

# AGRIBUSINESS ARE

‘ACTIVELY PARTICIPATING IN INNOVATIONS’

*The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) recently shared the much-anticipated agricultural business survey, with the focus squarely on factors driving business innovation in agriculture.*

Over the years, there has been a considerable lament on the agricultural sector ageing and being inertia to embrace the digital era. A study conducted by Dr Glenda Kruss, Dr Moses Sithole and Dr Yasser Buchana from the HSRC swiftly disproves this notion. The results of the study indicate that 68% of agribusiness (less than 20 years old) were actively innovative including the 20% of those over 20 years old.

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Evidence of agricultural technology consumption by farmers is well documented in media and could only bode well for the sector economically. As reflected in the HSRC survey report, farmers were willing to buy state of the art agricultural technology machines and this can possibly create a new market for the country.

The espousal by these farmers to integrate agricultural technology on their farms seemed to be motivated by issues of access to water, weather/climate change and limited access to finance.

“Weather/climate change was rated by the largest number of innovation-active agribusinesses as highly important in promoting innovation (69.6%), followed by access to water (64.8%) and labour (54%).”

Agricultural technology and innovation in South Africa is spearheaded by the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) and over the years it has produced ground-breaking research in technology and science including registering numerous patents used commercially.



While it is commended for such technological breakthroughs and being to ‘strategic to collapse’ as the portfolio committee on agriculture, land reform and rural reform once said, there was still consternation over its innovative research and technology cascading down to smallholder farmers.

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) ‘White Paper on Science, Technology and Innovation’ (2019) had identified agriculture as one of the sectors that required modernising to support its growth and development. From its original design since 1996, the White Paper called for the establishment of the National Advisory Council on Innovation (NACI) to advise government on science, technology and innovation (STI).

Furthermore, the DST White Paper called for the reconfiguration of NACI in order to “act as the national STI Monitoring and Evaluation institution, charged with analysing STI information and undertaking work to inform government planning on STI.”

ARC is coincidentally the Chair of NACI and in August 2020, the HSRC Agribusiness Survey Results was shared with other scientific nodes represented on the Council.

While commercial farming seemed to be in unison on the need to embrace agricultural technology, the jury was still out on how smallholder farmers can be assisted in accessing such technology.

The comprehensive agribusiness business survey is a rallying call for agricultural technology to be commercialised including strong support for institutions such as ARC to lead the the agritech vociferously in conjunction with other agricultural state-owned entities.

For example, the NAMC could venture into the agricultural technology economics while the Land Bank could look into financing models of agricultural technology. The interlink of the three entities on agritech could benefit the country.

For more information on the Agricultural Business Survey [click here](#).