

Agri sector shows robust performance in labour survey

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The agriculture sector in South Africa continues to show its strength creating 61 000 new jobs in the third quarter of 2023.



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This is according to the data of the latest Quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS) released this week, by Statistics South Africa.

According to the LFS the total number of those employed in the country increased by 399 000 to 16,7 million in the third quarter compared with 16,3 million in the second quarter of 2023.

The survey showed a slight decline in the official unemployment rate, from 32,6% in the previous quarter to 31,9% in the third quarter.

This reflected an employment increase of 979 378 in the third quarter with 2,46 million jobs added over the past eight consecutive quarters.

With the creation of approximately 61 000 new jobs in the third quarter, the total employment in agriculture has now increased to 956 000.

According to Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development Minister Thoko Didiza, the statistics show that this is the highest employment figure in the sector since the start of democracy.

“The last time the agricultural sector recorded a million jobs was in 1993, the era which was underpinned by subsidies.”

The latest figures suggest that the economy is gradually recovering and starting to create jobs, Didiza said.

“The agricultural sector has demonstrated its resilience and capability to support the overall South Africa’s economic recovery and growth, both in terms of jobs creation and contribution to the economy. The positive jobs in agriculture attest to the continuous commitment by government, industry, labour, and other value-chain players to implement inclusive growth and job-created measures contained under the Agriculture and Agro-processing Master Plan.

“The resuscitation of agriculture in rural areas and continued expansion of export opportunities are among the enablers that have brought growth and stability in the sector,” added Didiza.

Paul Makube, senior agricultural economist at FNB Commercial, said the LFS data confirmed the resilience of agriculture, making significant improvement in employment in the sector.

“The agriculture sector was boosted with an addition of 61 146 jobs quarter-on-quarter (7% q/q) and 82 984 jobs year-on-year (10% y/y) in to 956 000 people in the third quarter of 2023. This is despite the tough operating environment characterised by disease outbreaks and infrastructure challenges, such as a dilapidated road network. At current levels, employment in the primary agriculture sector is well above the longer-term trend of 793 000 people,” Makube said.

He added that the seasonal increase in activity with bumper harvests in full swing for both the field (grains and oilseeds) and horticultural crops in the third quarter more than offset a declines in the livestock industry which was the biggest with a share of 42% of total gross-producer value of agriculture during the 2021/22 season.

Makube said that there was a good regional spread of new jobs with gainers being the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, North West and Gauteng.

The Free State, Mpumalanga, and Limpopo, however, saw losses in employment numbers.

“An uptick in employment numbers is a step in the right direction in helping fight the scourge of unemployment in the country. Agriculture has the potential to add more jobs, and this may be realised if impediments to growth are addressed by expediting the improvement of efficiencies in ports, fixing the rail system to ensure bulk agriculture produce gets back on rail, and repairing road infrastructure that has proven costly for producers.

“Moreover, the seasonal outlook has improved significantly as the El Niño scare seems to have dissipated with forecasts still calling for rains in the early part of the current crop season which bodes well for agriculture,” Makube said.