



Media Release

For Immediate Release

To: All Media

Date: 8 July 2021

Attention: News Editors / Agricultural writers

The Agricultural Research Council and Stakeholders Workshop the Preservation of South Africa's agricultural National Public Goods Assets.

Pretoria: As the legislated custodian and primary user of South Africa's agricultural National Public Good Assets, the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) together with its stakeholders, namely the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI), the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), and the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) recently held a workshop with the objective to initiate the process of drafting a five-year strategic plan to ensure the preservation and utilisation of the National Collections towards achieving national strategic objectives.

The goal of the workshop was also to foster greater coordination, collaboration and support for the National Public Good Assets across key stakeholders to find better ways to ensure the sustainability, safeguard and to further increase the scientific and economic value of these assets through better regulation, public awareness, public-private partnerships, improved diagnostic capabilities, effective data management for evidence-based decision-making; building human and research capacity.

Current factors that may put the National Public Good Assets Challenges at risk include the impact of climate change, droughts, lack of skills and lack of proper funding hence the need for a collective and coherent approach by all relevant stakeholders.

National Public Good Assets, namely facilities, databases, biobanks, natural science collections and the vast living collections, are strategic resources of economic and permanent value belonging to a country. They form the basic and unique building blocks of sovereign property, indigenous and acquired knowledge of any country from the beginning of humankind.

Sovereign states rely largely on stores of National Public Good Assets, knowledge and intelligence to defend national interests and to rebuild their societies and economies after destructions caused by wars or natural disasters. They are critical to the recovery, survival and

resilience of the different sectors of the economy. National Public Good Assets are an integral part of the country's balance sheet and provide a future benefit.

The ARC has had the privilege and honour of preserving and managing gainful use of South Africa's National Public Good Assets for more than 100 years. The skills, knowledge, and innovation that people accumulate are the greatest assets of economies on the rise. The ARC has made significant investments over the past few decades to preserve the National Public Good Assets for the sector and the nation at large and has received significant support from the DSI in this regard over the past 15 years. Timely investment in National Public Good Assets plays a critical role in shaping the agricultural sector and food security for future generations in coming decades.

Prof. Michelle Hamer, South African National Biodiversity Institute and manager of the Natural Science Collection Facility and Biodiversity Biobanks, two pillars of the South African Research Infrastructure Roadmap of Department of Science and Innovation said, "The main requirement of any country is food security, and a stable agricultural sector ensures a nation of food security. Over time human memory fades, however, with the National Public Good Assets, the country's food production remains safeguarded by custodian government institutions such as the ARC. Through these Assets the country's multibillion Rand agricultural sector is also protected and is able to remain competitive in producing quality and nutritious foods."

"Agriculture plays a critical role in the entire spectrum of a given economy. Agriculture is the backbone of the economic system of nations. In addition to providing food and raw materials, agriculture also provides employment opportunities to a very large percentage of the population," added Mr Jan Hendrik Venter from the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development's Plant Health Early Warning Systems Directorate.

The other economic benefit of a thriving agricultural sector is that it contributes to economic development and national income levels, ensuring that citizens' standard of living improves. The fast rate of development in the agriculture sector offers a progressive outlook as well as increased motivation for development. Hence, it aids to create a good atmosphere for the overall economic development of a country.

The ARC possesses the requisite scientific capacity, and is also the custodian of infrastructure to maintain, and optimally utilise these National Public Good Assets for agricultural development, in the application of reproductive biotechnologies. For example, over the past >50 years, the ARC has contributed more than 200 cultivars to the crops industry, amongst which are some of the best performing in the world.

The ARC possesses diagnostic capabilities which are used with National Public Goods Asset as reference samples in the identification of new and emerging agricultural risks, such as Fall Armyworm, *Tuta absoluta* (Tomato Leafminer), BBTV (Banana Bunchy Top Virus), Sugarcane Longhorn Beetle, Blueberry bud mite and Golden Cyst nematode. The ARC is the appointed diagnostic referral centre for the Southern African Development Community (SADC) by the FAO on Maize Lethal Necrosis Diseases, Fall Armyworm and *Tuta absoluta* based on its National Public Good Assets.

The ARC's animal production and animal health programmes have also made a huge impact on the Agricultural sector in recent times. The sector's annual contribution to the economy was R11 billion in 1985, which tripled to nearly R30 billion in 1995, and this grew 10 fold to nearly R280 billion in 2018.

The ARC has seven OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health, formerly the Office International des Epizooties) reference laboratories and is responsible for the diagnosis of notifiable diseases (Foot-and-Mouth, African Swine Fever, Rift Valley Fever, Lumpy Skin, African Horse Sickness, Rabies and Blue Tongue) and national reference laboratories for Avian Influenza, *Peste des petit ruminants*, etc. as well as provision of blood vaccines for the whole country.

Through the preservation of the National Public Good Assets by the ARC with the support of its stakeholders, the South African agriculture sector will be able to safeguard the economy from shocks, instability and losses worth billions of Rand to food producers and consumers alike. Preventing these shocks will curtail food products from skyrocketing as result of rampant food inflation.

Dr Thulasizwe Mkhabela ARC Group Executive: Impact and Partnerships concluded that, "In order for the South African agricultural sector to thrive, both young and old of the country should be aware of the value and scientific capacity of National Public Good Assets hosted by the ARC. And it is through partnerships with other organs of State for their preservation that the National Public Good Assets will remain a key component for the stability of the South African economy."

Issued by:

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Notes to the Editors

About the Agricultural Research Council

The Agricultural Research Council is a premier science institution that conducts research with partners, develops human capital and fosters innovation in support of the agricultural sector. The ARC provides diagnostic, laboratory, analytical, agricultural engineering services, post-harvest technology development, agrochemical evaluation, consultation and advisory services, food processing technology services as well as various surveys and training interventions. For more information visit the ARC website at: www.arc.agric.za