

Minister Zokwana reaches out to agri colleges

The Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Senzeni Zokwana is set to visit agriculture colleges as part of Government Imbizo Focus Week.



Grootfontein Agricultural Development Institute. Image source: www.middelburgec.co.za

Zokwana has visited Grootfontein Agricultural Development Institute and will visit Fort Cox College of Agriculture and Forestry on Friday, 21 April.

Education and training in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors is facing a number of challenges, including the legislation governing colleges of agriculture, employability of agriculture college graduates and the participation of women and youth in the three sectors.

“Following these challenges, the Imbizo will emphasise the implementation of norms and standards for agricultural training institutes, which are expected to be officially endorsed as a guideline to the mandate of these colleges,” the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries said on Wednesday.

The imbizo will be used as a platform to engage with stakeholders in the education and training of the three sectors in efforts to support and drive the development agenda of food security and rural wealth creation.

Stakeholders are also expected to share with the department's authorities the implications of transferring colleges of

agriculture from the department to the Department of Higher Education and Training.

Promoting skills development in agriculture

Grootfontein Agricultural Development Institute is a specialised centre of excellence in small stock production, with a proven record of training in wool and mohair production.

The college is situated in the dry Karoo town of Middleburg, surrounded by Cradock, Graaffreinet and Colesburg, which are dominantly small stock farming areas. It has developed a partnership with the wool and mohair industry and is well known for its research in the field.

Fort Cox College of Agriculture and Forestry is a centre of excellence in forestry. It is located near the Kat Valley Citrus growing area. The college is also near the University of Fort Hare, making it easier to tap into the expertise from the university in support of its training programmes.

It is also the only college that is semi-independent and governed by a board appointed by the MEC for Agriculture in the Eastern Cape to provide leadership and oversight.

The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has been awarding bursaries since 2004, after introducing an external bursary scheme in response to government's call to bridge the skills gap, promote rural development and eliminate skewed participation in South Africa's economy.

The scheme is used by the department as a skills pipeline to contribute towards the promotion of inclusive economic growth, job creation and food security by ensuring a constant supply of required skilled personnel in the highly competitive fields of agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

"A variety of programmes, which include the bursary scheme, have since been introduced to attract young people to the abovementioned sectors and needless to say, the effort is paying off very well," the department said.

Over the years, the department has funded deserving young people to follow careers that have been identified as scarce and critical. These include agricultural economics, bio-resource engineering, food science and technology, veterinary science, viticulture and oenology, agronomy, entomology, plant pathology, soil science and grassland/pasture science, genetics and microbiology in the agricultural sector.

Other careers include forestry and wood science in the forestry sector, as well as oceanography, marine biology, ichthyology and aquaculture in the fisheries sector.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>