

Nedbank, PALS partnership boosts new-era farming with Next Level Training

In September 2022, Nedbank partnered with agricultural transformation specialists, Partners in Agri Land Solutions (PALS), to fund their enterprise development until 2025. Under the agreement, an amount of R1m per year will be used to finance training for new farmers through an enhanced 'Next Level Training' (NLT) curriculum.



Source: Supplied

PALS is a non-profit organisation developed by farmers in Ceres, in cooperation with local communities. Its key objective is to create an enabling environment to implement innovative land reform and inclusive agricultural growth that supports social harmony.

Through PALS, farmers of colour not only become true landowners with full titles, but their success as farmers is ensured by workable partnerships with commercial farmers. The organisation and its work represent a fundamental departure from post-land reform models and are based on sound business principles, legal structures, mentorship and training.

The Nedbank-sponsored NLT curriculum builds on and enhances the training facilitated by PALS from 2016 to 2022. In 2023, more than 30 NLT events were held in the Western Cape, Mpumalanga and the Free State, **upskilling almost 240 new-era farmers in the following subjects and initiatives:**

- Responsible leadership and mentorship, held in partnership with the Stellenbosch University Business School.
- Financial principles and skills, which focused specifically on financial statements and cash flow.
- Money matters, which examined finances for acquiring, managing and developing land.
- Management information, which explored factors to consider when making financial decisions for a commercial farm.
- Marketing for fruit exporters, in collaboration with the Koue Bokkeveld Training Centre, which touched on everything from market segmentation and export compliance to international commerce and risk management.
- Farm management and finance, presented by Maluti Farming and PALS in cooperation with Dunamus Agri to upskill new-era farmers in the Free State.
- Corporate, business and legal principles training for PALS directors, shareholders and trustees.
- Youth development and leadership initiatives, including the opportunity for 19 learners and their teachers to participate in the Youth in Conversation discussions on the Nation in Conversation stage at Nampo Cape. They were joined by the editor of Landbouweekblad, Chris Burgess, and Western Cape Provincial Minister of Agriculture, Dr Ivan Meyer.

Lennox Plaatjies, PALS's national liaison manager, says that training and mentorship have been one of PALS's main focus areas since its launch in August 2014, as the requisite skill set is a critical success factor for a sustainable agricultural enterprise.

Training an mentorship

"PALS is proud of the pioneering work and enriched training that has been developed and presented because of the Nedbank grant. The 2023 training calendar was filled with a comprehensive range of training sessions for new-era farmers, which allowed us to successfully coach many previously disadvantaged PALS beneficiaries who do not have access to formal business training. The training calendar for 2024 will build on this substantial base and the lessons learned.

"The insight and commitment of Nedbank, and their investment in a more inclusive future through the training of new era farmers, is invaluable and we are humbled by and extremely grateful for their ongoing support," says Plaatjies.

"Nedbank's senior manager for enterprise development, Nirmala Reddy, and I had the opportunity to attend some of the training sessions hosted by PALS," says Cobus de Bruyn, head of client value propositions for agriculture at Nedbank Commercial Banking. "What a privilege to attend a training session attended by new-era farmers and successful commercial farmers, all around 1 table. We are exceedingly proud to see how our purpose becomes action.

"Our purpose is to do good for individuals, families, businesses and society, and our partnership with PALS forms part of Nedbank's commitment to facilitating transformation in the agricultural sector and the future commercial viability of emerging farmers. This, in turn, is aligned with our goals to contribute positively towards achieving food security, economic growth, job creation and skills development and transfer," says de Bruyn.