



# Are black farmers capable of farming commercially?

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SUBTROP

**TWENTY-FOUR YEARS** ago Mr Government won the lotto after years and years of struggling. Billions of Rands were deposited into Mr Government's account. He was very poor and illiterate. Some of his children had dropped out of school to help in the house. He thought "I have been struggling all my life and so have my children, finally I have won the lotto. I don't have to work for baas and Mrs anymore. I have my freedom. Free to do whatever I like, however, whenever and wherever I want to".

Mr Government then decided to share his money with his children and grandchildren. One of his grandchildren was Emerging Grower, who was seven years old, the son of Agriculture. He bought a fully furnished house for his grandson Emerging Grower and gave him 10 million to spend. He then decided that Emerging Grower's father was not good enough, therefore it would be better for his Aunt Rural Development who had no children of her own to be Emerging Grower's guardian.

Emerging grower spent all of his 10 million to buy sweets, cake, cold drinks and takeaways. One day as he was playing with fire, the whole house burned down. The neighbours, Mr Industry Association and Mr Researcher, and the school principal, Mr Commercial Farmer, watched as Emerging Grower wasted all of his inheritance. Twenty-four years later Emerging Grower lives in the street, begging for food.

Whose fault is it that Emerging Grower is not a successful business man? We cannot blame Emerging Grower for lack of understanding the sense of responsibility, because he had not fully grasped the true value of farming.

Are those to blame who entrusted him with the inheritance without broadening his skills levels into different areas of social development, psychological preparation and business management skills, as well

as the skillful spectators with extensive experience who sat back and watch their tax payers money go to waste?

Are black farmers capable of farmers? The answer is a big yes. Black farmers, and I repeat *farmers*, are capable of farming commercially. Not everybody is a farmer and not everybody is interested in farming. Most definitely not everybody has the potential to farm. Farming is a difficult and risky business that needs a passionate, hard-working and patient person. To be a lawyer, one need to study law and want to be a lawyer ... to be a farmer, one needs to study agriculture and have passion for it.

Agricultural land which was in production was claimed, redistributed to black communities or families who used to live in the area and were forcefully removed. Are those people farmers? No! Are they all interested in farming? No! Do those who are interested in farming have the means to succeed? No! The government had a great idea but no sensible strategy. Sadly, some people only wanted land to build a house or pursue other businesses. Some just wanted money ... why give them arable land?

The poor unskilled emerging growers have not benefited from the government's measures. If you want someone to farm, you must equip them with the knowledge, skills, experienced mentors and necessary support for a certain period with a continuous follow up to make sure there is sustainability.

If a department or organisation is not implementing what is mandated for them, why waste resources on it? Leadership skills should be questioned. For as long as we are pointing fingers, stuck in black and white issues, holding on to the past, we will never succeed in elevating emerging growers to farm commercially and transforming this country.

Eventually we will all suffer, black or white ... there will be a price to pay. South Africa has rather transformed to a country of thieves, hatred, corruption and lazy youth who lives on grants,

hence our state of economy is declining, state of infrastructure diminishing and unemployment rate increasing. In these 24 years of freedom we are going downwards, following the trend of all African countries. As long as there is this current set up, things are not likely to change.

With proper support and training, black farmers will be able to farm successfully and graduating from Emerging Growers to Commercial Growers. Both leaders in governing structures and the masses who voted them into power must take ownership. The industries, commercial growers and other stakeholders must also step in with their expertise.

If all stakeholders can work together in identifying potential farmers, invest resources like production inputs, infrastructure, skills development, technical advice and mentorship, then black farmers will be enabled to farm commercially. Everybody has a role to play, something positive to contribute, a story to share, a follower to lead and a legacy to leave.

South Africa is for us all and land must be shared for a bright future, and those with knowledge, experience and expertise must share as much as possible. As an integrated booming agricultural sector, we will have a massive impact on communities and go a long way to counteract unemployment and provide opportunities for the youth who can be educated in agriculture to drive the future of agribusiness in our country.

It takes a whole community to raise a child. Raising a child is not something achieved in one day, it is rather a lengthy process as well as a learning curve that requires patience, commitment and passion. It surely is not for the faint-hearted.

We therefore should not expect commercial farmers to miraculously emerge from a pool of unsupported emerging farmers. All industry players, like government, industry associations and commercial farmers, need to play an active role in creating a pool of future commercial farmers. ❖