

## Agbiz Student Case Competition Showcases Future Agricultural Leaders

The future of South African agriculture stepped into the spotlight at the Agbiz Congress 2026 Student Case Competition, and it did not disappoint.

Held at the Agbiz Congress from 3 to 5 June 2026, the competition brought together aspiring agricultural economists and agribusiness professionals from universities across the country, united by a shared challenge: reimagining the competitiveness and resilience of South Africa's wheat industry. Students were placed into multidisciplinary teams drawn from different institutions, fostering the kind of collaborative, cross-pollinated thinking that the sector increasingly demands.

This year's case study placed participants at the heart of one of agriculture's most complex conversations navigating tariff structures, regulatory frameworks, food security imperatives, and the long-term sustainability of the wheat value chain. Facilitated by Dr Melissa van der Merwe and Prof Johann van Rooyen, teams worked under real pressure to produce evidence-based recommendations before presenting their findings to a panel of judges and industry stakeholders. The quality of work on display reflected not only strong technical grounding but also maturity, strategic thinking, and the ability to communicate under pressure.

The accolades spoke for themselves. The first-place team delivered a standout performance, with one participant also recognised as an Outstanding Presenter a fitting tribute to the depth of preparation and passion invested throughout the competition. Ona Ndelu captured the spirit of the experience well:

*"Participating in the Agbiz 2026 Student Case Study Competition was a rewarding and career-shaping experience that allowed me to apply Agricultural Economics knowledge to real challenges within the wheat industry. The experience deepened my understanding of agricultural policy, food security, and industry dynamics while strengthening my problem-solving, research, teamwork, and presentation skills."*

Beyond the competition floor, students had rare access to the broader Congress engaging directly with agribusiness executives, policymakers, researchers, and sector leaders. These conversations added a dimension that no classroom can replicate unfiltered insight into the forces shaping South African agriculture today and the decisions that will define it tomorrow. Ona Ndelu expressed that:

*"Engaging with industry professionals, including the CEO of Agbiz, further inspired my passion for contributing towards sustainable and improved agricultural value chain systems, food security, and innovation."*

What emerged most clearly from the 2026 competition was not just academic ability, but readiness the readiness of a new generation to engage seriously with the sector's most pressing challenges and to

contribute solutions that are innovative, practical, and grounded. Initiatives like this one are how Agbiz continues to invest in agriculture's most important long-term asset: its people. The future is in capable hands.