

POLICY FORUM ON AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

By: Stephen **Monamodi** | 29 Nov 2021

‘There is a critical need to modernize South Africa’s agricultural production’, especially in the current environment said delegates gathered a virtual workshop on agri-innovation.

Since 2007, South African agriculture had turned the tide of labelled being a food importer, thanks largely to incorporating technological advances.

“Buoyed by the private sector, it is the organized agriculture that spent and invested millions into agri innovation” according to Agriculture Business Chamber CEO, **Dr John Purchase**.

According to the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) 2016 – 2018 Agriculture Business Survey, it found that nearly two-thirds (62%) of South African agribusinesses were innovation-active.

“They took some scientific, technological, organisational, financial, or commercial steps, during 2016-2018, towards the implementation of an innovation” said **Dr Glenda Kruss**, Executive Head for Centre for Science, Technology and Innovation Indicators at the HSRC.

Dr Purchase however, warned that unless South Africa had a common agreed plan on agricultural technology and innovation, the country’s agricultural competitiveness would remain in peril.

This view was also supported by the Grains industry, urging for government and private sector to have a common agenda. According to **Dr Marinda Visser**, Grain Research and Policy Manager at Grain SA, the grains industry imported vast of its technology.





“The industry has lost a lot of crop scientists, yet we have resources in the country that could catapult innovation but we were not using them efficiently” she said.

Independent International Strategic and Policy Advisor on Innovation in Agri-food and Nutrition Systems, **Judith-Ann Francis**, said South Africa had not built adequate capacity for agricultural innovation to take off.

“SA has no enabling environment for agricultural innovation. There should be an update on policies, creating synergies, institutional frameworks, laws, roles and regulation” she added.

HSRC Agri Innovation Indicators pointed specifically towards policy intent in responding to the modernizing of agricultural production question.

According to **Dr Kruss**, science and technology had to be intensified in all agri enterprises, which would lead to technological capabilities in SMME’s, and ‘improving linkages in development of product innovation.’

Sharing of data was highly recommended and a necessary fit to advance traceability in the agricultural sector. Unlike other prospering countries in managing data collectively, South Africa had no harmonised central information data hub or centre and lost its ability to manage its data said **Dr Albert Strever**, Agri-Informatics Expert at Stellenbosch University.

While agricultural innovation strategies had been developed, there was a resounding need to integrate agri-technology and innovation in the education system from primary school to universities.

Dr Simphiwe Ngqangweni, CEO of NAMC, said the Agriculture and Agro-Processing Master Plan had identified agri-technology as an enabler to drive RSA’s agriculture competitiveness.