



agriculture, environmental affairs & rural development

Department:
Agriculture, Environmental Affairs
& Rural Development
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

GRADUATION SPEECH FOR OSCA AND CEDARA COLLEGES OF AGRICULTURE BY MEC FOR AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, MRS LYDIA JOHNSON - 05 APRIL 2011

Mr Programme Director; Rev. Mantini, Senior Staff Members and Officials of The Department; Representatives from the Private Sector and NGO's; College Sponsors; Staff and Students of the two Agricultural Colleges; The Graduates, their Families and Friends.

I would like to convey my warm greetings to all of you this morning. I always get thrilled whenever I see young and beautiful people succeed in life. Every person on this earth dreams about what he/she wants to become when they grow older, some see themselves as doctors, engineers, pilots and the list goes on. If anyone goes around interviewing children about their future prospects, it is not likely that agriculture will be mentioned too often. But it's awesome that we have convened here this morning to applaud success and welcome so many fresh brains into the agricultural sector.

Young people form the majority of our population and are the future of the country. There is a common adage in Zulu which best explains what I have just said and it says "Inkunzi isematholeni" Which means that indeed young people are the future. Our government is committed to youth development in building and securing a brighter future for our country. That is why there is so much investment towards lifelong learning through bursary schemes like NAFSAS, scholarships and exchange programmes. All of these programmes are geared towards skills development and I want you to take full advantage of them. Above this, government has launched an aggressive stance to address unemployment through the Jobs Fund. Now these programmes will

stand you in good chances of quickly landing your dream jobs if seize opportunities in them and upgrade your skills. Remember! The sky is the limit and certainly this is not the end of the road for you.

The young men and women who are graduating today should be commended on more than simply the achievement of a Higher Certificate or Diploma, they should be commended on wanting to invest themselves and their services in the field of Agriculture which, as you well know, is the most incremental factor in the survival of mankind. Parents, guardians and spouses of these students must also be thanked for the inevitable sacrifices made during their period of study. Studying in these two Colleges need to be further commended on the fact that these students have put their education before the urge to seek fringe benefits as has been the case with many other tertiary institutions where students become involved in unnecessary activities that serve little more than to distract them from their primary goals.

Many of today's graduates probably aspire to enter the agricultural production sector. You are the 'farmers and potential employers of the future' and I salute you for you will be feeding the nation, and that is a noble task. Food security, not just at the level of the individual but, critically, at the national level, is the challenge that agricultural producers must address. Hence this programme is run by the Department as one of its flagship projects in the form of One Home One Garden and One School one Garden. The Department has committed itself in ensuring that the production of food, fibre and fuel is ensured in ways that are economically viable and environmentally sustainable. The majority of your former colleagues are already working hard in transferring skills to the beneficiaries of this program and soon you will be joining them.

You are the agricultural entrepreneurs and business people of the future and I salute you. Broadly speaking, you will be either providing the inputs and services necessary for production, or you will be involved in processing the outputs or providing the services for handling those outputs.

It is encouraging to learn that the Colleges have introduced a competency based learning curriculum which will ensure that its products are capable of being hands on in agricultural programs and have also introduced a realistic entrepreneurial skills and managerial capabilities in their training. I hope that such business experience projects, coupled with the existing production

projects, will inspire students to look beyond 'finding a job' and to have the confidence to create employment niches for themselves.

In practice however, the division between the production and entrepreneurial sub-sectors is not always clear. As you proceed in your careers, you may find that you have a foot in each camp. The training you have received here will enable you to bridge this divide. In fact, it is probable that in the next decade every agriculturalist will find that the effects of recession, fuel price volatility, global warming and international trade demands, to name but a few, will have changed the face of agriculture so much that it will be almost unrecognizable. Every agriculturalist of the future will have to commit to keeping abreast of these trends, and that means committing to on-going training, whether formal or informal.

But, you may ask, who will be providing that training?

Perhaps among this year's graduates are a few who have chosen the career path of agricultural knowledge transfer. This seldom recognized, but complex, sub-sector is not confined to College and University lecturers, but also embraces primary, secondary and vocational agricultural education and training and diverse areas such as subject-specific journalism, librarianship and training resource development.

In the interests of its agricultural education programmes, both the Department and the College must retain very close ties with dynamic sector they serve. It is commendable that College staff are active in keeping abreast of developments in the production sub-sector by engaging with leading farmers and arranging on-farm practicals and study tours. Just as the College commits itself and its staff to ongoing improvement, I appeal to you as graduates to commit yourselves to ongoing study and self-improvement. I encourage you to see this as an excellent investment that yields high returns. Start investing in yourself by way of your ongoing agricultural education; come back to these Colleges to attend Farmers Days, attend Departmental Short Courses and make every effort to further your academic studies.

In closing, I feel it is a privilege to be associated with the two Colleges of Agriculture in the Department. I must also applaud them that in the past years they were operating as Ivory towers and we were not even aware of

what they were doing. Things have changed so drastically and this has resulted in ensuring that in return we, as the Department, provide our unwavering support to ensure that they succeed in improving the Structured Agricultural Education in this province.

I am also excited by the partnership that exists between the Colleges and the Universities of Fort Hare, Pretoria, Nelson Mandela and KwaZulu-Natal. Hitch your wagon to the stars and keep up the good work. The Department took an informed decision that at the end of your three year Diploma you are hired as Extension assistants to ensure that you are given an experience in the field whilst we are also allowing you to register with the Universities that we have Service level agreements with to upgrade your qualifications. This is a lifetime opportunity that you must not miss.

I trust that each of the students who graduated here today shares this sense of privilege, and will honour it by maintaining the connection with the College, taking their places in the agricultural sector and committing to ongoing agricultural education and training. Remember, as some of you go out into the job market that any opportunity to gain experience is a worthy use of your time. I wish you all well in your future endeavours. Last but not least I would like to thank all the lecturers for a job well done.

I now look forward to conferring the Certificates and Diplomas.