

## **Smart Agriculture for Climate Resilience (SmartAg) Project**

Developing a strategic locally relevant sectoral response to climate risks for agriculture in the Western Cape Province: the next step towards supporting climate smart decision making and long-term sustainability.

In a first-time collaborative effort, the Western Cape Department of Agriculture (DOA) and the Department of Environmental Affairs & Development Planning (DEA&DP) launched the Smart Agriculture for Climate Resilience (SmartAg) project. Under the leadership of the University of Cape Town's African Climate and Development Initiative (ACDI), a consortium has been engaged to develop a provincial climate change response framework and implementation plan for the agricultural sector.

Agriculture is an endeavour defined by multiple challenges and risks, and is surely not for the faint-hearted. Thus, farmers especially, are recognised for their ability to respond and survive, whilst managing risk responsibly. The last few decades have presented a new and possibly the greatest threat ever to the globe and to agricultural systems, in particular: climate change. In the Western Cape Province, farmers and agri-businesses are already finding responses to climate risks which are within their means to implement; however, the scale of this threat will also require backing through policy, practical support and guidance from the provincial Department of Agriculture. A co-ordinated and co-operative approach is required for the development of long-term resilience to climate impacts in a more integrated and strategic manner. Farmers and their suppliers and support structures form a crucial part of this journey and can contribute through shared learning, new insights and the joint identification and promotion of effective and practical responses. Climate smart agricultural practices can meet the challenges of food security, sustainability and climate change, ensuring continued profitability and growth opportunities – with the use of proper work-shopping and assessment. We invite all leaders and interested role players in the various agricultural sectors to participate and represent themselves or their organisation in the development of practical climate responses through the newly launched SmartAg project.

Earlier in 2014, the DEA&DP launched the revised provincial Climate Change Response Strategy which identified agriculture as a high priority – now, a more detailed sectoral plan, SmartAg, is the next step in ensuring the confident growth and development of this sector despite the climatic uncertainties. The Western Cape is one of a few regions globally where the very essence of the current climate is at risk of shifting. This could potentially change the farming landscape in ways that will require smart and innovative responses. Also, increasing pressure on farmers and agribusinesses to reduce their carbon footprint is already being felt in the export market.

The Smart Agriculture for Climate Resilience project, which includes a series of workshops with stakeholders in all three phases of its 20-month duration, aims to take previous engagements with the sector around climate change a few steps forward. The focus is on feasible risk management approaches, technologies, and effective implementation for specific climate risks, commodities and local contexts. A key part of the significance of this project is its collaborative approach, which, as project manager Stephanie Midgley describes, “captures the understanding, experiences and needs of a wide range of stakeholders in the Western Cape Province.” Dr Ilse Trautmann, project leader at the Department of Agriculture, emphasised at the launch on 8 August 2014 that “the project should provide real and practical information, support and inspiration to farmers in a manner which optimizes their decision making and will ensure sustainability”. This is an excellent opportunity for concerned and forward-thinking farmers (both commercial and smallholder) and their support networks to contribute their experiences and work with the project team in delivering a product that will meet the needs of the sector.