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Agriculture is still creating employment in SA

11:08 (GMT+2), Wed, Wednesday, May 11, 2016

By Wilma den Hartigh

Statistics South Africa's latest employment figures show that fewer people in the country have jobs, with employment declining by 2.2% or 355 000 in the first quarter of 2016.

The agriculture sector, however, is one of only two industries that showed notable quarter-on-quarter growth in job creation.

This means that agriculture is still making an important contribution to employment, even though the industry is dealing with one of the [worst droughts](#) in South Africa's history.

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The agriculture sector created 876 000 jobs in the first quarter of 2016, which is an increase of 2% from the previous quarter but down by 2% from the same period last year.

Despite the quarterly increase, employment in agriculture declined by 15 000 compared to a year ago.

Wandile Sihlobo, head of economic intelligence and agribusiness at Agbiz, said that the majority of jobs were created in primary agriculture as the rest of the value chain generally falls within manufacturing. The manufacturing sector contracted by 6% quarter-on-quarter and 7% year-on-year.

Prof Nick Vink, chair of the department of agricultural economics at the University of Stellenbosch, said that higher employment figures in agriculture could be attributed to the increasing number of hectares under irrigation.

Expansion of [irrigation farming](#) is one of the strategies proposed by the National Development Plan (NDP) to create a million jobs in agriculture. "It

does seem as if we are busy putting more land under irrigation than in the past," Vink said.

He said that if more land is farmed under irrigation, employment per hectare increases in comparison with dry land production.

"Once land is irrigated employment per hectare will decline over time because of new technology but the trick is that if you can put new hectares under irrigation fast enough, total employment will increase," he explained.

Sihlobo said that the fertilizer, livestock, horticulture and game sectors showed the most significant growth in employment, but ocean and coastal fishing experienced a decline.

"In the NDP aquaculture does not feature as prominently as other sectors. It has potential to assist in job creation but not as much as other farming sectors," he said.

He believes that aquaculture's contribution might be more significant in the manufacturing industry as it is an input in the production of many food products.

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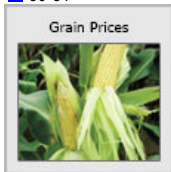
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