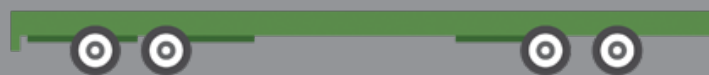


GAUTENG KICKSTARTS TRAINING DAY



FARMER2MARKET



Local, Safe, Sustainable Food

GAUTENG KICKSTARTS FARMER2MARKET PROJECT WITH A SUCCESSFUL TRAINING DAY

The first Farmer2Market training workshop took place on 28 February 2019 at the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's (GDARD) AgriPark in Westonaria, in the West Rand, Johannesburg. More than 50 Gauteng based smallholder farmers who attended the workshop were upbeat and ready to take advantage of the prospects from the "initiative". The Farmer2Market initiative's primary objective is to support emerging producers of fresh horticultural produce with access to formal markets.

Smallholder farmers in South Africa face multiple challenges which results in them not being able to fully participate in the modern economy. At the top of this list is limited access to credit and insurance, markets and finance for expansion.

Mr Jacob Smith has been farming for more than 22 years on Plot 15 in Rietfontein, producing spinach, cabbage, beetroot, carrots, onions, as well as high-value crops such as tomatoes, pepper, and cucumber. Smith also produces maize and sugar beans on 55 hectares of dry land. "In the twenty-two years that I have been in this business, I'm still battling to secure a formal and a lucrative market. I have had to rely on informal markets and the Joburg Market, which are both not friendly to a developing business like mine," said Smith. He explains that despite the high quality of his product, the limited support from government, poor infrastructure, high input costs, and low prices, all contribute to the slow growth of his business. The revenue is simply insufficient to fund expansion. "This is why we are excited with the Farmer2Market project which among other things, offer technical support and several tools to facilitate access to formal fresh produce markets, therefore increasing our net farm income," Smith added.

PARTNERS

Mr Johnson Bungu, Farmer2Market project manager said the initiative was established in partnership with LIMA Development Foundation, ICCO Cooperation, WWF and the Southern Africa Food Lab. The project is funded by the European Union, in partnership with the Department of Environmental Affairs. During the workshop, Bungu explained the importance of partnerships in achieving the goals set out for this project. "During implementation, the project will bring together multi-stakeholders who have vested interest in growing the emerging sector such as major retailers, government, financial institutions, different agricultural input/services suppliers and development organizations," said Bungu, while introducing GDARD, John Deere, PSJ & SAKATA Seeds, and Smart Inputs as partners for the day.

Bungu said the relationship with GDARD started a few years back and it was through the department the project's participants were identified. The farmers are already actively producing and servicing a particular market, which fits the selection criteria for the project.

Mr Seama Seabela, Service Coordinator at Smart Inputs, an agri-solution company providing liquid lime and fertilizer, addressed farmers on the importance of soil health and plant nutrition. He demonstrated and explained how the latter could be achieved using newer technology and innovation in the agri-chemical space.

From John Deere, Mr Patrick Kubyana, smallholder/emerging farmers market development manager, emphasized the important role mechanization and technology has played in agriculture development, locally and

internationally. Mr Kubyana highlighted some of the successes the company has had with emerging farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa through the use of tailor-made solutions and the right machinery.

SAKATA Seeds is one of the well-known and respected companies with a majority share in the seed market in South Africa. Through their representatives, the company presented some of the best vegetable cultivars grown in the country, as well as the pro's and con's of certain cultivars for different regions and seasons. Johan Stronkhorst, the Product Specialist for Solanaceae and Sweetcorn, said the secret for success is in knowing what the market wants and selecting the right cultivars suitable for a specific environment.

COMPLIANCE

Dr Cedric Baloyi, Farmer Relations Manager at ICCO, Farmer2Market implementing partner, said their involvement is mainly to address capacity building, access to finance and business development services to help farmers understand their role as entrepreneurs.

Baloyi said the main challenge for emerging farmers in accessing formal markets is compliance with basic standards required by most retailers. These basic standards are used to ensure food safety and traceability, therefore it is imperative for suppliers to adhere. Locally, retailers are guided by the Local GAP, which has three levels: entry, intermediate and advanced.

Gababoife Morake, of Aretotobeng Primary Cooperative in Ekenhof (Gauteng), said the challenge to complying with required standards was due to the lack of support for smallholders. Morake added that lack of access to facilities such as post-harvest, storage and processing facilities constitute barriers for them to enter into formal markets. He produces pumpkin, okra and rainbow maize on about 4ha of communal land which he markets through informal traders and the Joburg Market.

Even for a progressive farmer like Antoinette Robela, who commercially produces high-value crops such as tomatoes, cucumber and lettuce under 32 tunnels in Magaliesburg, compliance remains a challenge. Robela, who also produces broccoli, cauliflower and runner beans on an open field, said the costs to acquire a Local GAP accreditation are steep. Therefore, she has to rely on an intermediary to access a formal market. "Currently I have an offtake agreement with another company which buys my product to supply a bigger market," explains Robela.

Both say they have high hopes in the Farmer2Market project as it will assist them to solve these multiple challenges, especially in terms of complying with the relevant standards.

MOBILE TECHNOLOGY

Bungu said two mobile applications, "Farming Solution" and "Business Solution", were designed to address these challenges as well as increase efficiency, quality of yield and gather actionable insights about smallholder operations. The primary objective of Farming Solutions is incentivizing the farmer to follow all the Good Agricultural Practices such as the correct use of fertilizers and sprays, as well as to advise farmers on good harvesting techniques relating to specific crops that will ultimately help farmers reach their expected yield. "This takes farmers a step closer to acquiring the Local GAP certification, which is the pre-request in accessing formal markets," he explained.

At the age of 66, Mable Dikobe of Ekenhof is an active user of the mobile applications. Mable said she had to adapt and take advantage of technology benefits in revolutionizing her farming operation. "With the vacuum left by lack of proper extension services that were the backbone of agriculture in the olden days, I had to learn how to use the App and the results have been amazing so far," explained Mable. She produces cucumber, tomatoes, and pepper under 20 tunnels, as well as dry beans on 32 ha of dry land.

OTHER PROVINCES

According to Bungu, similar workshops and training days are set to take place in other participating provinces such as Limpopo, North West, Mpumalanga, and KwaZulu Natal. A total of 750 emerging smallholder vegetable producers are targeted as beneficiaries to the project.

“The project is running for three years and is set to end in 2021. Our goal is to have supported 750 emerging farmers in obtaining entry-level group and/or individual accreditation, and able to participate in formal supply chains, thereby having higher net income of 30% and creating year-round employment for at least 3,750 rural poor,” concluded Bungu.

