

Microsoft investment to boost sustainability in SA's agricultural sector

Microsoft South Africa has announced an investment of up to R40m in South Africa's agriculture sector, which is one of the country's critical industries driving growth and job creation. The investment is aimed at driving sustainability in the sector for smallholder farmers, who form an important part of the agricultural workforce in the country.



Lillian Barnard

[Over two million of these farmers](#) help reduce poverty for local communities and establish food systems for South Africa and the wider southern African region. However, they face challenges that prevent them from becoming commercially viable, efficient and sustainable.

"There is no doubt that South Africa's smallholder farmers have significant potential to drive growth and employment opportunities, as well as enable other sectors within the country to ultimately drive food security.

"This makes it critical to invest in the sector to address the challenges they face. Key challenges are a lack of infrastructure, access to competitive formal markets, production and business skills, funding and financial support to re-invest in their farming activities, and compliance with food safety regulations and legislation," says Lillian Barnard, managing director at Microsoft South Africa.

The investment is geared towards using technology as an enabler to address these challenges. Broadly, this means harnessing the power of technology to help improve the economic participation and contribution, efficiencies, viability and sustainability of South Africa's smallholder farmers. It also aims to help meet broader South African National Development Plan goals. This includes creating job opportunities and facilitating skills development to attract more people into key sectors such as agriculture – particularly youth and women.

A report by Research ICT Africa on [*Paving the way towards digitalising agriculture in South Africa*](#) shows advanced technologies like the Internet of Things, remote sensing technologies, and unmanned aerial vehicles can transform the agricultural sector and help to address South Africa's food security challenges, create jobs, and address historical inequalities by reducing costs, conserving resources, optimising inputs and maximising outputs.

Microsoft's investment will be aimed at identifying and appointing established tech companies in South Africa, and working with these companies to conceptualise, develop and roll-out various high-impact solutions in the agriculture sector. These solutions will address the challenges that the country's smallholder farmers face, and make a meaningful economic impact.

"Our investment is aimed at making a real difference in one of South Africa's most vital sectors by harnessing the power of technology. High-impact technological solutions will improve efficiencies in smallholder farming, lower the cost of production, improve access to local and international markets, improve compliance with legislation, and drive access to information, among others.

"By investing in the agriculture sector and unlocking the potential of technology to act as an enabler for growth and skills development, we are showing our commitment to driving sustainability and creating opportunities in one of South Africa's most critical, job-creating industries," concludes Barnard.

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