

## SECTOR LEADS ON INCLUSION: LAUNCH OF THE AGRI DEIB PEER LEARNING AND NETWORKING FORUM

The agricultural sector has taken a bold step forward with the launch of the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (DEIB) Peer Support & Learning Network – the first initiative of its kind in the industry.

On 19 September 2025, representatives from about 8 companies gathered for the inaugural session of this industry peer forum, convened under the leadership of AGBIZ. The forum provides a collaborative platform for HR, DEIB, and transformation professionals across the agricultural value chain to share knowledge, co-create solutions, and strengthen resilience in the face of sector challenges such as scarce technical skills, workforce transformation pressures, and rural inclusion.

### KEY TRENDS SHAPING THE WORLD OF WORK

At the launch, Trevonica Naidu, Executive Head: Human Capital Experience at VKB Group, shared insights on trends shaping the future of work in agriculture. These included the growing importance of disability inclusion and tackling unconscious bias - issues that carry unique dimensions in rural and agricultural contexts.

Trevonica Naidu encouraged participants to envision what true inclusion in agriculture could look like by 2030, and to identify collective actions that can move the sector closer to that goal. The forum stressed that DEIB leadership must be embedded across all management levels, with accountability measures such as unconscious bias training. It also highlighted the importance of bridging generational diversity by combining the experience of senior professionals with the innovation of younger entrants.

### A SPIRIT OF COLLABORATION

The energy in the room was unmistakable. Attendees expressed excitement about the opportunity to learn, collaborate, and share best practices across organisations. As a first step, the forum resolved to identify two priority trends and build the capacity of its members around these focus areas. This will lay the foundation for collective impact and stronger sector-wide transformation efforts. The agricultural industry's vision as outlined in the AAMP is clear regarding transformation. However, this journey must begin by industry participants fully buying into the vision and opening the door to collaboration rather than competition. Embracing DEIB in the workplace will ensure that there are champions driving the larger national goal of the sector and this initiative by Agbiz paves the way for transformational leadership in the agricultural value chain.

### AN INDUSTRY FIRST

The creation of this peer forum marks a significant milestone for agriculture. By fostering inclusivity, talent pipeline development, and policy engagement, the network is poised to amplify the sector's voice on DEIB matters. (I am excited about this decision to focus on DEIB in the agricultural sector. Considering the important and prominent role that agriculture plays in South Africa's economy and the opportunity to address socioeconomic issues, it is commendable that Agbiz has taken this bold and forward-looking step. At a time

when many nations are tending towards more nationalistic and exclusionary dispositions, choosing to sustain the pursuit of DEIB truly resonates with the spirit of ubuntu and with being South African. I look forward to contributing going forward.)

As the independent convener, Agbiz ensures the network remains a safe, neutral, and trusted space for exchange. And for VKB, which together with AGBIZ, championed this inaugural event, it is an accolade that reflects both AGBIZ's and VKB's commitment to leading transformation and building an equitable, resilient future for agriculture.

By Thapelo Machaba, Agbiz and Trevonica Naidu, VKB