



MEDIA RELEASE

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Knysna youth successfully complete Agricultural Learnership

The Vineyard Academy and Mayoral Agricultural Learnership concluded on Tuesday, 21 August.

A ceremony attended by Knysna Executive Deputy Mayor, Elrick van Aswegen, municipal training officer, Zukile Kala, programme facilitator, Stephen de Vries and stakeholder partners National Student Fund, South African Wine Industry Information & Systems (SAWIS) and the Vineyard Academy took place later that morning in the town hall.

In his address the Executive Deputy Mayor, Elrick van Aswegen said that, “as an ex-teacher it is always good to see how young people reach for their goals. This learnership is a catalyst for reaching those goals. Many young people visit my office on a regular basis seeking employment or funding for further studies. The majority are unemployed Knysna youth. If our youth does not have skills and opportunities, then this country is headed for disaster. And if we as leaders do not give them the opportunities, it means that we are failing them.”

Van Aswegen went on to say, “Council recently had a discussion on how to create the environment for young people to access economic opportunities. We should be able to assist you so that you can contribute to the key drivers of our economy. When I think of black economic empowerment and economic development, it is about having young black people active and at the centre of the economy of this town.”

The learnership commenced in October 2017 and focused on the Greater Knysna unemployed youth and young entrepreneurs. The objectives of this programme are critically interlinked and include youth development through access to skills and career development, supporting land reform and enterprise development programme.

The curriculum focused on mixed farming methods, plant produce and animal products. The qualification can enable a career path in farm management, entrepreneurial development or formation of Co-ops.

According to the National Skills Fund's, Norman Sithole, their organisation is a funding institution and rely on stakeholder partners to make the training possible. As a funding institution the most critical outcome is that learners can be placed in the industry after completion of the training. “We also want to enable them to create their own businesses or find other opportunities. I encourage you as learners to pursue other opportunities, go out there, do research and empower yourselves.”

One of the participants, 28-year-old Unathi Mntungo, could not contain her excitement on completing the programme. "I would like to thank everyone involved for providing us with this opportunity. As diverse as we are we came together working towards a common goal. I encourage other learners to use this skill which can sustain us and help us financially. Lastly, thank you to our Facilitators, especially Mr de Vries, for his patience, support and helping us when the odds were against us."

In closing van Aswegen said, "Farmers are, in my opinion, one of the most important groups of scientists and professionals that our country is lucky to have. Farming is hard work. But those who have a passion for what they do have the potential to literally change the world for the rest of us. An Ethiopian proverb tells us that "the best of mankind is a farmer".

"Thank you for taking part in this programme and congratulations on completing it. The knowledge you have gained puts you in good stead to make a real difference in your life, and a real improvement to ours," concluded van Aswegen.

ENDS

Knysna Municipality Communications Department
P O Box 21, Knysna. 6570. Western Cape. South Africa
Tel +27 (0)44 302 6300 (switchboard) or 302 6471 (direct)
Fax +27 (0)86 215 4818 e-mail communications@knysna.gov.za