

Skills development summit considers agriculture

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Food and agriculture came under the spotlight in discussions at the Haggai Education and Training Skills Development Summit, held at the CSIR International Convention Centre in Tshwane.



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On the panel were Dr Shadrack Moephuli, CEO and president of the Agricultural Research Council (ARC); Tshiamo Dichabe, managing director of the Commercial Agriculture Youth Chamber and Nthuthu Mbiko-Motshegoa, chairperson of the women's desk at the African Farmers' Association of South Africa (AFASA).

Discussions focused on what the organisations are doing to ensure proper training and skills development. Moephuli spoke about the ARC's accredited courses, including short courses and higher-level courses. The ARC courses relate to various agricultural sectors, and to production in these sectors. The ARC also trains its own staff of about 3,000 people. The greatest challenge, identified during the training and development discussion, was the lack of proper funding. Dichabe reminded delegates that inadequate access to finance is the biggest cause of the lack of youth participation in agriculture.

Climate change and water supply challenges were identified as difficulties that impact on food security in South Africa. The discussion also considered future possible scenarios of the next few years. GMOs (genetically modified organisms) provided the fuel for rather a hot topic in which discussion was centred around whether there are strategies in place to improve the food we eat, and how we can support local farmers who provide fresh food.

Mbiko-Motshegoa spoke about her experience of women in farming and reported on what AFASA is doing to help aspirant women farmers gain access to land and proper training.

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