

5 ways women farmers can succeed in agriculture

While 60-80% of smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa are female, only an estimated 20% are landholders. "With females in farming jobs only making up less than half of the total, we can be certain that women who actually own the farms have numbers that are even less," says Ray-Ann Sedres, head of transformation at Santam. "At Santam, we remain focused on our efforts to elevate the role of women across various industries, of which agriculture is a key sector."



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

"With our support of organisations such as Buhle Farmers' Academy, we are kick-starting the careers of emerging farmers through consumer financial education (CFE). Part of the work done is changing perceptions about farming and creating opportunities for a new generation, particularly young black women, to enter the field.

"Armed with the right skills, real-life experience and business knowledge, these budding farmers can turn their farms into sustainable enterprises, contributing to the agricultural sector, which is vital to the country's economy and for job creation," Sedras.

Samkelisiwe Hadebe, who is heiress to a maize, soybeans and sugar bean farm in Daggakraal, Mpumalanga previously owned by her grandfather, completed a course in livestock production with Buhle Farmers' Academy in September last year.

She says that it hasn't been easy operating as a woman in such a male dominated industry. "A lot of people thought I was

pursuing the wrong career path and should focus my attention on something more 'female appropriate'. But I stuck to my guns because I knew that the proof was in the pudding. I started planting my own crops and drawing up business plans and working on financial statements. I didn't let anyone's doubts hinder my passion and commitment from my dream."

Hadebe has dreams to expand her crop farm into a livestock farm as well as expand sales to reach not only the country, but overseas as well. "I'm quite excited about the future and Santam has played a big role in that," she notes. "The farm has already received more exposure due to the Santam Transformation video as well as through the funding of my Livestock production diploma, which has enabled me to apply my learnings with the aim of taking my farm commercial. This can only bolster sales which in turn will allow for the growth I'm aiming for."

Hadebe shares her top five tips on how other budding woman farmers can succeed in the agriculture industry:

1. **Let's educate ourselves:** Education is key to increasing interest in agriculture for girls and women. After college, I did a diploma in agriculture and that's where my passion for this industry started. If this was implemented at primary school level already, I believe that more women would be inclined to farming.

2. **It doesn't happen overnight:** I'm not rushing things - I've taken the first step into expanding by buying one goat. We tend to be quite impatient as humans and think everything should just happen the moment we decide to invest our efforts, but that's just not the way things work. Be patient with your business and yourself. Taking it a step at a time yields perfection.

3. **Take risks:** I've had to start from scratch on the farm my grandfather left me. And one tough call I've had to make is to come in at lower prices to differentiate myself in the market. Yes, this affects revenue, but I am building a client base and gaining exposure. Nothing worth having is easy. And sometimes you have to take a risk with your business in order to succeed.

4. **Build a strong support network:** My mother has been my biggest support since taking over the farm – whether it be with funds to invest in the farm or advice. My family has also been a huge part of helping me run the farm, especially at a time when I can't afford too many employees. Find your support. Lean on them when you need to. There's nothing wrong with that.

5. **Adopt an entrepreneurial spirit:** The more people are willing to become entrepreneurs, the more this impacts the economy in terms of job creation. And the more women decide to take this road, the more you open up doors for other women.

"My business is still in its infancy and I've only been part of the Santam sponsored CFE programme for nearly a year now, but I'm excited for the prospects. In a few years, I will be running a successful crop and livestock farm, contributing to the economy as well as my community and making my grandfather proud through it all," concludes Hadebe.

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