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Development**
North West Provincial Government
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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MEDIA RELEASE

Att : ALL EDITORS
Media Houses

Date: Monday, 11 March 2019

DIGITALISATION SET TO TRANSFORM THE EXTENSION AND AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY SERVICES IN NORTH WEST PROVINCE

POTCHEFSTROOM- Hundreds of delegates from the 11th Provincial Extension and Advisory services held on the 06-08 of March 2019 in Potchefstroom town are adamant that digitalizing extension and advisory services will bring about much improved extension and advisory services to emerging and established farmers of the North West Province.

With digitalisation gaining momentum, the three day conference delegates agreed that there is an urgent need to transform and digitalize the sector to achieve specific national development initiatives as envisaged in the Agricultural Policy Action Plan and the National Development Plan, (NDP).

Amongst delegates who attended the conference were renowned experts in the extension profession from institutions of higher learning and the National Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), Crop Technicians, Natural Resource Technicians as well as representative from Research Institutes.

During the high panel discussion on digitalization of extension and advisory services and the province's state of readiness led by Professor Simon SebatanaLetsoalo of North West University, majority of panel members said although there were minor

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challenges, the province was more than ready and has no option but to embrace the fourth industrial revolution.

With specific focus on this year's theme of "improving the image and professionalism of extension services in the province", when addressing the 2019 conference, Acting MEC for the Department READ Dr Mpho Motlhabane, challenged delegates to move with times and ensure that their day-to-day activities are aligned to the Extension Recovery Plan (ERP) which is aimed at addressing the gaps identified in Agricultural Extension Services and which will ultimately assist the Province to meaningfully contribute towards achieving the 2030 National Development Plan (NDP).

"For the Province to immensely contribute in response of the NDP, we expect our extension and advisory practitioners to empower farmers with the cutting edge information so that they keep pace with trends and developments in agricultural production," MEC Dr Motlhabane said.

Motlhabane also said the agricultural advisors through their capacity building programmes and knowledge transfer should ensure that farmers produce food according to the potential of the area and strive for maximum participation and that they must use their expertise to benefit farming community and establish sustainable projects using programmed extension.

As part of the action plan emanating from the conference discussions, MEC Dr Mpho Motlhabane said all extension staff must be visible to the clients they serve and account to production of their clients.

With regard to professionalism, MEC Motlhabane said he wanted to see extension officers interacting with other professionals and to register with agricultural professional bodies like South African Council for Natural Profession Scientific (SACNASP). The body's renewal of membership is none negotiable and to those who have not registered or renewed their membership were urged do so before the end of March 2019.

The 2019 conference also resolved that managers must ensure that each and every extension officer have an extension programme that is accounting to the number of

farmers they serve; all Extension Practitioners to utilize information, communication technology (ICT) tools to the fullest on their day to day activities in order to improve services and that all Extension Practitioners must register with agricultural professional bodies for exposure purposes.

To boost the staff morale, the 2019 conference honoured Extension Practitioners and Agricultural Advisors who are making commendable contribution to the profession towards the long term achievement of the objectives of the National norms and standards of Extension and Advisory Services (EAS).

Jeremiah Gaompotse won the award for Best Conference Poster, Pertunia Mogogana took home the Best Conference Paper award, Top Performer in the category of Agricultural Advisor award was won by Padiso Mothibi, Top Performer Award in the category of Senior Agricultural Advisor was won by Didintle Sebubi, Specialist Agricultural Advisor Award was won by Dieter Jordan, Top Performer in the category of Supervisor was won by Tshetlho Makhwane and the main winner was Daniel Thubisi from Ngaka Modiri Molema who took home the award for top performer in the category of support services and the Overall Winner for 2019

Winners will compete with their counterparts from other provinces at the national extension and advisory services awards to be hosted at the end of the year.

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Issued by the Communication Services Directorate

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