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OPPORTUNITY

3

Build productive synergies
between communities
and the environment

OPPORTUNITY

9

Create new connections
to opportunity for
young people.

HANDS-ON

Experience Learning

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WHY WE NEED TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE IN AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is an economic growth sector in South Africa, a country with high rates of youth unemployment. The sector constitutes more than just farming and farm work. It's an integral part of our country's food system, which is an "interconnected system of everything and everybody that influences, and is influenced by, the activities involved in bringing food from farm to fork and beyond".¹

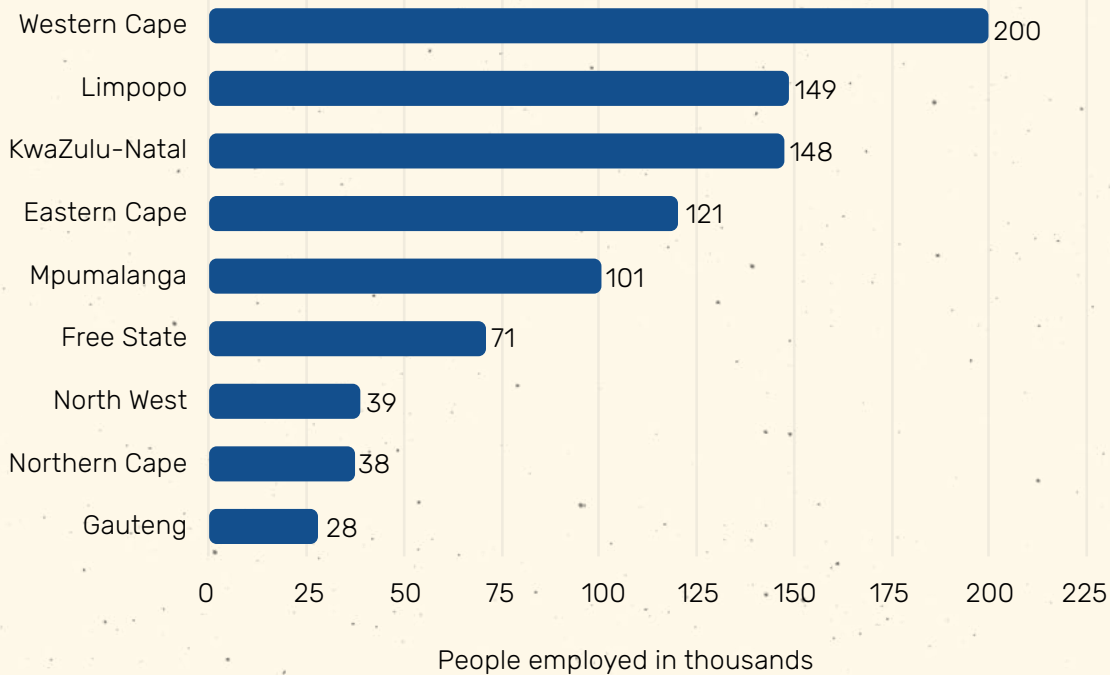
If one considers that food should not only meet a person's caloric requirements, but also support their nutritional status, there is an obvious link between agriculture and nutrition. Considering the role of agriculture in our food system, this learning brief explores the ways in which young people can participate in the sector and how this could influence environmentally friendly farming practices, as well as access to nutrition for poorer families and access to new consumer markets.

¹ Parsons, K., Hawkes, C., & Wells, R. 2019. Brief 2: Understanding the food system: Why it matters for food policy. (Rethinking Food Policy). Centre for Food Policy, City University, London.

AGRICULTURE: WHAT THE STATISTICS TELL US

The average age of a South African farmer is 62, even though a more than a third of our country's population is made up of young people. On the one hand, the 'youth bulge' presents a demographic dividend, an opportunity to expand the economy; however, severe poverty, inequality, and unemployment erode those prospects. Agriculture is the backbone of many developing countries in Africa, where 65% of the population consists of subsistence farmers who rely on indigenous farming knowledge to feed their families.² Furthermore, agriculture is typically the primary or sole source of income for smallholder farmers who continue to live in poverty while operating farms that are less productive than they could be, and miss out on key opportunities to contribute to broader food systems.³

Figure 1: Number of people employed in the agriculture industry in South Africa in Q2 2023, by province⁴



2 Isadora Savage 2023. 10 facts about farming in Africa. <https://borgenproject.org/tag/subsistence-farming/#:-:text=Roughly%2065%20percent%20of%20Africa's%20family%20until%20the%20following%20harvest>

3 Dayo Aduroja 2021. What is the Role of Youth in Agriculture? <https://www.heifer.org/blog/what-is-the-role-of-youth-in-agriculture.html>

4 Statista 2023. Number of people employed in the agriculture industry in South Africa in Q2 2023, by region. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1129828/number-of-people-employed-in-agriculture-in-south-africa-by-region/>

Agriculture is the fastest-growing industry in South Africa, expanding at a rate seven times greater than the lacklustre growth of the overall GDP in 2023.⁵ Figure 1 (on the previous page) shows the number of people employed in the agriculture sector, with the Western Cape employing the most people at 200 000. The province successfully achieved a year-on-year increase of 13 000 people being employed.⁶ Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal also had a significant number of employees in the sector, with 149 000 and 148 000 people employed, respectively.⁷

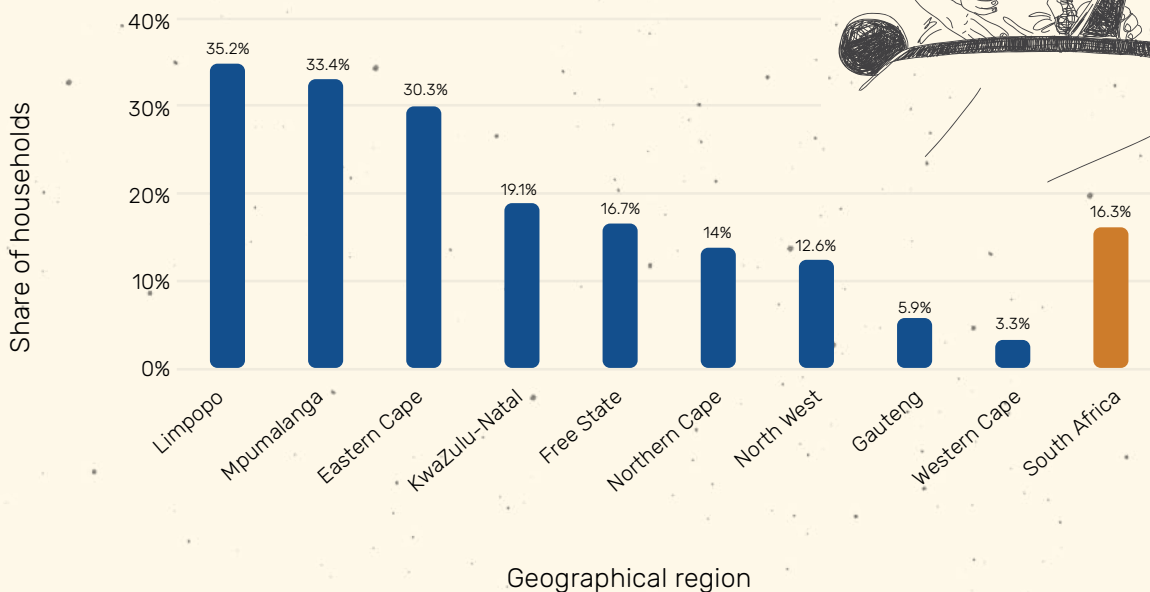
Apart from being employed in the sector, 16.3% of households in South Africa were also involved in agricultural activities in 2022 as demonstrated in Figure 2 (below). Large proportions of households involved in agricultural production are recorded in rural areas in provinces such as Limpopo and Mpumalanga. In contrast, Gauteng and Western Cape recorded the lowest proportions as they are relatively more urbanised provinces and are less likely to be involved in agricultural activities.

YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE SECTOR

It is reasonable to expect that young people in developing countries live in areas with the greatest agricultural potential, and as a result, they play a significant part in the agricultural sector.⁹ However, data collected in most African countries do not adequately reflect young people's present participation in these agricultural activities. However, this should not detract from the crucial role that young people play in agriculture, as well as the required support that ought to be in place for them to be successful in this profession.



Figure 2: Share of households involved in agricultural activities in South Africa in 2022, by province⁸



5 Rebecca Campbell. 2023. Agriculture was the fastest growing sector of the SA economy in the second quarter. <https://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/agriculture-was-the-fastest-growing-sector-of-the-sa-economy-in-the-second-quarter-2023-09-11#:~:text=While%20total%20GDP%20grew%20by,of%20the%20South%20African%20economy>

6 Statista 2023. Number of people employed in the agriculture industry in South Africa in Q2 2023, by region. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1129828/number-of-people-employed-in-agriculture-in-south-africa-by-region/>

7 Statista. 2023. Share of households involved in agricultural activities in South Africa in 2022, by province. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1116075/share-of-agricultural-households-in-south-africa-by-province/#:~:text=As%20of%202022%2C%2016.3%20percent,households%20involved%20in%20agricultural%20production>

8 Statista. 2023. Share of households involved in agricultural activities in South Africa in 2022, by province. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1116075/share-of-agricultural-households-in-south-africa-by-province/#:~:text=As%20of%202022%2C%2016.3%20percent,households%20involved%20in%20agricultural%20production>

9 Dayo Aduroja. 2021. What is the Role of Youth in Agriculture? <https://www.heifer.org/blog/what-is-the-role-of-youth-in-agriculture.html>

YOUNG PEOPLE MUST BE SUPPORTED IN PURSUING A CAREER IN AGRICULTURE FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

To prevent food insecurity:

Since farmers are often older than 60, agriculture is viewed as an ageing sector. Thus, it is important to help young people become active participants in agriculture, as increasing the labour force is necessary to prevent food insecurity.

Youth employment is good for the economy and society:

Young people are able to participate in economically productive activities, which is good for their well-being, families and communities. Increasing access to quality education also enables young people to apply themselves in developing new and sustainable agricultural methods.

Agriculture is a dependable industry with growth potential:

As the demand for food increases so should the supply of a semi-skilled and skilled workforce in agriculture. This industry will always be active since people require food and nourishment to survive. As a result, it's a dependable industry that needs youth involvement to flourish.

Agriculture is more than just farm work:

Young people stigmatise agriculture as they often perceive a career in this sector as labour-intensive with minimal financial reward. In addition to these perceptions, their family, friends and community might criticise them for choosing this as a career path. Nevertheless, young people still view work related to food production and food systems as meaningful. It is crucial for them to have the required guidance, skills and mindsets to turn their aspirations into positive lived experiences as well as income generation.

Agriculture offers a variety of career choices:

Agriculture is an evolving and diverse field with a range of career pathways. A career in agriculture might involve working in laboratories, offices and a variety of other places; it's not limited to farm management and working within the vicinity of farms.



CURRENT POLICIES AND STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE IN AGRICULTURE

Policies and strategies have been established, both continentally and nationally, to boost economic growth by integrating young people in the agriculture sector and fostering a sense of agency and self-sufficiency.

At the continental level, institutions such as the African Union have developed several youth development policies and programmes, such as the Youth Decade Plan of Action and the TVET Continental Strategy.¹⁰ Such an expansive strategy allows exploration of new opportunities for young people related to globalisation and new production systems. It also necessitates the establishment of support mechanisms that will provide young people with the best chance of success.

At a country level, South Africa's Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) envisions an integrated and coordinated post-school education and training (PSET) system for improved economic participation.¹¹ The White Paper for post-school education and training (WPPSET) states that this system is a crucial institutional mechanism that has to adapt to the needs of young people and society. As education, skills and health form part of the country's priority in achieving the National Development Plan (NDP), DHET will partner with the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development to enrol students for a Diploma in Agriculture at agricultural colleges.¹² In addition, the Agriculture Sector Education and Training Authority (AgriSETA) is mandated to provide relevant, quality and accessible education, training and development in both the primary and secondary agricultural sectors.¹³ The majority of the 50 TVET colleges located around the country provide courses in farming management and agriculture. However, it's difficult to determine how many young people complete these courses because information on completion rates and links to income-generating opportunities is not readily available.

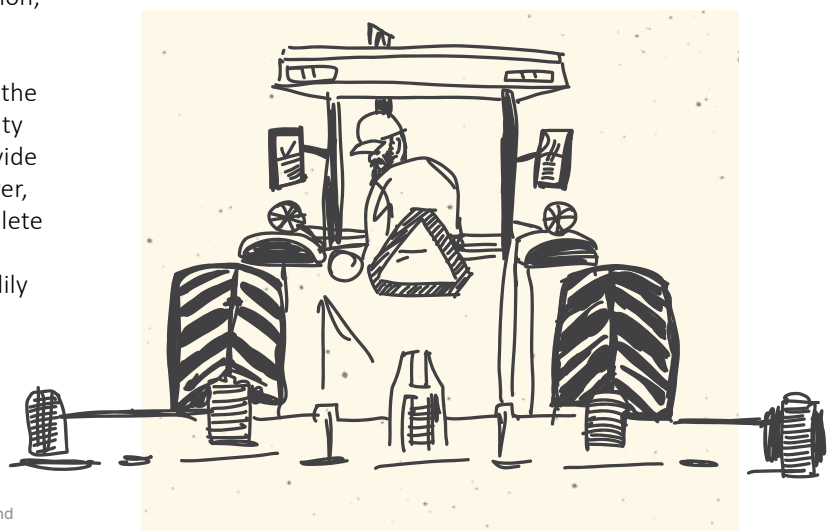
PATHWAYS TO A CAREER IN THE FOOD SYSTEM

Training for a career in agriculture is offered in different formats. In the Higher Education and Training sector, a person can study for a degree or diploma in agriculture (including many specialisations like farm management). These programmes are offered by universities and TVET colleges across the country and typically take three years to complete if studying full time.

There are also registered occupational training programmes (learnerships) and short courses offered by accredited institutions. The duration of these courses varies greatly.

Many non-profit organisations (NPOs) offer training programmes to people in the communities where they are active. Not all those programmes are registered and accredited by bodies such as the AgriSETA and South African Qualifications Authority.

Part of DGMT's efforts to make the food system attractive to young people is to diversify what is meant by work in this sector. While production is a key part of the food system, we need to look beyond the farm to make it attractive to young people. We should also consider the skills that are needed to support farming activities, such as the maintenance of tools and machinery, and installing and managing irrigation systems.



¹⁰ African Union. Continental strategy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to foster youth employment

¹¹ Department of Higher Education and Training. 2020. Strategic plan 2020-2025

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

CASE STUDY: SIYAVUNA

Siyavuna Abalimi Development Centre is a non-profit organisation based on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. The organisation envisages a future in which young people are part of food system transformation: they recognise that farming is a viable career path, and that they as young people play a crucial role in the sector. For young people in rural settings, agriculture may be the only economic sector that can lead to employment or income generation.

In 2022, the Social Employment Fund (SEF) awarded funding to Siyavuna to introduce agriculture as a means of employment and entrepreneurship to 1 000 rural young people in KwaZulu-Natal. Subsequently, through funding from DGMT, Siyavuna is working to transform this initial investment into a long-term opportunity for at least 500 young people from that same cohort to maintain their momentum for an additional two years. Importantly, Siyavuna recognises that the income that young people derive from this programme can be sufficient to meet their basic needs. Small-scale agriculture is not always commercially successful at a scale that creates greater income. Siyavuna has a guaranteed agreement with all farmers in its network, which allows market access to producers. This is often a major stumbling block for small-scale producers.

This programme is compelling because it highlights the intersection of nutrition, food security and youth development. Siyavuna has identified five principles that guide its agricultural programme:

- 1. Sound environmental and agricultural management principles**
- 2. Agroecological knowledge**
- 3. Nutritional diversity and food security**
- 4. Entrepreneurship skills and development for sustainable livelihoods**
- 5. Strengthening of agricultural value chains**

The initial investment from the SEF entailed participants completing training for three days in chemical-free food production, with two days dedicated to theory and the third to practical application. The training components focused on how to start an agroecological food garden from scratch as well as theory on composting, raised beds, inter-cropping, seed saving, seedling growing, production maintenance, chemical free agri-inputs and pest control. After completing the three-day training, participants started their own gardens and were assessed on their production skills. The training provided was accredited by AgriSETA. The Siyavuna experts, who are local farmers, conducted weekly visits with each participant to monitor progress and to provide additional support, thereby extending the training beyond the initial three days. The ongoing support was also an opportunity for intergenerational engagement and skills transfer, as the local farmers are mostly older members of their communities. This element of the project builds social capital and strengthens the community fabric.

Prior to this project, the Siyavuna team had expertise in developing home gardens, small-scale farming operations and community enterprises. However, the majority of the people they were working with were older than the youth age group. The shift to explicitly target young people meant they needed to tailor their approach. The team suggested that the most important input is in-field mentoring, which is "critical to enable the participants to successfully scale production". They recruited farmers in their network as mentors, supervisors and technical advisors. In addition to face-to-face support, they also used digital platforms where possible. However, high data costs were a barrier, and digital platforms required a decent level of tech savviness from all parties.

Within the current cohort of young people, the team finds that affirmation and public acknowledgement of success are big drivers for ongoing commitment. The most promising gardens are celebrated on social media and there is serious competition among participants to get one of these coveted posts on Facebook.

There is no single definition of **agroecology**; rather it is understood as a broad set of principles. There are three interlinking areas of agroecology: firstly, environmental sustainability and the incorporation of ecological processes as a core component of farming; secondly, social redress, which includes access to land and local ownership of processes; and thirdly, economic fairness in terms of participation, labour and diversification. Agroecology transforms and empowers people in the food system.¹⁴

LESSONS FROM OUR PARTNERS

- The definition of what work in the food system looks like (i.e. beyond agriculture) must be widened to consider nutrition outcomes and value chain development.
- Young people must be integrated into the agricultural workforce by focusing on the identification of reasons behind their (un)willingness to work in agriculture.¹⁵
- Agriculture is vague, daunting and unappealing to young people because it is not commonly taught in school. Therefore, young people are unaware of the prospects that the industry can offer.
- There is a lack of data on young people already in the sector related to education, employment, and entrepreneurial successes and challenges.
- There is a need to publicise success stories in agriculture among young people.
- Farming and agriculture must be presented in a practical way so that students can learn by doing and seeing, not simply from an academic standpoint.
- We must be honest with young people about expectations and the commitment required to make a success in agriculture. This isn't a sector characterised by quick wins.

¹⁴ HLPE. 2019. Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome. <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5602en/ca5602en.pdf>

¹⁵ Laura Girdziute, Erika Besuspariene, Ausra Nausediene, Anastasija Novikova, Jarkko Leppala and Martina Jakob. 2022. Youth's (Un)willingness to work in agriculture sector

WHAT'S NEXT?

DGMT is currently building a portfolio of projects that are trying to explicitly link young people to the food system. These projects include subsistence farming programmes, nutrition promotion efforts, building value chains and growing small agroecological businesses. Together with our partners, we are intentional about learning about the common principles that are required to attract, retain and develop young people in these sectors. Over the next two years, DGMT will continue to surface learnings, identify promising practices and celebrate the success of our civil society partners.

This brief was written by Anna-Marie Müller and Agisanang Magooa, and edited by Rahima Essop and Cornè Kritzinger. The brief is based on contributions from Siyavuna Abalimi Development Centre.

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This is the learning experience of:

 **Siyavuna**
ABALIMI DEVELOPMENT CENTRE NPC

