



HARRY GWALA AGRI
N P C
united in growth



IN-SERVICE TRAINING PROGRAMME

INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

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ORGANISATION BACKGROUND AND GOVERNANCE



Farmers' day action in Hlutankungu with HGA programme manager, Dylan Weyer (left), student, Onwabile Mnethu (centre) and HGA director, Phila Mkhize (right)

Harry Gwala Agri (HGA) is a non-profit company aimed at the upliftment of aspiring farmers in the Harry Gwala District Municipality of southern Kwa-Zulu Natal through skills development and education. The initiative was established by commercial farmers and founded on the belief that they can no longer farm alongside others who are unable to do so due to past injustices. It was felt that action needs to be taken to extend support to those for whom agriculture is an important or potential livelihood option and who have the motivation and will to improve not only their own circumstances, but who, with the right guidance and skills, can make a meaningful contribution to the local economy. In addition to this, part of the motivation behind setting up the organisation was the realisation among the commercial farmers that many had over time, wanted to address the districts inequalities by establishing projects with their staff or neighbouring communities and that these projects would benefit from being brought under one umbrella in order to strengthen their collective impact and to grow the initiative from the platform they laid. Four farmer's associations presently support the initiative: Highflats-Ixopo, Ingwe, Zwartberg and Mount Currie.

FOCUS OF THE ORGANISATION

HGA provides education and skills development to passionate upcoming farmers and existing developing farmers through the following two avenues:

1. In-service training programme for agricultural students
2. Agricultural mentorship projects (with an emphasis on the improvement of food security in the region)

IN-SERVICE TRAINING PROGRAMME BACKGROUND

Not long after the launch of HGA in 2017, we were approached by the Esayidi TVET College in Umzimkhulu who were hoping to identify avenues through which their students could obtain the in-service training which is a requirement for a number of the qualifications on offer there. One of the courses is a National Diploma in Farm Management and it was clear at the time that many students were struggling to graduate as they were unable to find opportunities to undertake their training and the college had no system in place to facilitate this.

We saw this as a good opportunity to support the upcoming farmers in our region and began exploring ways in which we could help. Many of the commercial farmers in our district had already taken on student interns in the past and so we were confident that we would have their support if we started a programme to assist the Esayidi students. The bigger challenge was going to be finding funding to be able to offer the students a stipend while undertaking their training. A major landmark was reached when Pannar Seed came on board as the primary partner in launching the programme.

As hoped, the commercial farming community got behind the programme as well and 13 farmers agreed to host students on their farm for the duration of their in-service training. By February 2018 we had selected and placed our first group of students and to date we have had 100 students come through the programme of which 90 % have been Farm Management students.



HGA at times arranges extra learning opportunities for its students such as this event that was held at Mackenzie Club near Donnybrook where we had two guest speakers: Dr Todd Collins who spoke about his career as a vet and shared many valuable tips about how to identify illnesses in livestock and Mr Walter Blore who is a labour consultant and passed on some useful guidance for future farm managers about how to effectively lead a team

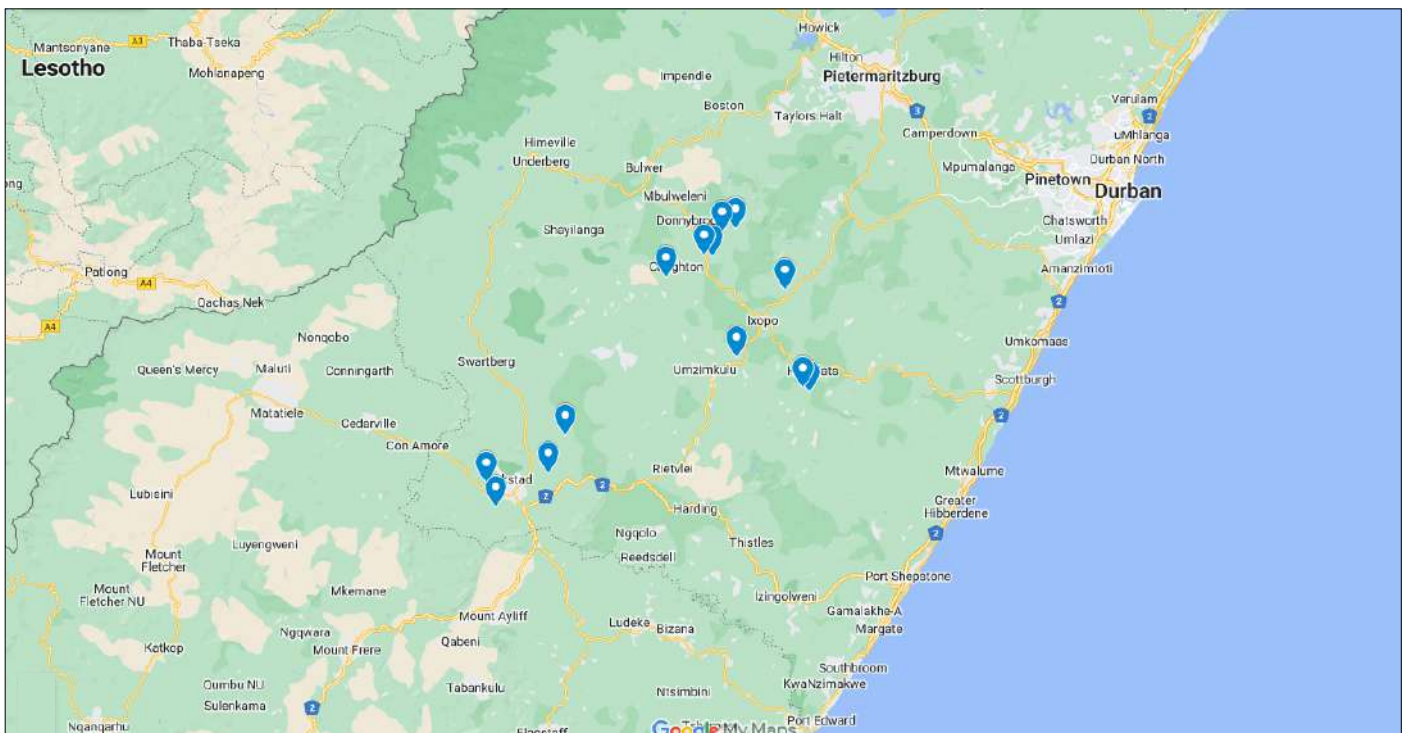
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE AREA

The in-service training programme operates out of the Harry Gwala District Municipality in southern Kwa-Zulu Natal and is bordered by the Eastern Cape in the west and Lesotho to the north. The district is made up of four local municipalities namely, Ubuhlebezwe, Dr. Nkosasana Dlamini-Zuma, Greater Kokstad and Umzimkhulu. The area is made up mostly of rural communities (typically on Ingonyama Trust Land or State Land) and commercial agricultural land. There are a handful of urban and peri-urban centres dotted around the edge of the district namely, Underberg in the north and (going clockwise), Bulwer, Donnybrook, Creighton, Ixopo, Highflats, Umzimkhulu, Kokstad, Franklin and Swartberg.

The climate and topography, as you would expect, plays a big role in the farming activity that takes place in the district. The Drakensberg Mountains which are conserved within the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park, fall within the north-western part of the district and forms part of a transfrontier conservation area with neighbouring Lesotho. It is a designated World Heritage Site and home to the most iconic gravel road pass in South Africa, namely Sani Pass. This part of the district is known for high rainfall and cold winters. The south of the district (Highflats, Ixopo and Umzimkhulu) has warmer monthly average temperatures which allows for a greater diversity of farming activity such as avocado, macadamia nut, pecan nut, sugarcane, citrus and vegetable production in addition to dairy and timber. The area (also referred to as East Griqualand) between Kokstad, Franklin and Swartberg and then from Underberg/Himeville down to Donnybrook and Creighton is one of the most important dairy production areas in the country but is where much grain and timber production also takes place.

The commercial farmers currently involved in our programme, of which there are 12, are involved in the following activities:

- ⇒ Dairy x 5
- ⇒ Poultry x 1
- ⇒ Beef x 1
- ⇒ Mixed farming operations:
 - 1 x poultry, avocado, macadamia nut, sugarcane, beef
 - 1 x avocado, macadamia nut, maize, cabbage, potato, timber, dairy
 - 1 x dairy and pecan nut
 - 1 x dairy, citrus and vermicomposting/warm farming
 - 1 x dairy, beef, sheep, pigs, bees



Map showing the location of the commercial farmers currently involved in the in-service training programme

THE NUTS & BOLTS OF THE PROGRAMME

The contract period

At present students are placed on an ad hoc basis according to when a position becomes available. This is because we have tried to assist students regardless of how many months of in-service training they required. As a result we currently do not have a set application window but this is something that may change in the future with a placement window in January and another in July.

We work on a 6 month contract which is signed by the student, the host farmer and HGA and if all is going well, can be renewed until such time as the student has completed their in-service training. We also try to place students on farms in line with their area of interest but with the majority of our farms being dairies this is not always easy. However, with most applicants being farm management students, whether you are on a citrus farm or a dairy, you will learn what it is to live and work on a commercial farm and have your first taste of what management of a farm would be like.



Njabulo Makhatini from Richmond who completed his 18 months of training at Alsace and Eastwolds Farms in 2019 and was thereafter given a full-time position at Eastwolds where he is still employed

Rules of the programme

Each college should have its own code of conduct/ethics that students undertaking their in-service training should adhere to and each commercial farm that a student is placed on will have its own standard operating procedures and rules that govern this. The contract that is signed is however between you the student, HGA and the host farmer and this document will be given to you to read and sign before you commence your training on the farm.

To date less than 10 % of our students have not had their contracts renewed or have been dismissed. Those that have fallen into this category were guilty of one of the following wrongdoings:

- ⇒ **Alcohol/drug abuse:** there is zero tolerance for this and if you are found guilty of drinking or taking drugs while on the farm or arriving at work intoxicated you will be dismissed.
- ⇒ **Absenteeism:** if you are unable to come to work because you are ill or have had to respond to a family emergency, or for another reason that is out of your control (e.g. no public transport due to strike action), it is your responsibility to communicate this to your superior on the farm. If the management on the farm has had to try and contact you to find out where you are then you are already in the wrong.
- ⇒ **Relationships:** this programme is best suited to singles and those not parenting children. We have however placed many students who have children but because you will not be permitted to have your children accompany you or have family live with you on the farm, it is your responsibility to ensure that it is feasible for you take the position and not at the expense of your children and/or family.
We also strongly recommend that you do not get involved in romantic relations with any of the staff or students with whom you are working on the farm. If we find this is happening and having an impact on your performance it will likely lead to your dismissal.
- ⇒ **Notice period for resignation:** If for whatever reason you choose to leave the programme, we require that you serve one months' notice or a period decided on by your host farmer.
- ⇒ **Health/safety:** it is your responsibility as a student to ensure you are comfortable with every task given to you while on the farm and if not, to communicate this. It is also your responsibility to find out from your college what insurance they may have in place to cover you while doing your in-service training. HGA has workman's compensation to cover incidents of injury on duty but any health issue beyond this is the responsibility of the student and HGA and the host farmer are indemnified against this.
- ⇒ **Gratitude:** we have at times been disappointed at the lack of gratitude shown by students in the programme towards their host farmers and staff, especially upon completion of their training. It should not have to be stated that this is an opportunity being granted to you that thousands of other students are without. An important lesson to learn as well is the need to complete a contract on good terms with ones employer as this may have an impact on your prospects of future employment.



Lindelwa Mafu who completed her 18 months of training on Olivar Dairy Farm and took a great liking to the mechanics and maintenance of tractors while on the farm.

Stipends

HGA currently receives enough funding to be able to place 20 students for the duration of their in-service training and to be able to offer them a monthly stipend of R2000 which is paid directly into the students account each month. It is then at the host farmers discretion how (if in any way) they supplement that. Some farmers make a monetary contribution, some have incentive schemes for the students to earn extra depending on their performance, others provide the student with gas for cooking, while others provide a monthly food ration.



Knowledge transfer between students: Walter Khumalo (left) was one of the first students to enrol in our programme and remains one of our most successful currently holding a junior managerial position at Rockfontein Dairy Farm near Donnybrook. Here he is together with Zandile Nzimande (centre) and Thabiso Gasa (right) both of whom were also given permanent posts at Rockfontein subsequent to completing their in-service training

Be prepared

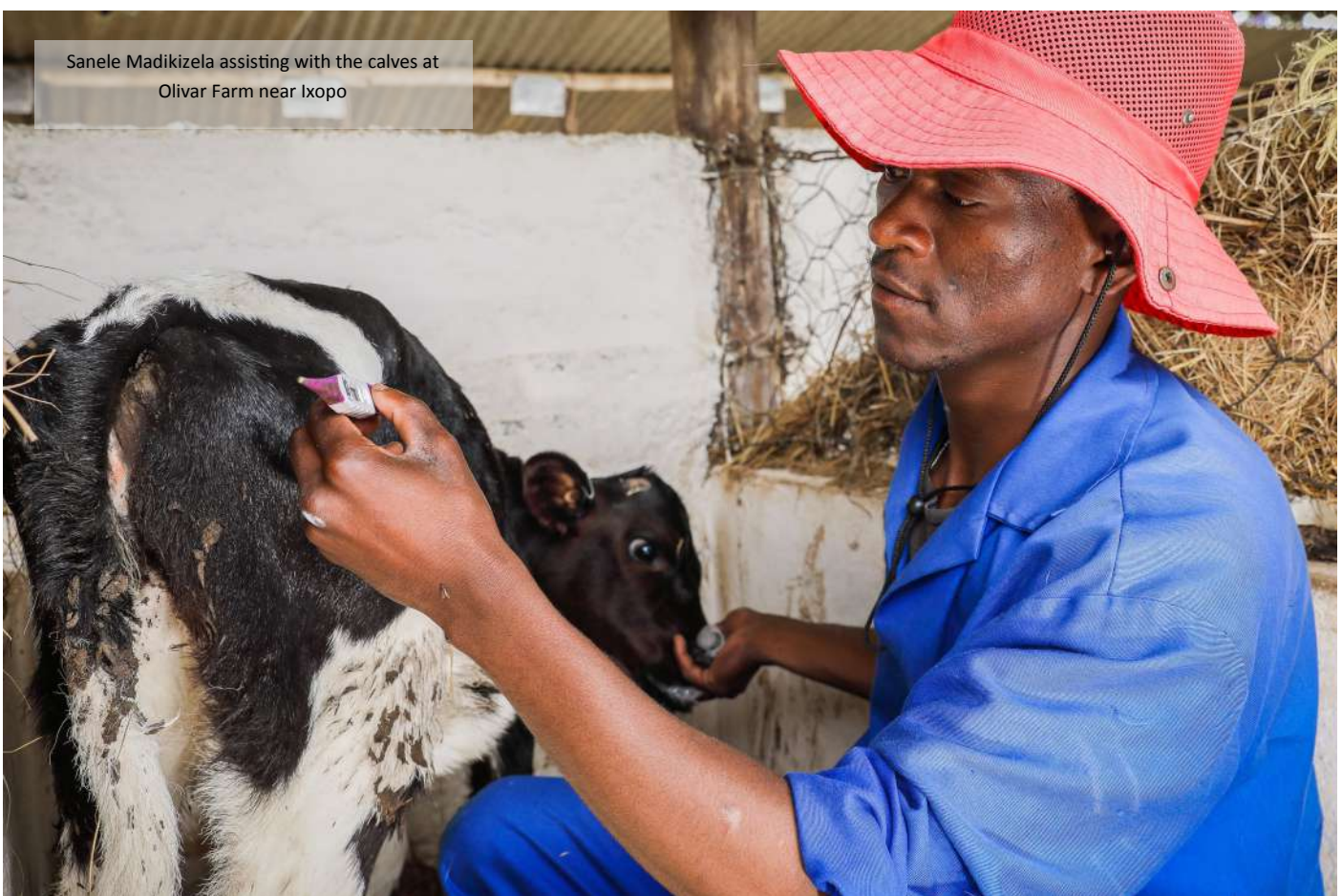
As the majority of the students who apply to be involved in our programme are studying towards a National Diploma in Farm Management, being willing to start one's career 'at the bottom' is important. If you hope to manage staff on a commercial farm one day you need to do be willing to do the 'ugly' or boring jobs, and understand why they need to be done and what it is like to do them.

It is also important to remember that most commercial farms have staff that have held their positions for many years and although they may not have the same level of formal education as you, they have a lot more experience and if you treat them with respect and approach the tasks you are given with the right attitude, there is a lot you can learn from them.

You must be prepared to work irregular hours, particularly if you are placed on a dairy farm. Most dairy farms will be milking twice a day with the first session starting as early as 03h00 - 04h00 in the morning. The next milking session will then take place in the afternoon at about 14h00 but there will be jobs to do in between. This will seem like a long day even though you are given breaks during the course of the day.

The students that perform the best are those that communicate well and take initiative. What does initiative mean? 1. The ability to assess and initiate things independently. 2. The power or opportunity to act or take charge before others do. A good example of this may be a situation where you have just finished work for the day and are about to get some rest when you look out your window and see that a cow has broken out of the grazing camp and is walking up the farm access road. You are faced with a decision; either you turn over and pretend that you did not see what you saw or you pull your gumboots back on and herd the cow back into the camp and work out where it broke free and attend to this. A successful farmer will tell you that the job of a farmer is not bound by certain working hours and one must expect the unexpected and be prepared to deal with it.

The other important skill is communication. Most of the farms on which students are placed are large-scale commercial operations and are very busy. If you hope to gain the most out of your opportunity you need to be confident enough to ask questions and express your interest in whatever aspect of the farm you have not yet been exposed to. The same applies to receiving instructions. For most of you, this will be the first time you have been on a commercial farm and it may seem intimidating. You are going to be asked to do jobs you have never done before and will need to follow instructions carefully. The well-known phrase, "the only stupid question is the one not asked" applies here. In other words, ensure you understand the task that you have been given and beyond that, the reason why the task is being done. If you hope to be a manager one day you need to understand every aspect of the farm and why things are done the way they are done and the purpose of each task.



What to bring with you to the farm (apart from passion, grit & determination!)

- ⇒ Accommodation is provided on the farm and students are given protective clothing (overalls and gumboots) at the start of their contracts.
- ⇒ In many cases only a room is provided and so students may be expected to bring their own furniture and what they would need to prepare their own food. HGA will put you in contact with a student currently on the farm or a student who has recently completed their training for you to ask all your logistical questions.

- ⇒ It is best to arrive with food as most of the farms are some distance from the nearest retailers and you may only get a chance to visit the shop on your first day off.

- ⇒ Remember to also be prepared to work in cold weather conditions by bringing warm clothing with you.



Tumeka Sapo (front) being taught how to create package labelling at the Carisbrooke Valley Citrus packhouse during her in-service training

Monitoring, evaluation and the diploma application process

It is your responsibility to find out from your college what the specific requirements are of you during your training as these may change and HGA may not be aware of these changes. You need to know before starting your training whether a logbook needs to be kept and whether or not your college is expecting a report from you.

As far as we are aware, if you are a Farm Management student you need to choose two subjects/instructional offerings from your N6 curriculum (farm management, data management, human resource management and financial management) and aim to gain sufficient experience in each of those subjects during the 18 months of your training.

We have found that there are limited opportunities for students to be exposed to human resource and financial management practices on a farm as this is mostly the domain of senior management on the farm because it normally involves confidential information. For this reason we recommend data management be combined with farm management as your two focus areas. With regards to data management, try and take note and be exposed to whatever modern technology is being used on the farm. Any job that you do that requires record keeping must be noted, and what the tools were that you used to do this. For example, if you are given the responsibility of doing pasture walks, the instrument you use will record the height of the grass in the pasture and this data might then be captured and analysed in a spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel.

Regardless of whether or not a logbook needs to be kept or a report written, we require that you keep detailed notes of every job that you do on the farm and all that you learn. If you have the option of doing this on a personal computer that is great but no problem if handwritten notes are kept we would just recommend that for either method you keep a backup copy of your notes as they may serve you well in your future career in the agricultural sector.

HGA will meet with you every 3 months to monitor your progress and will go through the list of duties you have performed to ensure that you are on track to cover everything that is expected of you to meet the requirements of your diploma. If the farm on which you are placed cannot offer experience in all the required departments, HGA will fill in the gaps by arranging tutorials or workshops.

Post-programme support

When you are nearing the completion of your in-service training HGA will work alongside you to ensure all your paperwork is in order and ready for the submission of your diploma application. Thereafter, we will also follow-up with your college or the DHET to ensure that you receive the outcome of your application within the 3 months we are told this process should take. This is provided you keep us updated as to the exact date your application is submitted and any correspondence you have from your college or the DHET thereafter.

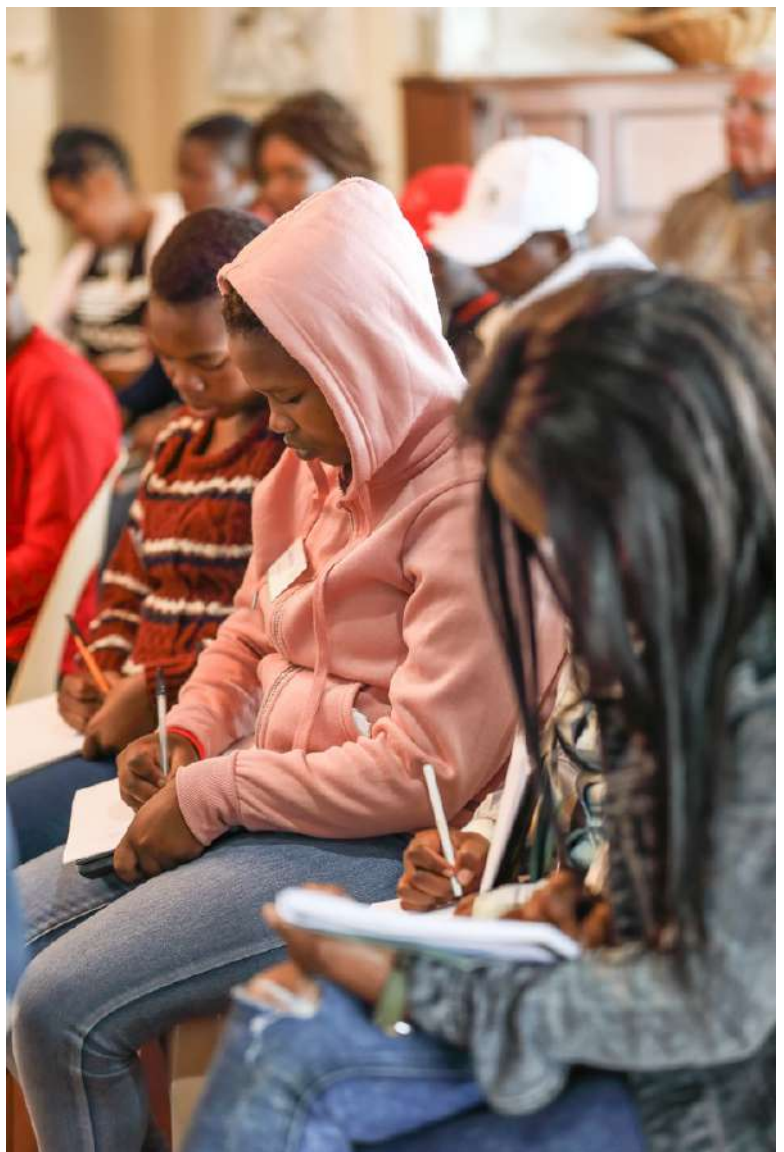
Although HGA is not obliged to offer students support once they have completed their in-service training we do try and assist wherever we can by recommending other internship or job opportunities and the next section shows that most of our past students are achieving success once having obtained their qualifications.

What our past students are now doing

HGA tries to maintain contact with all the students that have completed our programme and it has been encouraging to see what they have been able to accomplish after graduating. As of mid 2023:

- ⇒ Two-thirds (70 %) of our students were employed, studying further or doing another internship
- ⇒ The majority (>90 %) of this group have remained in the agricultural sector
- ⇒ Of those employed, 56 % have been given full-time positions on the commercial farms on which they did their in-service training.

We strongly recommend arriving with a pen and paper as there is a lot to learn!



Two of our standout students:

Walter Khumalo

Spent his first 9 months of in-service training on a banana and macadamia nut farm on the south coast but was eager to learn about livestock production and so applied to HGA and was part of our first intake of students and placed on Rockfontein Dairy Farm near Donnybrook where he completed his remain-



ing 9 months. He was then given an opportunity to do a 1 year internship on a dairy farm in California, USA where he quickly proved his worth and was offered a managerial position there. He however chose to return to SA and was offered a junior managerial position at Rockfontein Dairy which he still holds today.

Zikhona Bhantshi

Had completed 9 months of in-service training at the Department of Agriculture when she applied to HGA and was placed on Eastwolds Dairy Farm near Donnybrook. Here she saw through her remaining 9 months of training and then hatched a plan to start an agri business in her community near Bizana. She and her friend from college, Athayanda Mdanyana had been saving some of their stipend money each month and were ready to fence a 1 Ha plot when the opportunity arose but were wise and started small, growing vegetables from a home garden first. The produce from this caught the eye of the Boxer in Bizana who signed an off-take agreement with them and they were then ready to scale up their operation. They secured funding through



the NYDA and are now cultivating 5 Ha. Their goal is to be the biggest supplier of vegetables in their district municipality and we are confident they will achieve this.

How to apply

Students wishing to apply to the programme need to [visit our website](#), download the application form and return this to the Programme Manager along with the following supporting documents:

1. A letter of introduction including a head and shoulders photo of yourself
2. C.V.
3. Academic statement of results (**NB:** we cannot process your application until we have seen your final theory results. In the case of farm management students this means we need your final results for N4, N5 & N6. It is not necessary to send us your N4 - N6 certificates).
4. Copy of ID
5. Matric certificate (if applicable)
6. Completed HGA application form

NB: please only send **CLEARLY SCANNED** documents. If we cannot read the documents your application will not be processed. We would also prefer to receive all of the above documents combined in a single .pdf document.

Your application and supporting documents must be sent to projects@hgagri.co.za

The selection process

Step 1: Assessment of application and supporting documents

Step 2: Invitation to an interview in person or remotely

Step 3: Successful students will be shortlisted for selection by a host farmer who may want to interview you as well

Step 4: Placement on a commercial farm

As it currently stands, students are placed on an ad hoc basis throughout the year but this may change in 2024 to two selection/placement windows: January and July.

