

CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE (CA), WHERE ARE WE?

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On the 4th March, the NAMC as a node institution of Food, Agriculture, Natural Resources and Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN) in conjunction with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), hosted a research feedback session on conservation agriculture.

The research study was commissioned by FAO, looking into 'Identifying and Mapping Conservation Agriculture and entry points into National Development Frameworks, and Climate Resilience Related Investment Opportunities for Scaling up the Technology among Smallholder Farmers.'

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In 2016, the then department of agriculture, forestry and fisheries (DAFF), announced to the public and stakeholders at large, that the sector face constrained challenges such hunger, food insecurity, unsustainable production on highly degraded land, and frequently changing climate.

Dr Yoliswa Jikelela of the Agriculture Research Council (ARC) led the research study with her team and managed to identify potential investments opportunities that the National Conservation Agriculture Task Force (NCATFs) can harness, and dialogue with key stakeholders in order to create awareness on these low hanging fruits.

The workshop also noted that Conservation Agriculture (CA) in South Africa, was largely spearheaded by the grains industry, with the Maize Trust at the forefront.

“An assessment of the CA adoption in South Africa was compiled before and the most important message was that farmers needed to do it for themselves. The Mahlathini Farmers Group, an NPO based in Jozini (KZN), were already adopting CA practices” said Dr Hendrick Smith one of the research pioneers in the field of CA.

Jikelela concurred with the view as the research study findings also observed that most participants understood the concept of CA but adopt was the biggest challenge. Added to this, there was a number of cultivators decreasing while weed control and pesticides were on the increase.



“Commercial farmers adopt CA individually and are not influenced in any form. For rural farmers, the argument is that CA takes long and they lose

two years on profit opportunities” said Jikelela. The key recommendation of study was that rural farmers still needed 3 to 5 years of CA demonstration, to better project the positive attributes of the technology in rush climatic areas, reintroduce variety of healthier legumes than dry

beans for rotation, integrate value adding and agro processing within the CA value chain project implantation, to ensure that CA users are linked to formal markets to maximize profit generation from better yields.

Altogether, the workshop agreed on the need to finalise stakeholder awareness sessions, continuously engage government on CA policy implementation and harmonisation, and working with the various industries to implement CA adoption practices.