

CASE C

WESTERN CAPE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

The Department

The Western Cape's Department of Agriculture (DoA) provides development, research and support services to the agricultural community in the province. Agriculture in the Western Cape is an important component of South Africa's economy. The province generates between 55% and 60% of the country's agricultural exports and also represents more than 20% of South Africa's total agricultural production.

The DoA's administrative headquarters is located on the Elsenburg farm in the Boland region of the Western Cape, 50 km from Cape Town. According to its website, its mission is to:

- Promote the production of affordable, nutritious, safe and accessible food
- Care for natural resources
- Support sustainable development of rural communities
- Provide economic opportunities for farming and rural communities
- Promote export opportunities for agricultural products and services
- Reduce hunger in the Western Cape
- Provide service delivery
- Create favourable working conditions for staff

The Department staff who work at the Elsenburg site are involved in research in order to develop technology for use by animal and crop producers in the province. They also provide agricultural advice to the agricultural community. Elsenburg staff provides agriculture infrastructure to developing rural communities and have an agricultural training facility. They offer agricultural engineering services and the conservation of natural resources. The Elsenburg staff offers veterinary health services and diagnostic services at their veterinary laboratories. The Elsenburg College of Agriculture is also located there. The Department also has regional agricultural centers, research farms, extension offices, state veterinary offices, and animal health technicians in other parts of the Western Cape province.

The Human Capital Development Strategy

One of the key challenges facing the Department, and indeed the country is the need for human capital development. Given the legacy of Apartheid, a significant portion of the population lacks the education and skills to contribute fully to the economy. Given the strong focus on land reform in the Western Cape, this issue is of particular concern to the DoA. Maurius Paulse, the Chief Director of Cape Institute for Agricultural Training is overseeing the development of the Human Capital Development Strategy (HCDS) for Agriculture and Rural Development in the Western Cape. This HCDS fits well with the overall provincial strategy of iKapa elihlumayo (Growing the Cape) and is particularly focused on youth and women.

The HCDS has both an internal and external component. Externally, the Department is focused on ensuring that those who are given land have the skills that are needed to farm it. But the demographic profile of the agricultural sector in the Western Cape has been slow to change for several reasons including

- Lack of information regarding the variety of careers available in the field of agriculture
- Limited access to land with a high investment requirement and high risk of failure
- Current technological nature of agriculture
- Slow transfer of skills from existing farmers to emerging ones

This component of the HCDS focuses on supporting land reform and encouraging young people to consider agriculture as a career.

But the strategy must have an internal component as well. In order for the Department to provide for the needs of farmers now and in the future, it must have its own workforce in order. And yet it is facing skills shortages in the following occupations: agricultural engineers, veterinarians, economists and soil scientists. It must ensure that it is engaged in leadership development and succession planning activities. The strategy must also aim at the overall precepts of transformation, accessibility, redress and equity. That means the DoA must continue to change its organizational make-up to achieve employment equity. This continues to be a challenge in light of the shortage of specialized agricultural skills, gender and racial imbalances and other barriers.

The Department has instituted various programs to enhance human capital including

- Bursaries (scholarships) especially to provide for the acquisition of scarce skills
- Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) to provide employees with the education and training they need to qualify for promotion
- Internship, learnership, mentoring and coaching programs to facilitate career development
- Communication strategies to advance careers in agriculture
- Recruitment and retention strategies aimed at people with scarce skills, women and youth.

Marius explains that sometimes there are logistical problems in finding the right people. For example, he needs lecturers to train people in commercial agriculture, which is what is done in the Western Cape. But most of the Blacks come from the Eastern Cape where most of the agriculture is subsistence so they don't have the background for the lecturer positions. Or they come right out of the universities without the practical experience needed. Eighty five percent of the students in his classes are still white because they grew up on commercial farms.

The problem with recruiting veterinarians, he adds, isn't so much that there are too few in the country, it is that they cannot compete with the private sector. Another issue is that to be trained as a vet, one must go to Pretoria and Black children don't think about going that far away to study.

The Head of Department is Joyene Isaacs. She has only had this job for a few months and is determined to improve representation in the Department. Her primary focus for doing so is the Human Capital Development Strategy. She thinks it is important to focus on children who need to be educated about the choices they will have in choosing careers. But the Department also must transform to reflect the demographics of the province. Agriculture is still a very white-dominated field.

The Head of Department who preceded her was able to convince the Cabinet to approve funds for 18 senior managers, which made her job of changing the profile at that level easier (in 2005 there had only been 10 senior managers). (See Appendix C-1). But to fill these positions she had to decide whether to look for people with the necessary management skills or the agricultural specialist skills because it is be hard to find nonwhite males who had both. She decided to look for those with management skills and skills that might be related to agriculture, but not necessarily specific expertise in the program they would be managing. Of course, it is difficult to know if a candidate will be a good manager from just a resume and an interview so they have developed a job assessment instrument which they will be introducing in the near future. To hire a Black person who can't do the job well just to meet a target—"well, you have just shot yourself in the foot," states Joyene and created poor morale.

Joyene was able to open up two senior management positions by offering early retirements to white men. But she had to be careful how she did this because she didn't want to alienate the men in case she needed to bring them back. Nor did she want to alienate those who remained.

Her other strategy is to offer Blacks and women opportunities they did not have before. For some, this is the opportunity to earn a secondary school degree ("matric"). For others it is a college or graduate degree.

Rashidah Wentzel is the Director of Corporate Services. As such, she is also oversees Human Resources. She emphasizes that the Agriculture Department has to deal with the fact that it has always been dominated by white male Afrikaaners. The farmworkers have historically been Coloured. So overall there is an overrepresentation of Coloured farmworkers but they are at the lower levels; at the top are still white men. There is also a gender imbalance. Transformation requires vacancies and these are in short supply on farms because the Coloured farmworkers are given housing for very low rent. These jobs and housing tend to be passed down through the generations. It is difficult to get them to leave, even for a promotion.

It is difficult to bring people in because of the locations of the farms. They may advertise but then only white men apply. The historically disadvantaged don't apply because it is expensive for them to get to the farms which are inaccessible by public transportation. In addition, young people don't know what the occupations are. There is a perception that you have to work on a farm, even though 80% of the jobs in the agricultural field are not on a farm.

From Rashidah's perspective retention is also a serious issue. Those who work for the DoA are given good exposure and good training, and it looks good on their CV. They can get a university education paid for by the Department and a mentor, and then leave to take a higher paying job in the private sector or a promotion with another department. The salary structure in the government is such that they can't earn more within their department unless a promotion opportunity opens up that they can compete for. So when a promotion opens up at another department, they go. Those that are African are in high demand because departments have to fulfill their equity targets. In the past, the DoA did not have any contractual arrangement whereby those who got education or training paid for by the Department would be committed to staying for specified amount of time. The attitude was "let them go if that's what they want."

But the Department has made great strides. The Employment Equity Act requires the Employee Equity Consultative Forum to be comprised of representatives of a broad array of groups, including each racial and gender group. Similarly, it is good practice to constitute diverse interview panels to make selection decisions. When Rashidah started, there was not enough diversity to ensure either. The senior management was 80% white male. Now they will reach their 2010/11 target for senior management by 2007/08 (see Appendix C-1).

The two areas where targets are most difficult to meet are the Directorates of Research and Development and Sustainable Resource Management.

Ilse Trautmann is the Acting Director for Technology, Research and Development. She believes strongly in balancing equity with service delivery. The Department has come a long way since the days when they were too desperate to transform. Now things have calmed down, and it is part of their daily work. They used to let the supervisor do all the initial screening of applicants. Now half of the fully representative interview panel does it. It's more transparent. But, she adds, there are some Black people who don't know how to apply. They just want to come to the Western Cape so they do a mass mail-out of applications and then don't know which is which when they are contacted by a department. Sometimes she has to reduce the qualification requirement to get a Black for the job (e.g. from a masters to a bachelors degree) but that just causes resentment by the Whites who were hired with a masters degree. There are some Blacks with higher education but they are offered more money by the private sector. Ilse's comment about the overall working environment: "There is a good vibe here."

Peter Keuck is a Deputy Chief Engineer in Sustainable Resource Management. He understands the importance of integration but it is a struggle to find people with the technical skills needed for the job with such a strong emphasis on employment equity. There are very few able Blacks and women with engineering expertise so any time a vacancy is posted it is a struggle to fill it.

Peter believes the Department should start with a development program focusing on historically disadvantaged people in primary and secondary schools, and then provide bursaries (scholarships) for tertiary schools. Engineering training would be done under mentors to get people technical capacity. But he doesn't believe really have the clout to make this suggestion in the Department. Mentorship is extremely important in this field

because when people graduate they have a lot of theory but to apply that requires supervision.

Peter finds the overall work environment to be mixed. There are some with a strong sense of self—they will go forward. But others' sense is self-defined in terms of race, religion, or another characteristic which affects their attitude. The identity of some of those who were in the struggle for liberation lies in where we have been. We need to get on with things but some stuck in old ways.

Men are open to have women working with them but women are still trying to prove a point, Peter continues. An issue will come up to be sorted out and a woman will say "is this happening because I'm a woman?" And the men never even thought about gender. Women are sensitive about gender and men are not. The same can happen with races.

Mogale Sebopesta, Director of Food Security, has been with the Department only 4 months. The Department leadership's determination to meet equity targets is very clear to him, and is reinforced by pressure from the provincial government. One concern he has is that Human Resources often sends someone to sit on interview panels who is too junior to make an effective case for hiring the candidate that would help meet the equity target. He then finds that he has to step in to make the case himself. There are some managers who support the transformation, and others who don't.

It can be difficult to find people to appoint who meet the targets and have the needed skills, but it is not as dire as some people say. Mogale hires recent university graduates although he pays a price because they lack the experience. The Cabinet is looking for performance, too. Joyene could be removed if she doesn't meet performance targets, but the managers at Elsenburg would defend her.

Another hindrance to recruitment is that people perceive the department as a place where transformation hasn't come, according to Mogale. The Department says it wants people to come and make the transformation happen but people don't want to come because they think it isn't transformed yet. The department needs better PR to convince people it is a good place to work.

Another problem is the language barrier. A lot of documents are still written in Afrikaans. When Mogale applied for the post the application was in English, but the response came back to him in Afrikaans. He gets e-mails in Afrikaans. He doesn't know Afrikaans, nor do most of the 40% of the Cape population whose 1st language is Xhosa. He is learning. They need to understand the culture of diversity.

Mogale's view of the internal climate is that there is probably antagonism, but that it takes place at the junior level. He doesn't see it at the manager level.

Desmond Afrika is a security controller with the Department. He is also a shop steward for the Public Servants Association and a representative on the Equity Consultative Forum. He agrees that there is a lot of pressure put on managers to achieve equity targets. They had an inspection by the Department of Labour last year which found some "obstacles," but they were given until 2014 to get the numbers right and they

have already made some improvements. The Department has recently hired two people with disabilities and a Black woman. Desmond acknowledges that there are some managers that resist the pressure to achieve equity targets, but we have to accept that it is a new world.

Recently Melani Davis of Organisational Change Consulting held a focus group with employees and solicited their thoughts about how organizational diversity may be impacting organizational performance. These were the concerns they raised:

- “The inability or unwillingness to talk and understand each other’s language creates communication barriers in the working environment
- Shortage of staff raises the question if the Dept. of Agriculture can serve all their clients in the community
- Transformation leads to conflict in the divisions
- Experienced personnel are reluctant to transfer and/or share their knowledge – this was seen as perhaps resulting from them being fearful of their own future, or being selfish and vengeful
- People form groups and do very little to interact with others outside of these groups
- There is an inequality regarding the allocation of finances to the different divisions for the use of social interactions and team building
- Clients are biased towards EE appointments and doubt if the service will continue to be of the same standard
- Future of different groups vary – non acceptance of change by those who see the future as having less or no opportunities for them
- Quality of service will be affected by forced change that disregards the inherent job requirements
- Many misunderstandings result from ignorance when it comes to cross-cultural interactions
- Territorial behaviour (not sharing resources, skills, finances) contributes to unpleasant working environment and hampers productivity
- Lack of commitment to EE. e.g. skills development program is perceived by some to be failing or not enforced, recruitment process regarding the aforementioned is questioned e.g. are we setting people up to fail?
- Are the victories we have achieved regarding diversity and transformation false victories or is there going to be a backlash because continuous support is lacking (the distribution of land was mentioned as an example)
- Internal skills development is not evident in some departments, people are recruited from the external labour market and existing personnel that could be trained into those positions are overlooked. This leads to resentment, dissatisfaction and demotivation”

The department must develop its next annual Employment Equity Plan. Appendix C-1 shows the current and target staffing levels for Senior Management and for each of the other salary level groupings. The plan should specify:

- Steps the Department plans to take to achieve the numerical targets
- Steps the Department plans to take to address the barriers identified by the staff interviewed for this study and by the focus group conducted by Melani Davis

APPENDIX C-1

Implementation of Employment Equity Targets for Senior Management Service

SMS ¹ Level	(Current) 2005	2006	2006/07	2007/2008	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Post level 13	5 White Male	4 White Male	3 White Male (1 Retired)	3 White Male	2 White Male (1 Retired)	2 White Male	2 White Male
					1 White Female	1 White Female	1 White Female
	1 Coloured Male		1 Coloured Male	2 Coloured Male	2 Coloured Male	2 Coloured Male	3 Coloured Male
	2 Coloured Female	1 Coloured Female	2 Coloured Female	3 Coloured Female	3 Coloured Female	3 Coloured Female	3 Coloured Female
		2 African Male	3 African Male	3 African Male	3 African Male	3 African Male	2 African Male
		2 African Female	2 African Female	2 African Female	2 African Female	2 African Female	2 African Female
			1 Indian Female	1 Indian female	1 Indian female	1 Indian female	1 Indian female
	*1 Vacant (funded)						
Post level 14	None	1 Coloured Female	1 Coloured Female	1 Coloured Female	1 Coloured Female	1 Coloured Female	1 Coloured Female
		1 Coloured Male	1 Coloured Male	1 Coloured Male	1 Coloured Male	1 Coloured Male	1 Coloured Male
		1 White Male (contract)	1 White Male	1 White Male	1 White Male	1 White Male	1 African Male (1 potential retirement)
Post level 15	1 White Male	1 Coloured Female	1 White Male	1 White Male	1 White Male	1 White Male	1 Coloured Male Male (1 potential retirement)
TOTAL POSTS	10	13	16	18	18	18	18

¹ Senior Management Service

Race and Gender Distribution by Salary Grouping (1 through 15) Current and Target (2014)*

Salary level	African			Coloured			Indian			White			Male		Female	
	Male	Female	Target	Male	Female	Target	Male	Female	Target	Male	Female	Target	Now	Target	Now	Target
1-6	23	17	139	281	102	239	0	0	4	9	50	85	313	252	169	215
7 & 8	14	8	45	18	12	78	0	0	1	52	41	28	84	82	61	70
9 & 10	5	2	38	7	0	65	0	3	1	72	9	23	84	68	14	59
11 & 12	2	2	18	2	2	32	0	0	1	45	15	11	49	33	19	29
13-15	0	0	3	1	2	6	0	0	0	5	0	2	6	6	2	5
TOTAL	44	29	243	309	118	420	0	3	7	183	121	149	536	441	265	378

*Department management has agreed that salary levels 1-12 should be 50% representative by 2009; senior management levels should be 75% representative by 2006 and the Department should be fully representative by 2014 (fully representative is defined with respect to the economically active labour force—see Table 1 in Background section).

SOURCES

Department of Agriculture—Western Cape (DoA). 2006. Human Capital Development Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development in the Western Cape.

DoA. 2006. Race and gender distribution per salary level (1 April).

DoA. Undated. Macro-Structure: Employment equity targets to be achieved by 2010/2011.

DoA. Undated Employment equity projections.

DoA. 2006. Annual Report 2005-2006. Elsenburg: Western Cape Department of Agriculture.

Afrika, Desmond, Security Controller, DoA. Interview with author January 19, 2007.

Davis, Melani. 2005. Report on diversity management training. Organisational Change Consulting

Isaacs, Joyene, Head of Department, Western Cape DoA Interview with Author. DoA Headquarters, Elsenburg, South Africa November 14, 2006

Keuck, Peter, Deputy Chief Engineer. DoA. Western Cape DoA. Interview with Author, DoA Headquarters, Elsenburg, South Africa. January 18, 2007.

Paulse, Marius, Chief Director, Cape Institute for Agricultural Training. Western Cape DoA Interview with Author, DoA Headquarters, Elsenburg, South Africa Interview with author January 18, 2007

Sebopesta, Mogale, Director, Food Security. Western Cape DoA Interview with Author, DoA Headquarters, Elsenburg, South Africa January 19, 2007.

Trautmann, Ilse, Acting Director, Technology, Research and Development and Deputy Director for Research, Western Cape DoA Interview with Author, DoA Headquarters, Elsenburg, South Africa January 18, 2007

Wentzel, Rashidah, Director of Corporate Services, Western Cape DoA Interview with Author, DoA Headquarters, Elsenburg, South Africa. November 30, 2006.