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**Media Release by Lina Keyter**

**MD: SA Agri Academy**

**Date: 25 April 2022**

**Release: Immediately**

## **SA Agri Academy launches a new small holder farmer hospitality route - Voedpad™/Foodpath™**

A new and exciting hospitality initiative for small holder farmers was launched at the SA Agri Academy's head office in Jamestown, Stellenbosch on 20 April 2022.

In order to enable these farmers to diversify and broaden their focus beyond primary production, the SA Agri Academy expanded its training and coaching offerings to include courses in the hospitality sector. Small holder farmers focusing on a primary production value chain can now add a hospitality value chain to its activities, including a B&B, guest house, on-farm holiday experience, small farm kitchen restaurant, farm stall, food truck, to name but a few. This new venture will enable them to diversify income sources and mitigate risk by not focusing only on primary production but explore a collaboration with the hospitality value chain.

Nine farms in the Western Cape were part of the first roll out of the programme. The training is based on two participants per farm – one specialising in the vegetable production value chain and the other trainee being trained as Cook Convenience Food. They submit a joint business plan as outcome of the training. Added to the primary production and hospitality training is also the identification of a Corporate Social Investment Project. This new exciting programme is an outcome of the current consumer market preferences of healthier food prepared in an environmentally friendly environment. The focus will be on in-season products produced and enjoyed on-farm or in the region.

This new development is a partnership initiative which truly reflects public/private collaboration. According to Mr. Rashid Toefy, Deputy Director – General: Economic Operations from the Western Cape Department of Economic Development and Tourism (DEDAT), "Entrepreneurship and supporting entrepreneurs remain key to the Western Cape Government's Economic Recovery Plan. Our Ministers has recently identified Enterprise Development and supporting small businesses as one of the key priorities for the WCG. This exciting opportunity will allow tourists to explore local flavours from Atlantis to Piketberg, Caledon, Mamre and Lutzville. The hands-on coaching and mentoring by Agri Academy on the softer side of business development is often overlooked but is one of the most valuable resources we can provide entrepreneurs".

DEDAT was a major funder to the hospitality training and coaching, as well as start-up infrastructure capital. As Foodpath™ was officially launched with nine farms, Lina Keyter MD of SA Agri Academy stated "Dreams came true not only for the small holder farmers who participated in the training, but also for Agri Academy who is constantly seeking opportunities to serve small holder farmers more effectively on their route to commercial viability and sustainability. Diversifying risks and ensuring an extra stream of income by combining two value chains for the small holder farmers was the key to the development of this new programme."

An interesting component to this project, as brainchild of Agri Academy, is the Corporate Social Investment (CSI) initiative. According to Toefy "So often we focus only on the business and commercial side of things, which is never a bad thing as it rakes in the money and create jobs, through this project there is an element of added social-economic development". Each farm on the programme has to select a charity in their immediate environment which with support provided will add value through the buying of equipment and infrastructure. Continued technical support from the farms will eventually ensure sustainable social businesses and give back to the community where the farmers operate in.

Funders to the project, besides DEDAT and Agri Academy, is the Perishable Products Exporters Control Board (PPECB) who co-supported the primary production training and coaching.

Adv. Gesie van Deventer, Executive Mayor of Stellenbosch Municipality, and passionate agricultural supporter and qualified winemaker, delivered the keynote address at the launch. According to Adv. van Deventer people in agriculture always continue regardless of what is coming their way "Tomorrow they just stand up and continue". With these words of wisdom and advice the project and new tourism route for small holder farmers Foodpath™/Voedpad™ were official launched.

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