BIZCOMMUNITY

Regenerative farming takes root in S/ as demand for sustainable exports grows

As global buyers tighten sustainability standards, South African farmers are starting to adopt regenerative farming practices at a growing pace — particularly those focused o export crops.

Source: Freepik

Regenerative farming works with natural processes to restore soil health, reduce chemical use, ar increase resilience to climate shocks. The World Economic Forum reports that transitioning just 4 of global cropland to regenerative agriculture could cut 600 million tons of emissions — equivalen the footprint of a small country.

Arno Abeln, managing director at Agrimark, says the shift is gaining momentum in South Africa, though the pace varies by sector.

"We're seeing major investment in these practices among wine, citrus and table grape producers, in apple and pear production, because export markets are demanding it. It's less advanced in the

sector, but we're starting to see more interest as producers explore ways to improve soil health ov the long term," says Abeln.

Export-facing crops lead the shift

Abeln believes South Africa's lack of government farming subsidies means local producers have h adapt faster and smarter.

"South African farmers don't benefit from the government subsidies common in other countries. They've had to find innovative and efficient ways to farm to stay viable. Regenerative practices tog with precision agriculture are playing a bigger role, especially as export markets adopt stricter sustainability standards."

In the Swartland region, principles like crop rotation and integrated grazing have been used for ye — helping maintain soil health naturally.

"A farmer might plant 500 hectares of wheat one year, followed by canola the next, each crop nourishing the soil differently. After harvesting, sheep graze the fields, naturally fertilising the land a holistic system — and a scientific one."

Younger farmers driving mindset shift

A generational shift is also driving the uptake of regenerative practices.

"There's definitely a long-term view emerging – especially around soil health and resilience," says Abeln. "And with better soil health, you often see the potential for better yields and cost efficiencie too."

International studies suggest input costs could drop by 25-50% over time for farmers who move a from synthetic fertilisers and pesticides.

Data, not guesswork, key to long-term soil health

Abeln says modern farming requires science-backed decisions, not habit-based practices.

"Many farmers are still using the same fertiliser mix they relied on ten years ago. We help them mc smarter, insight-driven decisions that can improve yield and profitability."

Agrimark, a national agricultural retailer, works with suppliers, plant diagnostics specialists and ir providers to support this shift.

"It's about replacing guesswork with data. When a farmer faces an issue, we don't just sell a produ we work with him on-site to understand the problem and coordinate the right expertise."

"In some regions, like parts of the Northern Cape, soil degradation is a real risk. If we want to keep farming and feeding people, we have to prioritise soil health."