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Datacentrix Agri Indaba maps the journey to 'Agriculture 4.0'

How can the local agricultural sector harness technology to drive efficiencies and productivity? This was the over-riding theme of Datacentrix at its third annual Agri Indaba.

The event was held in March at Zebula Golf Estate and Spa in Limpopo and attracted over 90 clients and industry representatives. The comprehensive agenda included discussions by 17 content specialists, including Dr Roelof Botha, economist and joint MD of GOPA Group SA, Niki Neumann, GM: Strategic Innovation at AFGRI and GM: AFGRI Technology Services, and Alf White, Group Executive: Information Technology at Senwes.

As keynote speaker, Dr Botha relayed a message of hope to South African agricultural organisations, stating that, as a sector, it has shown an incredible performance over the past few years, with a primary trade balance in surplus of R164 billion since 2013. "Africa is the place to be, looking at the agriculture trade, as we are the largest exporter of food by far."

And even though it is proving impossible to reassure anyone who has felt the brunt of the fallout from the COVID-19 virus and the extent of global disruption, with empty sports stadiums and schools, desolate airports, countries closing their borders and plunging stock markets, this so-called 'black swan' event will eventually pass and is not a wholesale case of doom and gloom, he added. "The coronavirus is fast-forwarding us into the future, getting us to increase our hygiene, and while it will

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undoubtedly lead into a recession, a variety of economic sectors will continue to perform well.

"Two examples of sectors that will benefit from the virtually universal switch to working from home are web-based video conferencing applications and mobile communication in general.

"Furthermore, most factories around the globe that produce essential consumer products, including food, are still operational and food supplies are in abundance in most countries. South Africa is in the fortunate

position of being a net exporter of food, with agriculture having contributed R142 billion to the country's trade account in 2019. Bumper crops are expected as a result of good summer rains in many parts of the country.”

One of the key differences between the current global economic slowdown and previous recessions is the rapid growth of ICT, Botha pointed out – to the point that artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming an integral part of societal existence. “The services sectors now contribute more than 80 percent of total GDP in the US, the UK and France,” he said. “There is not a single problem that we can face in this country that cannot be solved with the right skills, the right governmental policies, and the right technology.”

In his address, Datacentrix CEO Ahmed Mahomed reiterated the fact that we are living in disruptive times. “With pressure increasing on agriculture as the world population increases, and resources such as land and water decreasing, it is imperative that food is grown, harvested and consumed more efficiently.”

Technology is playing an important role in helping with the transformation of the agricultural industry, he explained, with the long-term objectives of more effective resource and farm management, improved traceability, and greater supply chain efficiencies. This would apply across all key areas of agriculture, from smart tractors and livestock monitoring, to feed production and security management.

“To enable Agriculture 4.0, a logical rollout of smart, connected agriculture products and systems is required. Businesses wanting to become 'smart agriculture' organisations must become connected and digitalised as a first step, followed by greater control of business operations, the optimisation and self-control of these operations, and the automation and use of technologies to support.”

Thanks go to participating sponsors of the Datacentrix Agri Indaba 2020, including Cisco, Dell Technologies, Cybereason, Manage Engine, Nutanix, OpenText, Veritas, eNetworks, HP Inc. and Tactile Technologies.



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