buying produce	4%
Assistance with business plan development	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b><i>What could the older generation of farmers do to involve youth in farming?</i></b>	
<b>Responses</b>	<b>%</b>
Communicate the benefits of farming as a business	33%
Provide opportunities for young people to work on the fields	21%
Provide learnerships and in-service training for agricultural exposure	17%
Mentorship support	17%
Offer financial incentives for young people to associate value with farming.	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b><i>What should schools do to promote the culture of agriculture?</i></b>	
<b>Responses</b>	<b>%</b>
Provide adequate resources for agricultural subjects	38%
Make agricultural education more practical	25%
Promote farming activities by growing vegetables in the school yards	21%
Provide more information about the agricultural sector	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b><i>What could SACGA do to improve youth participation in the cane industry?</i></b>	
<b>Responses</b>	<b>%</b>
Provide educational tours of sugarcane farming	29%
Provide more information about the sugar industry	25%
Visit schools for career guidance in agriculture	17%
Create opportunities for young growers	17%
Employ young and energetic graduates to inspire others who are passionate about farming	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

**List of initiatives or available assistance respondents mentioned and captured in the survey<sup>3</sup>:**

- Land Reform and Restitution
- Cooperative Grant Funding
- Services for registration of Cooperatives
- Akwandze Agricultural Finance
- Mpumalanga Economic Growth Agency
- SEDA Funding
- AgriSETA
- IDC Funding
- Umsobomvu Youth Fund
- Land Bank

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Access to information, land and equipment were identified as key resources required for youth to start agricultural enterprises, and few respondents shared that access to markets and business plan development is critical to start up agricultural enterprises. The survey also found that most respondents suggest that the older generation of farmers should communicate the benefits of farming, to improve youth participation in the sector. As part of initiatives for schools to promote agriculture; most respondents stated that providing adequate resources to support agricultural subjects in schools is critical in promoting interest in agricultural careers. Finally, most respondents suggested that SACGA should provide educational tours on sugarcane farming, followed by the need for SACGA to provide more information about the sugar industry to attract youth to participate within the sector.

Most of the young people who participated in the survey were not aware of most of the initiatives recorded in Appendix 1 available for them both at a National and Provincial level. Access to information, land and funding remains a barrier for young people to start and maintain agricultural enterprises. It is suggested that industry partners such as SASA, SACGA, SASRI and millers should be more visible to youth and should come with individual initiatives to provide information to young people about the industry. It is important that stories of successful young people within the industry be shared for young people to be motivated and inspired to enter the industry.

It is recommended that SACGA should consider developing mentorship programs as part of platforms for sharing of skills and information within the cane growing industry. In-service training, internships and graduate programs should be encouraged within industry partners such as SASA, SASRI, SACGA and millers, for young people to gain practical experience, and for them to find value in entering the industry. The government has a role to play in terms of improving practical agricultural experience in schools; also, schools should encourage the culture of farming at early ages. Government initiatives for youth in agriculture both at a national level and provincial level need to be more communicated in order to improve youth participation in the sector. The future of South Africa's food security and rural communities is dependent on the youth entering the agricultural sector. It is therefore critical for the sustainability of the sugarcane industry and other stakeholders to effectively communicate with the youth to encourage them to enter the sector.

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<sup>3</sup> Percentage weightings were not assigned for the analysis as responses on initiatives varied.

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## APPENDIX 1

National Programs	Kwa-Zulu Natal Programs	Mpumalanga Programs
<p><b>1. Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme.</li> <li>• Small Holder Support Programme.</li> <li>• Agricultural Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Programme.</li> <li>• Youth in Agriculture Awards.</li> </ul> <p><b>2. Industrial Development Corporation (IDC):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agro-processing Competitiveness Fund.</li> </ul> <p><b>3. Department of Trade and Industry:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth in Agriculture Awards.</li> <li>• Sector Specific Youth Catalytic Projects.</li> <li>• National Youth Service Programme.</li> <li>• Youth Entrepreneurship Collateral Fund.</li> </ul> <p><b>4. National Youth Development Agency (NYDA):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ADA provides young entrepreneurs an opportunity to access financial and non-financial development support.</li> <li>• Grants offered by NYDA are offered for individual applicants, co-operatives and community projects.</li> </ul>	<p><b>1. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farmer Support and Development Programme.</li> <li>• Structured Agricultural Training.</li> <li>• Mjindi Framing Corporation.</li> <li>• Youth in Agriculture and Rural Development.</li> </ul> <p><b>2. Agricultural Development Agency:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ADA offers capacity building, technical support, and project implementation programmes.</li> </ul> <p><b>3. Agricultural Training Institutions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cedara College of Agriculture.</li> <li>• Owen Sithole College of Agriculture</li> <li>• Future Farmers Program.</li> <li>• South African Sugar Research Institute.</li> <li>• Weston Agricultural College.</li> <li>• University of Kwa-Zulu Natal.</li> <li>• Zakhe Agricultural College.</li> </ul>	<p><b>1. Mpumalanga Economic Development Agency (MEGA):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MEGA is responsible for funding SMMEs; agro projects, farming, housing; and for promoting trade and investment in Mpumalanga.</li> </ul> <p><b>2. Akwandze Agricultural Finance:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The agency offers financial assistance in terms of loans to sugarcane growers in Mpumalanga.</li> </ul> <p><b>3. Agricultural Training Institutions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beestepan Agricultural School.</li> <li>• Kanhym Agricultural School.</li> <li>• Lowveld College of Agriculture.</li> <li>• Buhle Farmers Academy.</li> </ul>