

Evaluation of Agricultural Extension Services at the LDARD

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PSEF

by
Mostert J.W.
Mathebula L.J.

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Introduction

- There is a growing consensus on the importance of agricultural extension support services as an integral component of ensuring effective implementation of developmental programmes in rural areas.
- Agricultural extension officers support farmers in decision making by providing information on sustainable farming practices and they propagate new, more effective methods based on the latest research.

The aim of the study

- The aim of the study is to understand and enhance the standard of extension services offered by the Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (LDARD) extension officers to the Limpopo farming community.

Problem Statement

- Current indications are that the department has employed around 567 extension officers at a cost of about R 302.2 Million per annum, and the cost of Technical and support staff is 419.2 Million (which sum up to 721.4 Million), which is about 59 percent of the total budget of the department. It is however a challenge to link the services offered by these extension officers against the current production output (quality and quantity), farmer skills and competencies in their relevant farming activities.

Research objectives

- The key objective of the study is to assess the agricultural extension support services so as to provide evidence based recommendations to advise the department and the province on ways to enhance the status of extension services in the province.

Research Methodology

- The study used a random sample where 25 percent of the extension officers and farmers were randomly sampled and they were interviewed using formal questionnaire.
- Formal Questionnaires were developed for extension officers, where they had to rate the level and quality of extension service they provide to farmers.
- Farmers were also interviewed through formal questionnaires and they were expected to rate the level and quality of extension services they receive from extension officers.
- The results were captured in excel, converted to percentage and analyzed.



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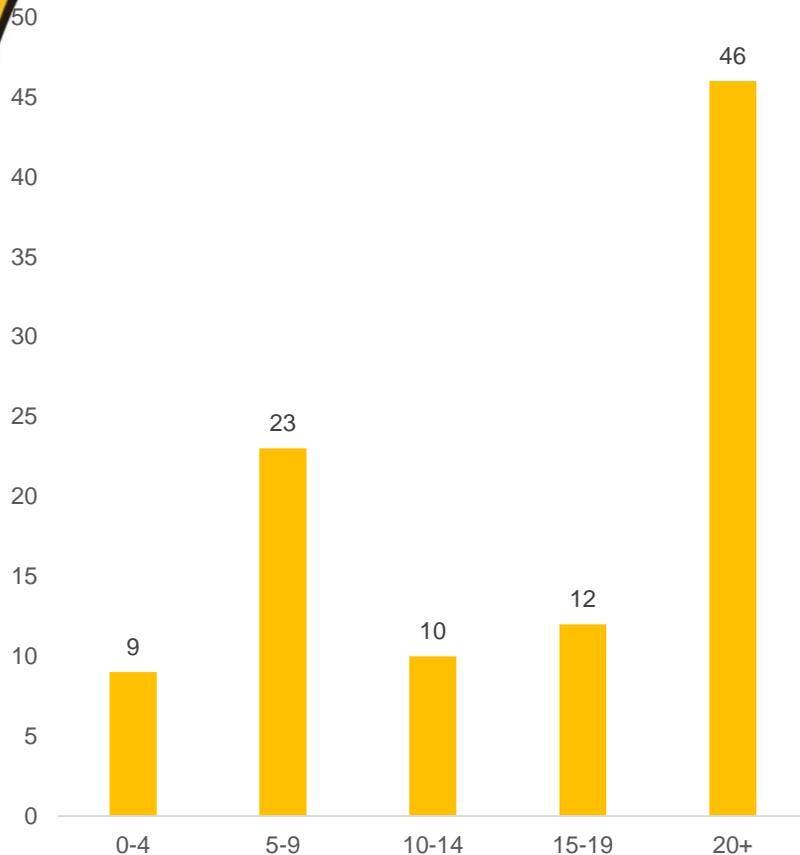
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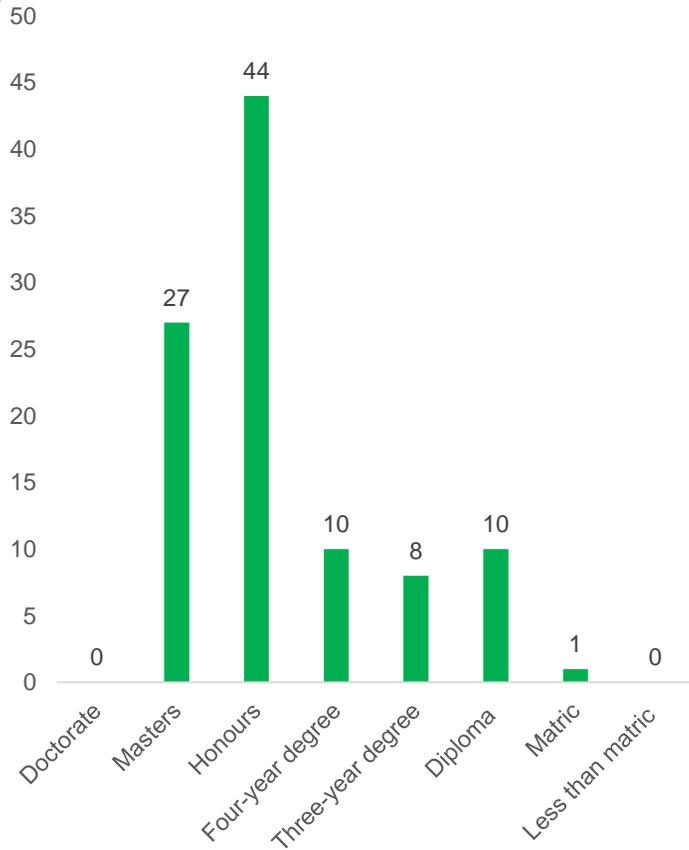
Findings from assessment of extension officers

Experience of extension officers



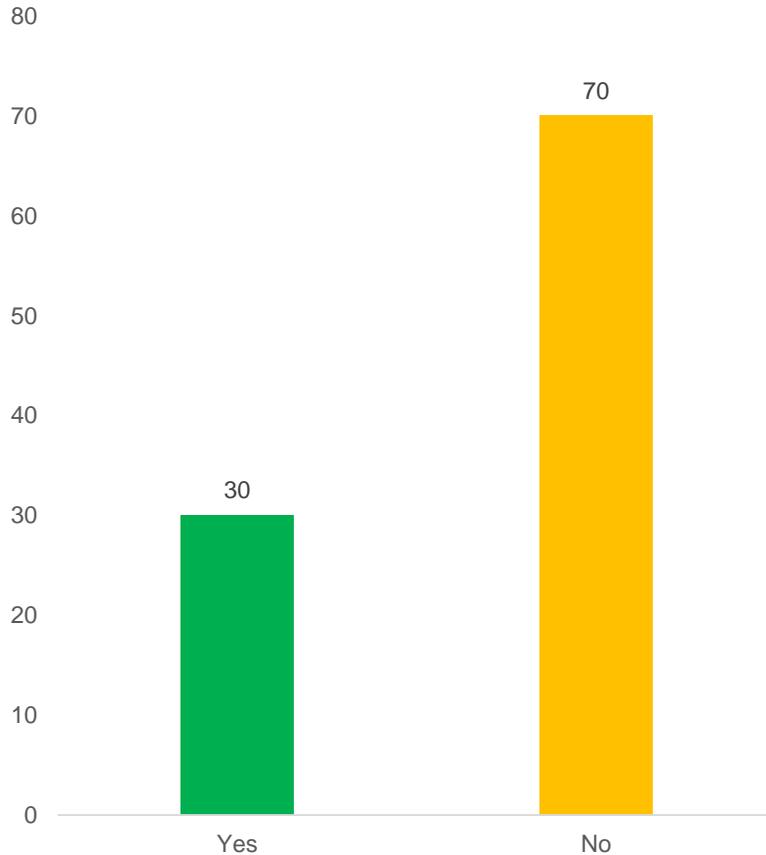
The survey indicates that majority of extension officers of about 46 percent have been involved in agricultural extension services for 20 years and above, while 23 percent have been in extension services for 5-9 years, 10 percent for 10-14 years, and 12 percent for 15-19 years while 9 percent have been in the agricultural extension services for 0-4 years.

Level of Education



44 percent of extension officers in Limpopo province have honours degrees, 27 percent have Master's degree, 8 percent has three-year degrees and 10 percent and one percent have four-year degrees and Matric certificate. The results indicate that extension officers in the province are well educated with masters and honours degrees.

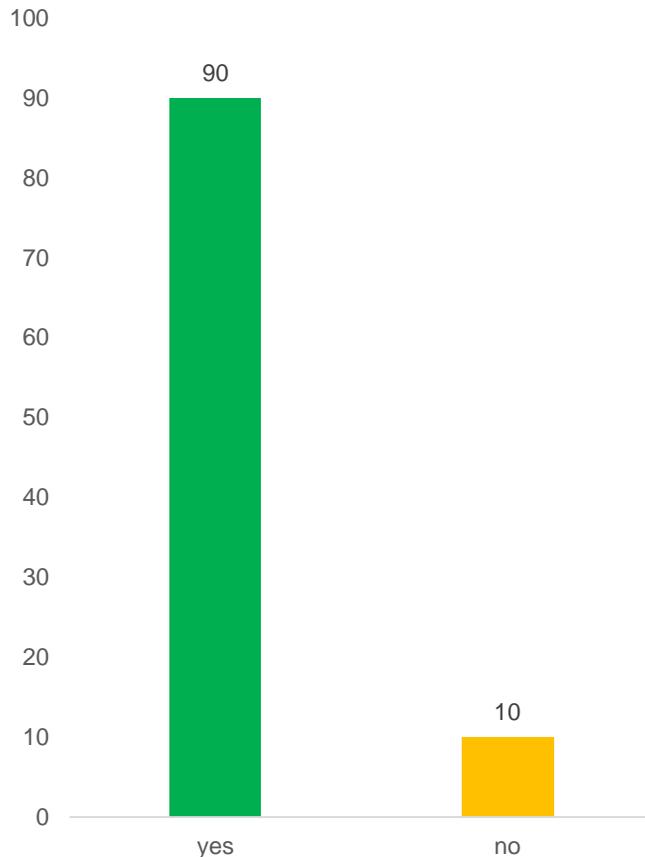
Studying further with any institutions/Universities



The results indicate that 30 percent of officers in the industry are furthering their studies and 70 percent are not studying.

Some of the extension officers mentioned that they are not furthering their studies because they do not have sufficient funds to further their studies, some are demoralised while some is due to the fact that they have family responsibilities as some of their children are at universities studying

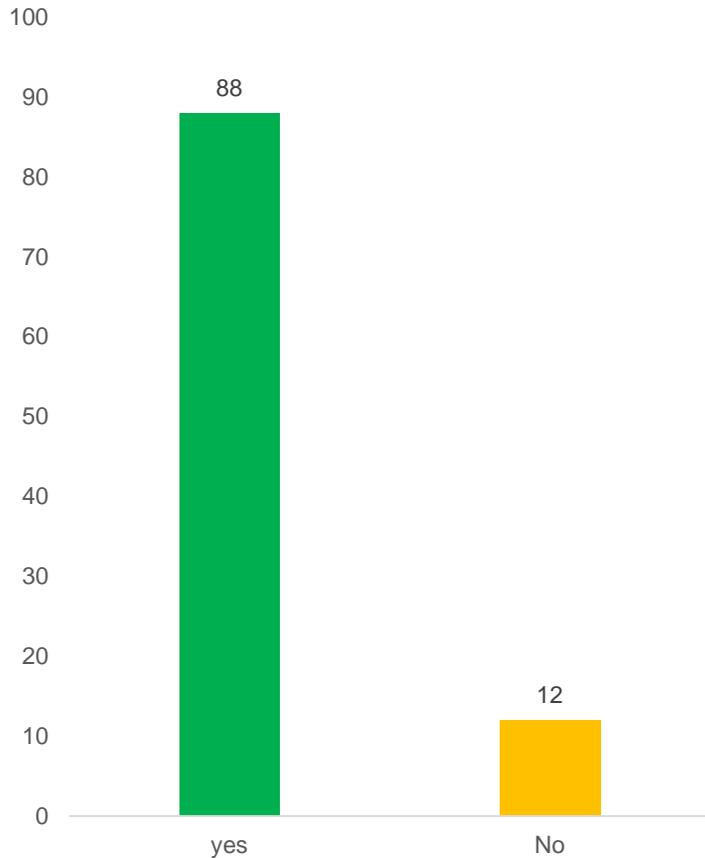
Received any form of training in the past five years.



About 90 percent of extension officers have attended some form of training in the past five years and only 10 percent have not attended any form training.

The training extension officers attended are rural development training, computer literacy, project management, agricultural training, bee keeping, beef and small stock provision, climate change, vegetable production and fertilizer advisory and dry bean production workshops.

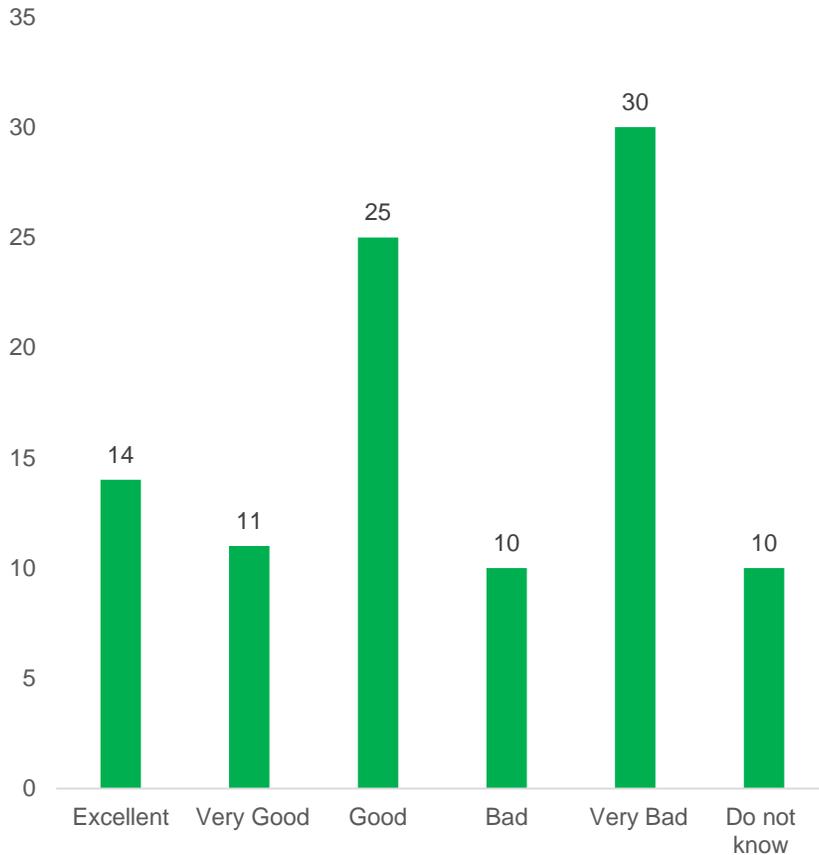
Officers' use of technology



The results indicate that 88 percent of extension officers use technology while 12 percent do not use technology.

Various concerns have been raised about the use of Smart Pens that was implemented by the Department, which were found to be a challenge to the officers.

Evaluate the state of extension services in Limpopo

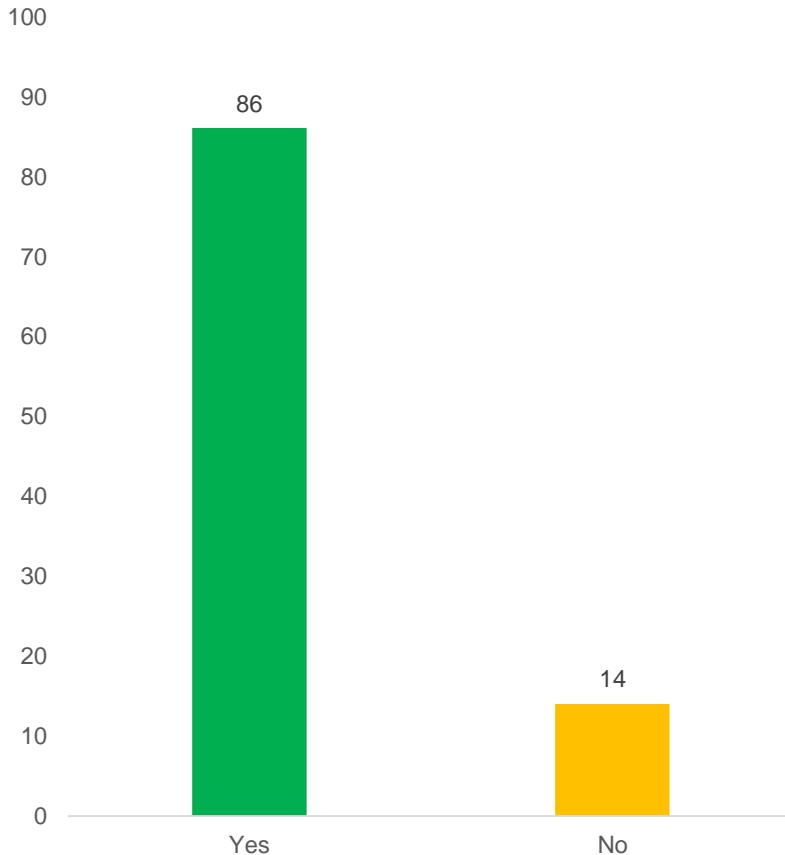


Of the participants, 30 percent rated the state of extension services in Limpopo very bad, 25 percent rated the services good, 14 percent rated the services excellent, while, 11 percent rated the services very good and 10 percent rated the services bad and another 10 percent that they do not know

Advices offered by extension officers

- Advices extension officers offer range from advisory on crops and animals, how to use new technologies, veterinary and land care, doing market research for farmers, facilitating funding by stakeholders, advising farmers on how to produce food in a sustainable way.
- Organise farmers days, advice on how to control internal and external parasites, mobilising farmers into entities and advising farmers on production planning and marketing.

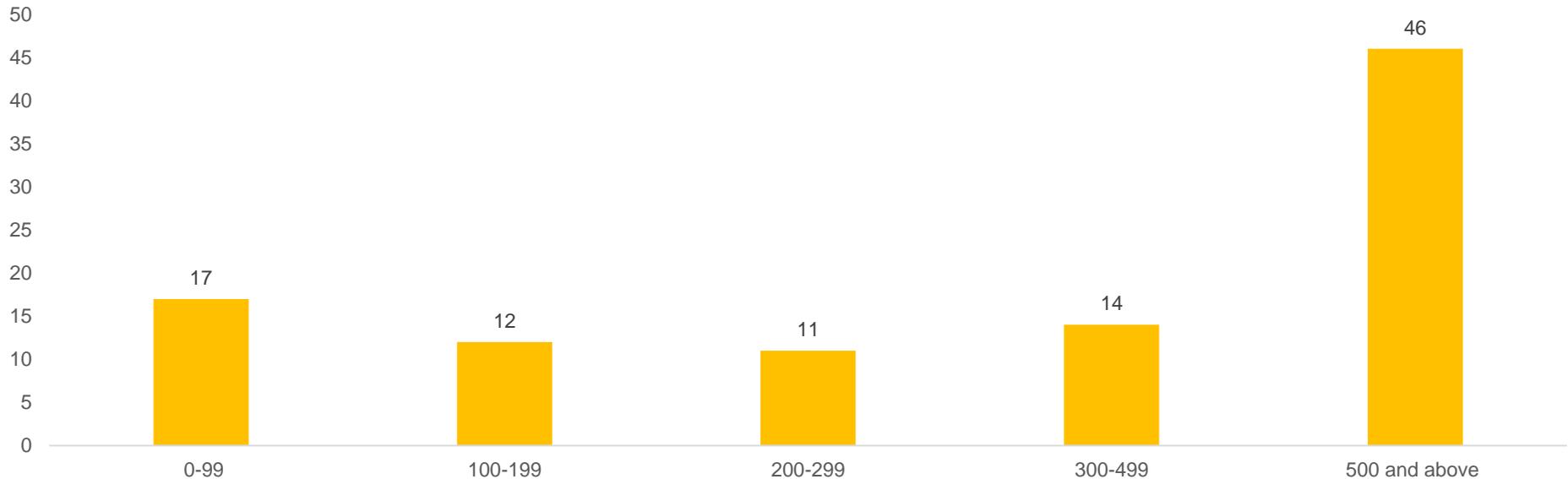
Appreciation/need of extension services by farmers



The extension officers had to indicate whether the farmers appreciated their services or not. If not, reasons had to be provided.

About 86 percent of extension officers gave an indication that farmers appreciate/need their services, with only 14 percent indicating that farmers do not require their services.

Percentage of farmers serviced by extension officers



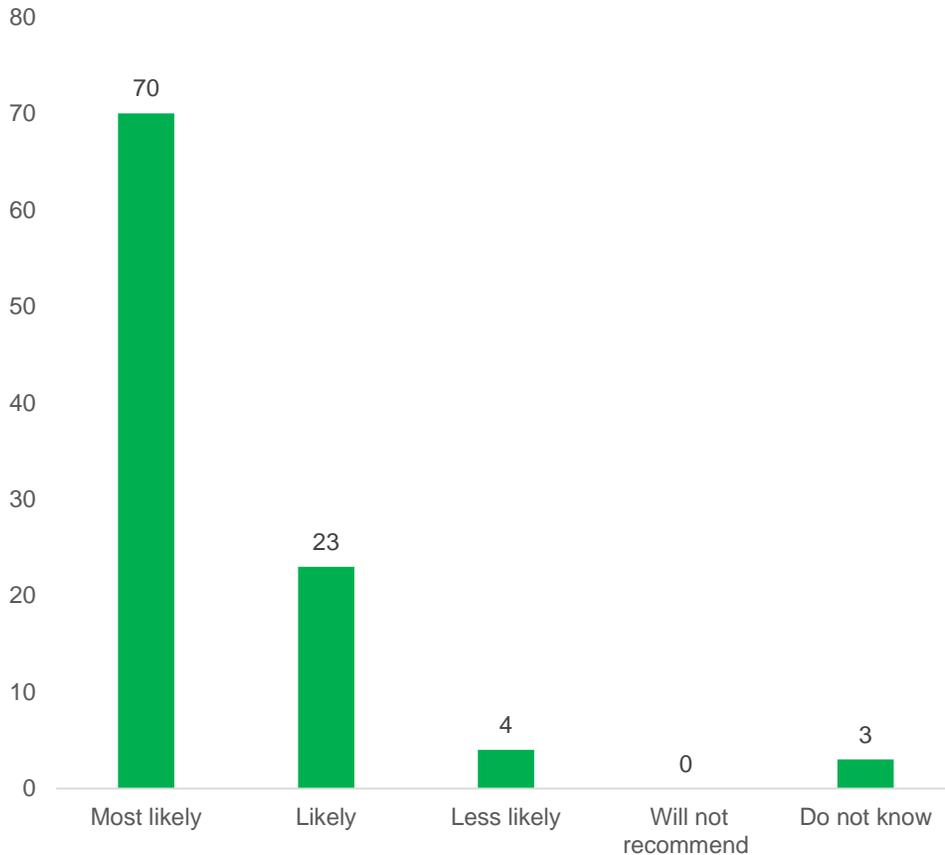
The results indicate that majority of extension officers in Limpopo are serving 500 and above farmers. Though the study could not link the extension officers to these farmers.

Percentage of each group of farmers that extension officer supported/spent their time

	Commercial	Emerging	Food gardens
0-20	73	6	10
21-40	13	17	8
41-60	8	26	10
61-80	4	29	32
81-100	2	22	40

Majority of extension officers (73) spend (between 0-20%) assisting commercial farmers, while about 72 percent of the officers spend above 61 percent of their time assisting food gardens. 77 percent of the officers spend more than 41 percent of their time servicing emerging farmers.

Recommendation of service to other farmers.

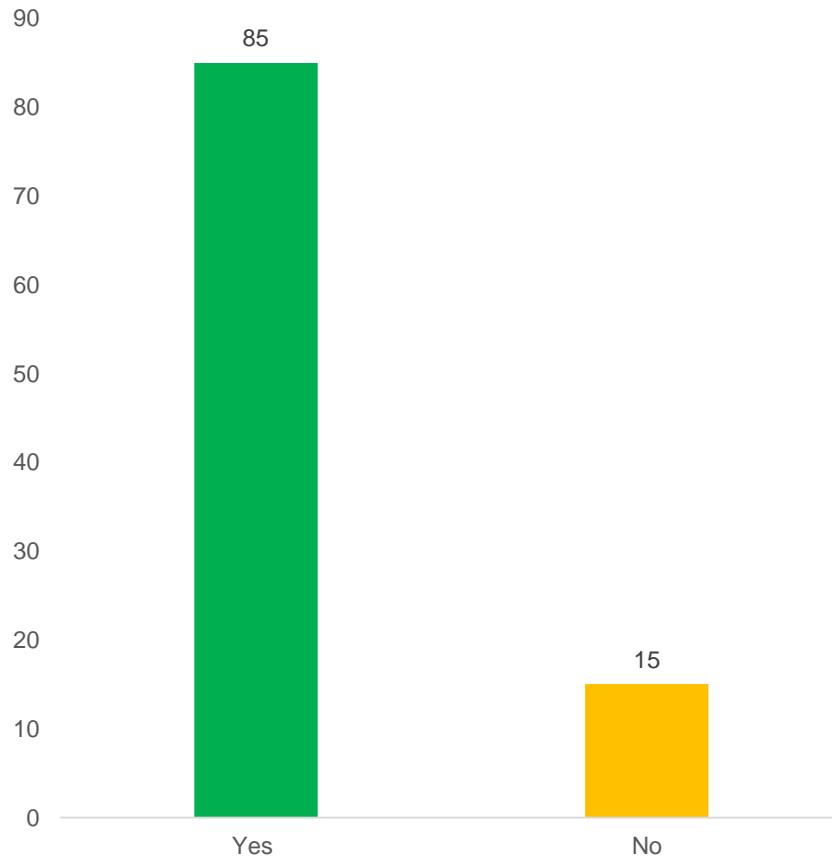


As expected most of the extension officers at 70 percent, are most likely going to recommend their service to other farmers.

Challenges that extension officers are experiencing

Farmers are not experienced enough	30 %
Commercial farmers don't need extension services provided by LDARD officials	24%
The officers do not have the necessary equipment/resources required to perform their functions	77%
The Department of Agriculture does not have budget to support the extension services	74 %
Farmers don't implement the recommendations as guided by the extension officers	38 %

Registration with professional body



About 85 percent of extension officers have registered with a professional body, while 15 percent of participants indicated that they are not members of any professional bodies

Extension officer perceive the following as challenges for farmers

- Farmers feel extension officers are not experienced enough
- The Department of Agriculture does not have enough budget for extension services
- Farmers do not have enough capital to implement the recommendations received from the extension officers
- Most of the participants indicated that commercial farmers do not use the government extension service



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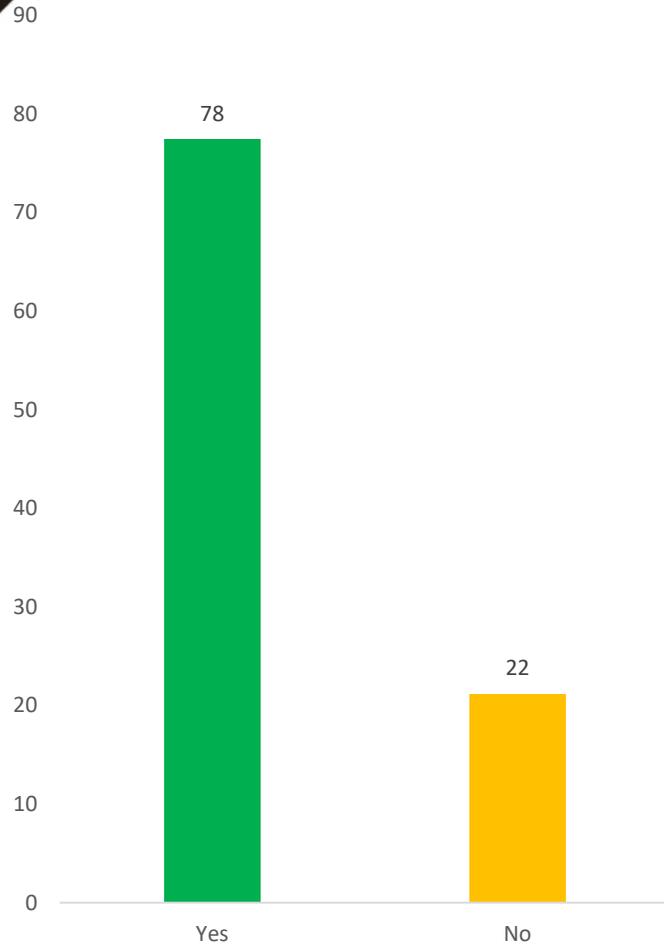
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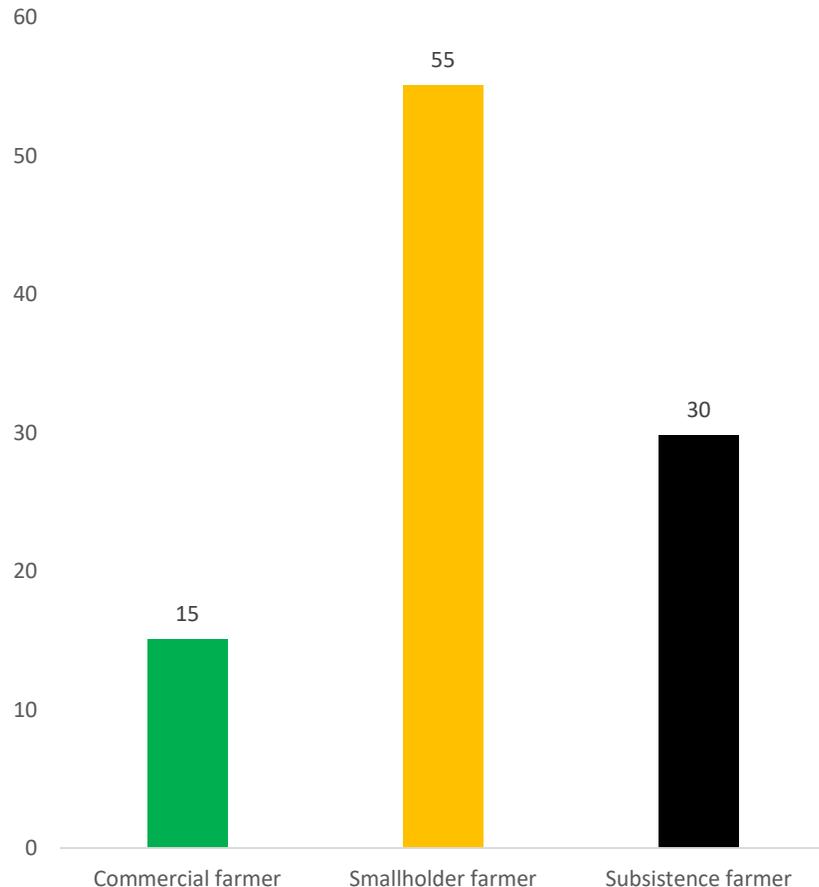
Findings from assessment of Farmers

Use of extension services by Farmers



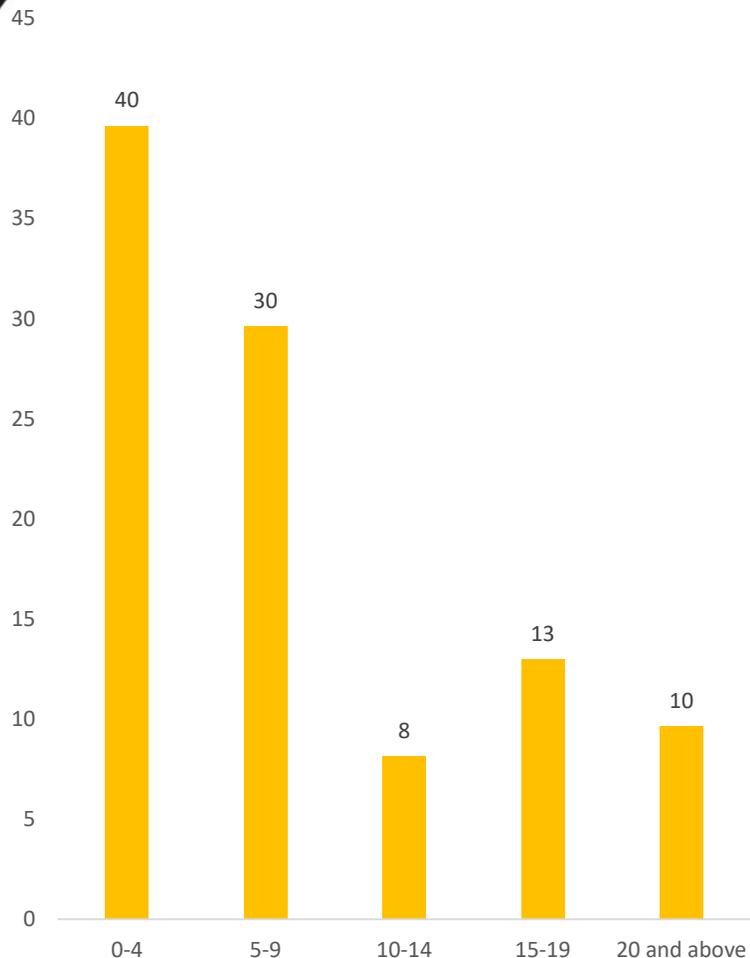
- The result is no surprise to indicate that almost all the farmers are utilising the extension services to some extent as the survey was conducted only to farmers who are serviced by the LDARD.
- About 78 percent of farmers are using extension services and only 22 percent are not using extension services.

Farmers category of farming



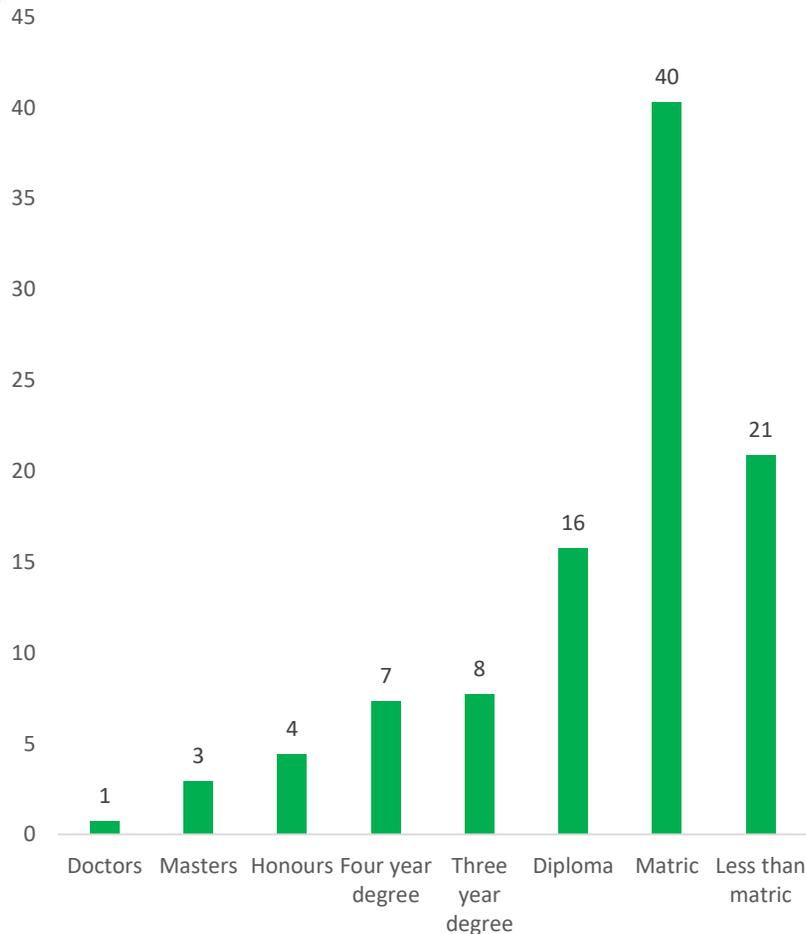
- About 15 percent of the farmers were commercial farmers, with majority at 55 percent being smallholder farmers and 30 percent subsistence farmers.
- About 85 percent of the farmers serviced by the LDARD are smallholder and subsistence farmers.

Farmers years of experience



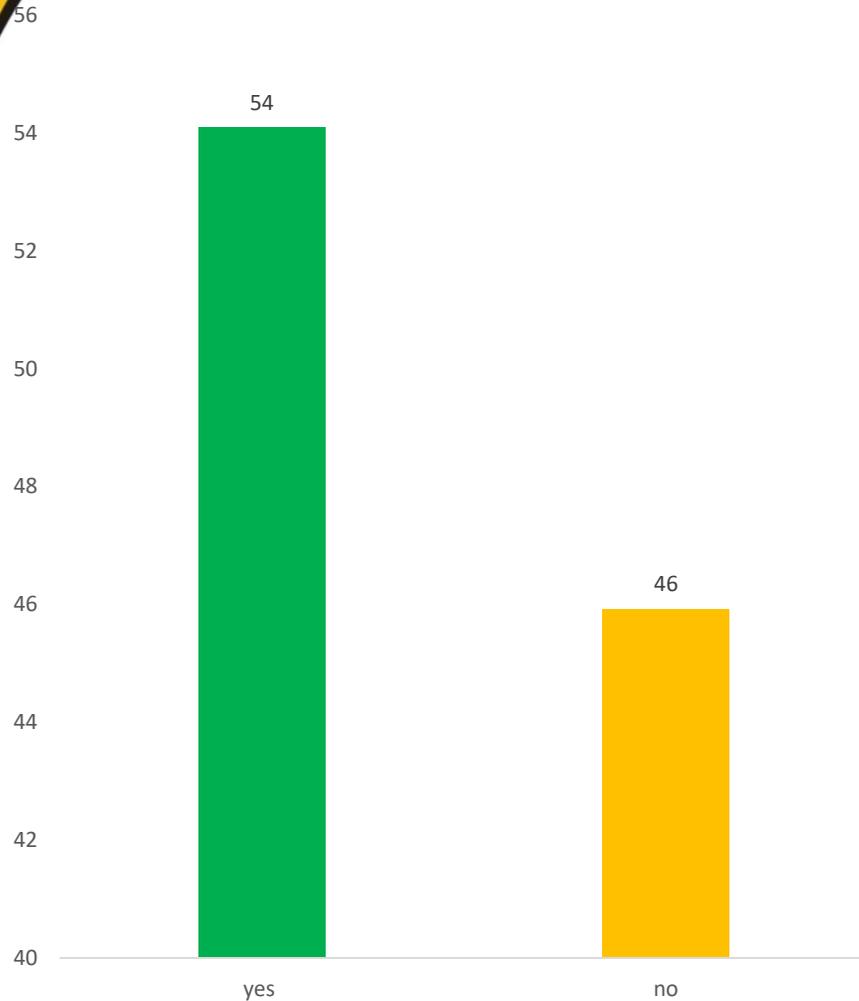
40 percent of the farmers have less than 4 years of involvement in agriculture or farming, with another 30 percent being between 5 – 9 years and with only ten percent having 20 and above years involved in agriculture.

Farmers level of Education



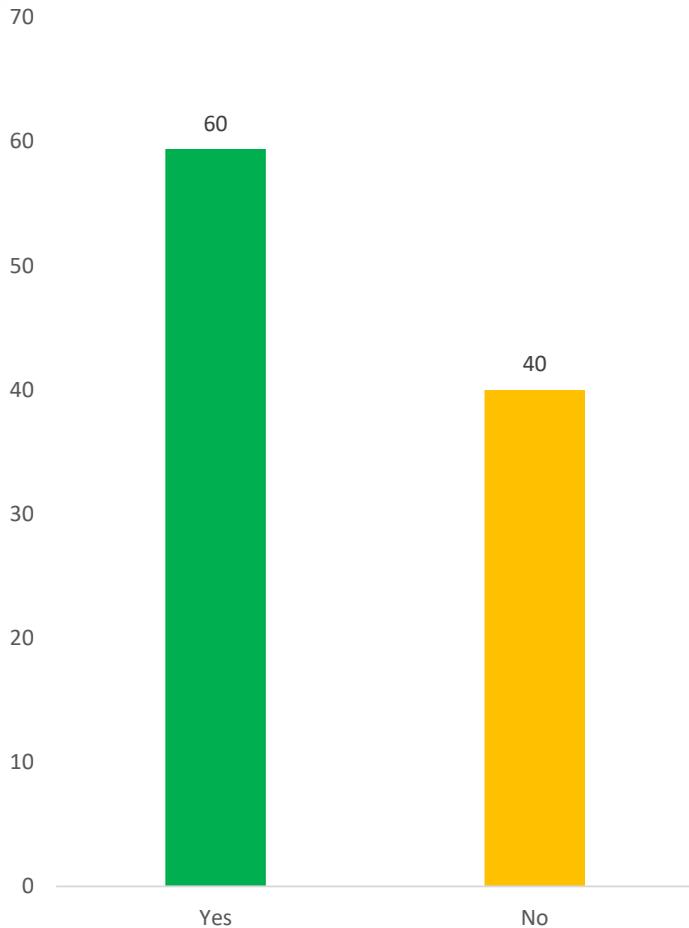
- About 61 percent of farmers have matric or less than less than matric. Only 39 percent of farmers have a qualification which are beyond matric.
- This indicates the level of literacy of the farmers in the province and the challenges that the farmers are facing as many of them cannot read and write.

Registration with Professional body



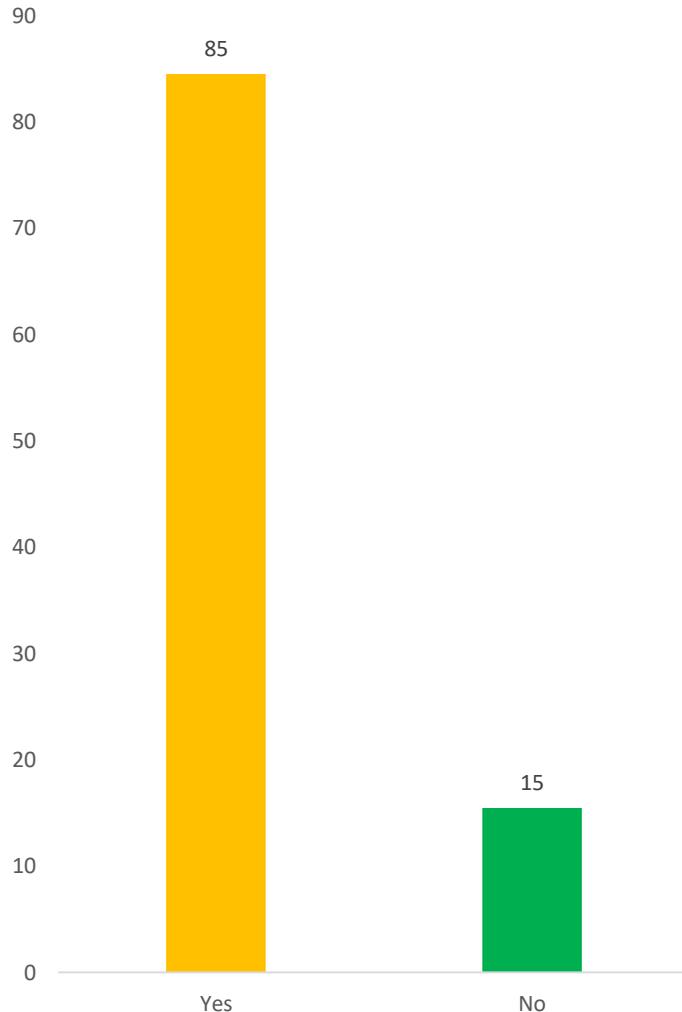
Only 54 percent of the farmers indicated that they were registered with any farmer's union/commodity association and 46 percent were not registered

Training offered to farmers by LDARD in the past five years



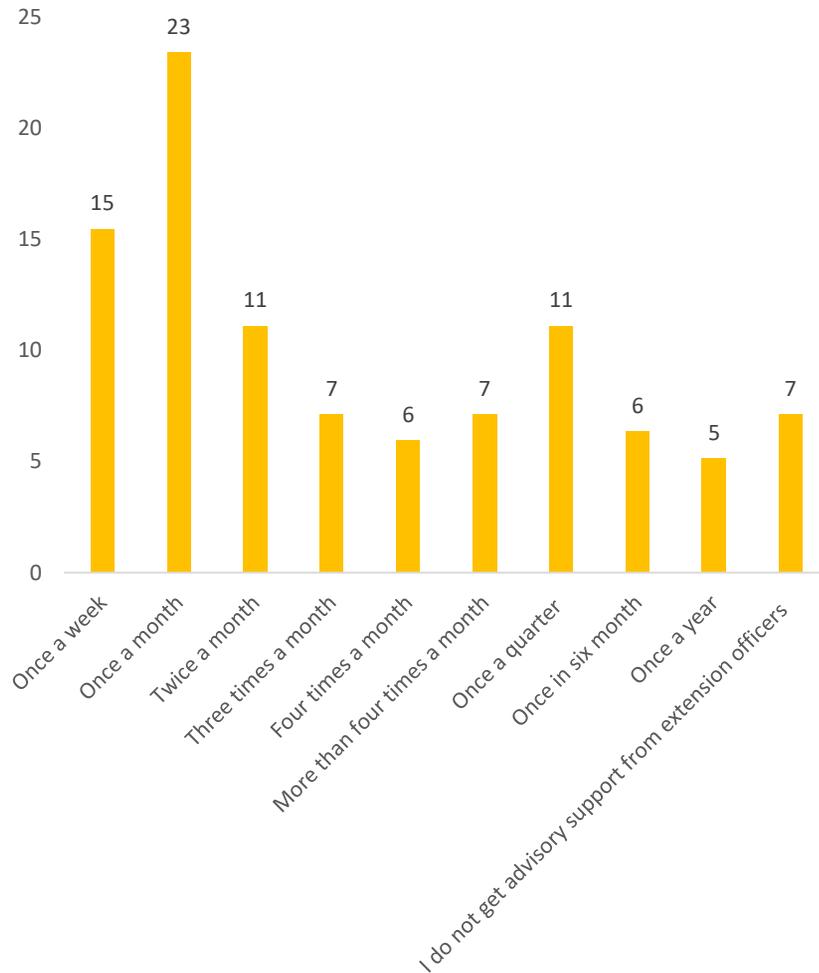
About 60 percent of farmers indicated that they attended training/workshop and 40 percent indicated that they never attended any form of training. The training attended includes practical training related to farming: example, how to castrate a bull, number of animals to keep on a farm, plant production.

Farmers application of techniques offered by extension officers



About 85 percent of the farmers indicated that they were applying the advice or techniques as recommended by the extension officers, while 15 percent were not applying any of the advices of extension officers

The number of times farmers receive advisory support

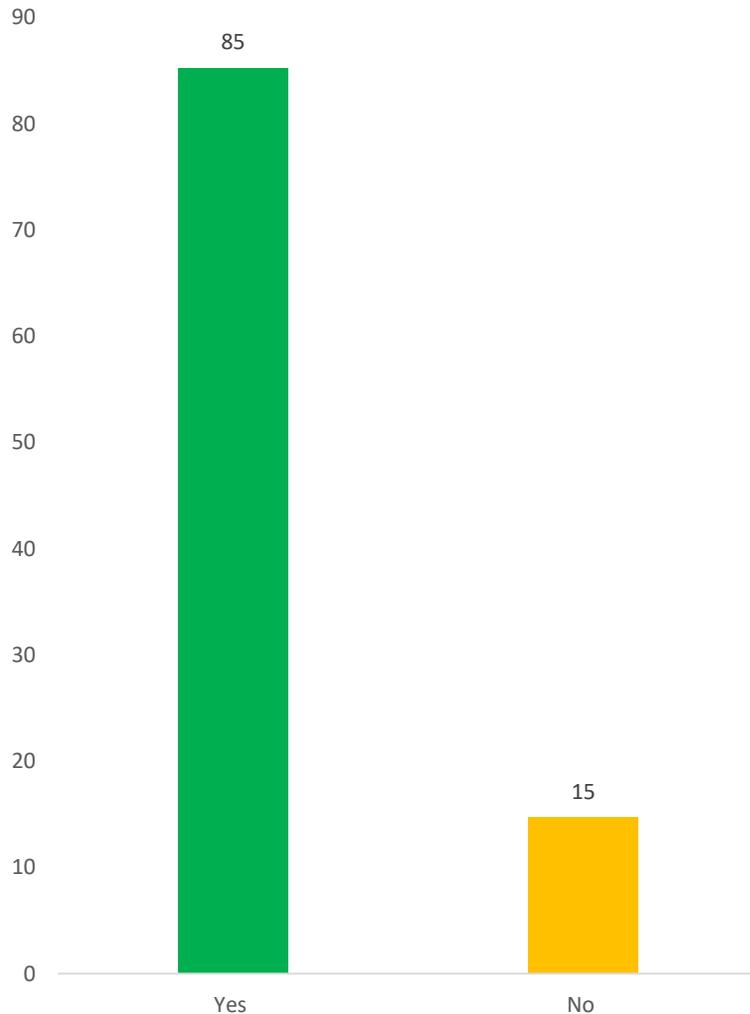


About 23 percent of farmers received advisory support once a month, followed by 15 percent who receiving support once a week and 11 percent receiving support twice a month. About 7 percent of farmers were found to be receiving advisory support three times and about 13 percent were receiving support more than four times a month.

Advisory support received by farmers from extension officers

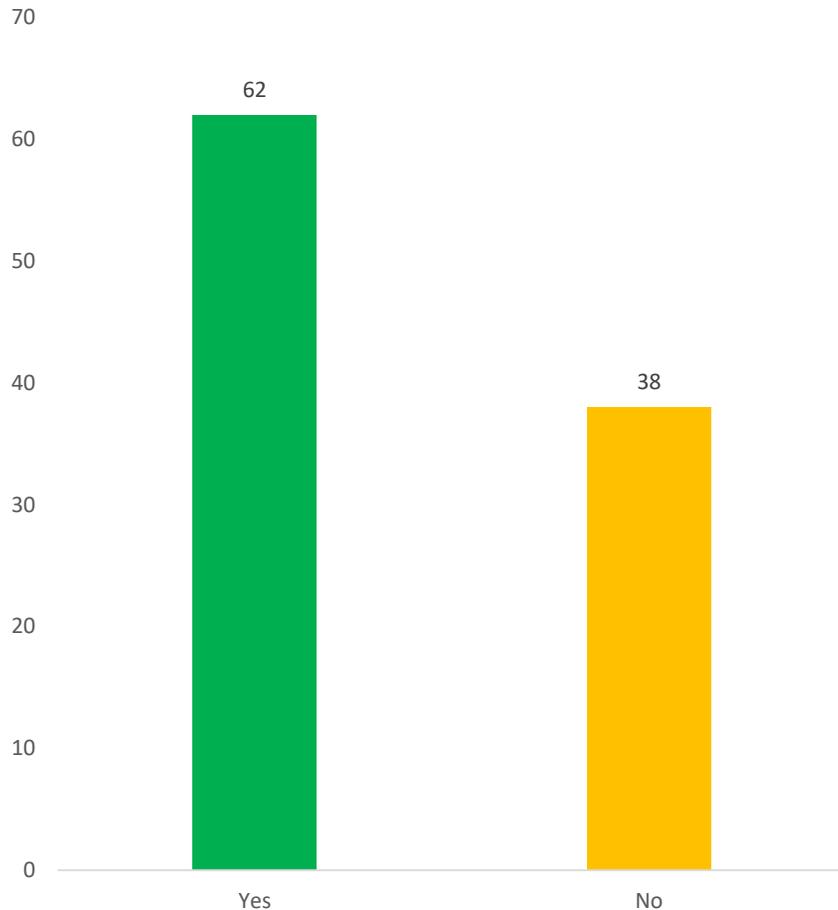
- Guide on land preparation
- Good Agricultural Practice (GAP)
- Record keeping
- Access to markets
- Plant according to Limpopo chart and customers' needs
- Planting of crop and pest and disease control
- Soil testing

Appreciation of extension services by farmers



About 85 percent of farmers indicated that they valued the services of extension officers, with only 15 percent who do not. Almost all the farmers indicated that they value and appreciate the services of the extension officers.

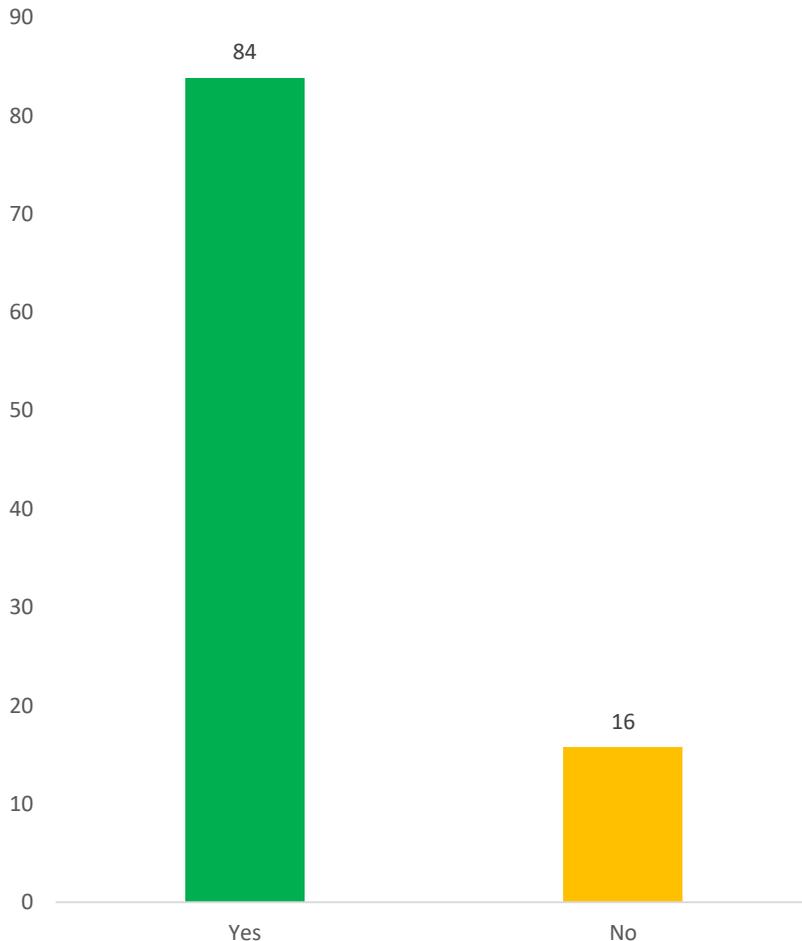
Production inputs received by farmers



About 62 percent of the participants received inputs while 38 percent did not get any inputs.

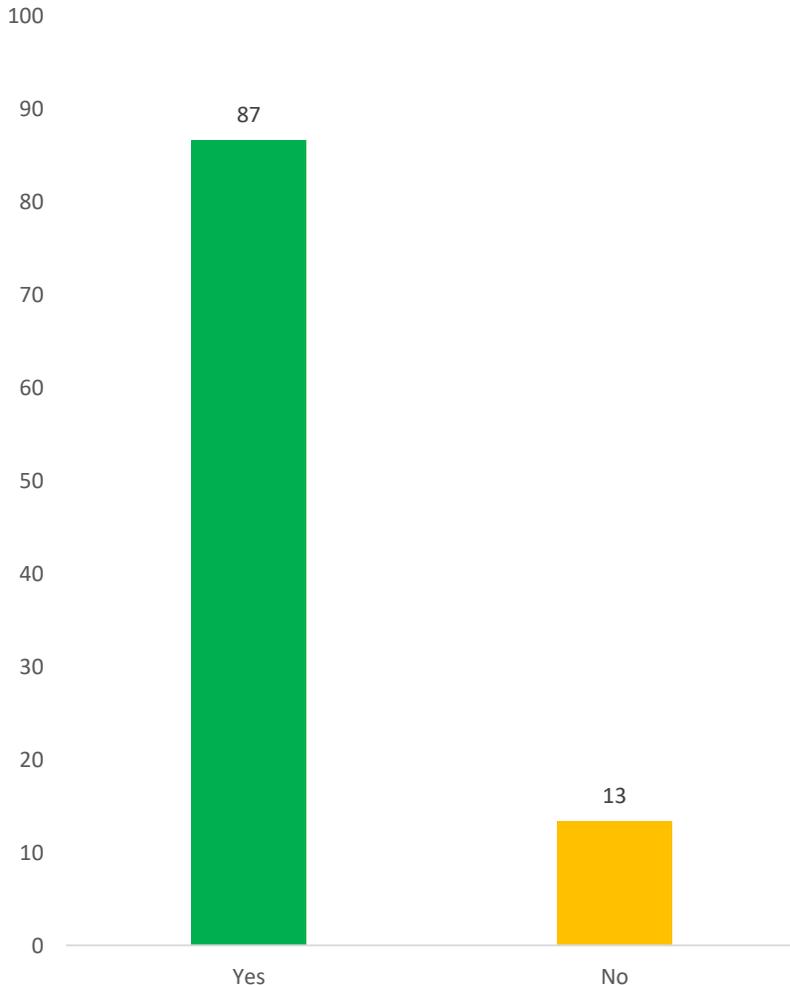
Some of the farmers who did not get inputs indicated that they were informed that there is not enough budget and their farms are still too new.

Improvement in farmers ways of farming



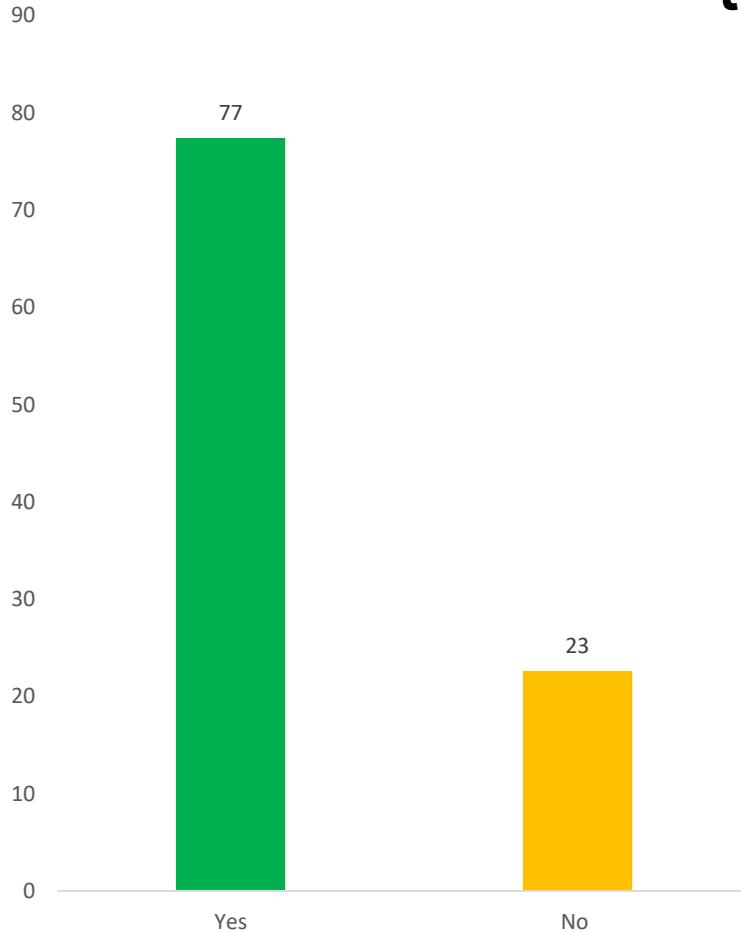
An overwhelming 84 percent of the farmers indicated that their way of farming improved after they have received advice from extension officers, while 16 percent indicated their way of farming did not improve after receiving advice from extension officers.

Improvement in quality of products



About 87 percent of farmers indicated that the quality of their crop increased after they have received advisory support from the extension officers while 13 percent indicated that there was no improvement in the quality of their products.

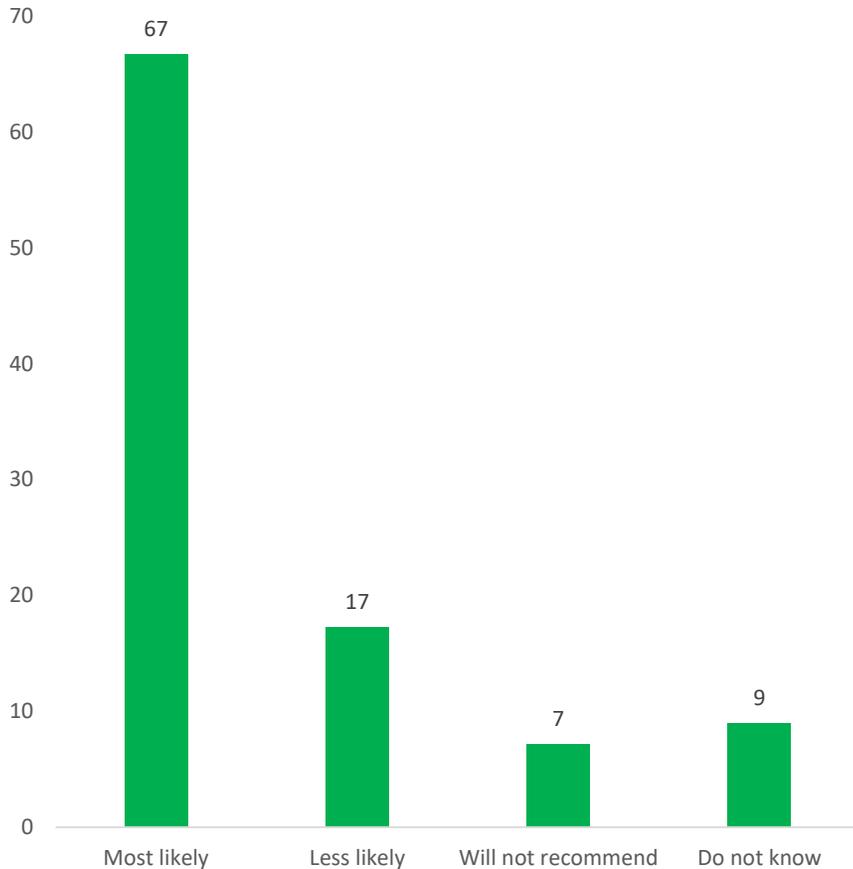
Increase in production inputs in the past three years



About 77 percent indicated that the production outputs increased, while 23 percent indicated there was no increase in their production outputs.

Some of the reasons for this was due to the drought experienced in the past years.

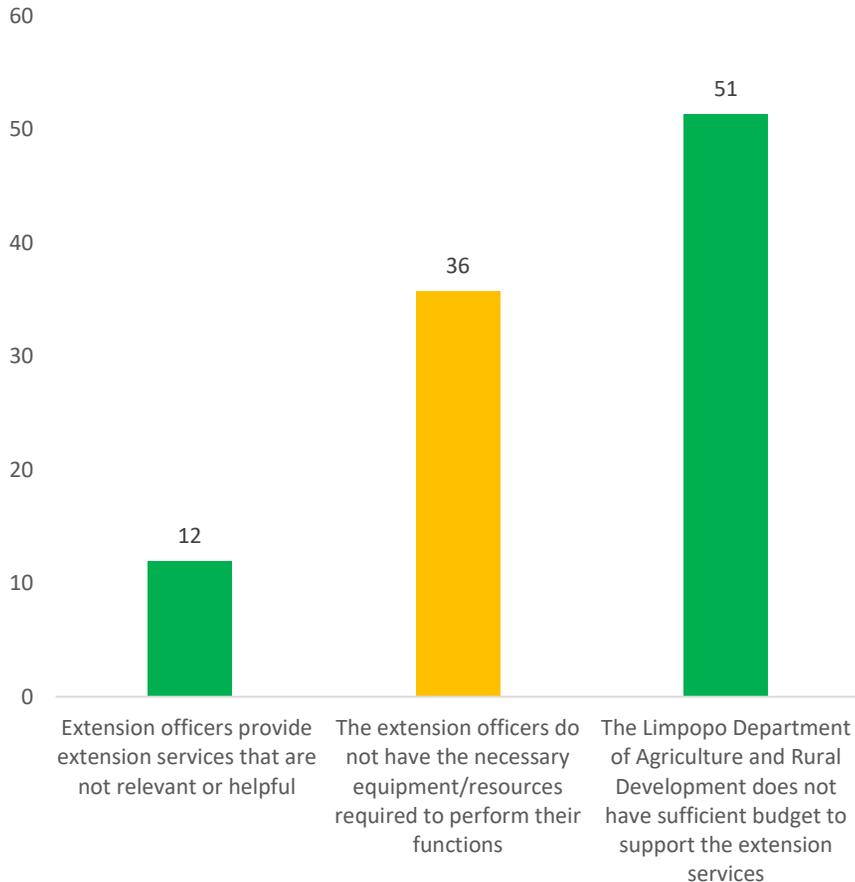
Possibility of farmers recommending LDARD extension officers to other farmers



About 67 percent indicated that they will most likely recommend LDARD extension officers to other farmers, with 17 percent being less likely to recommend LDARD extension officers to other farmers.

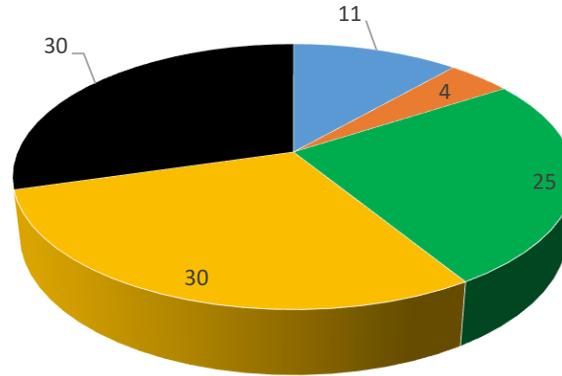
About 7 percent will not recommend LDARD extension officers to other farmers and with 9 percent who do not know whether to recommend or not recommend LDARD extension officers to other farmers.

Challenges experienced by extension officers while providing extension services



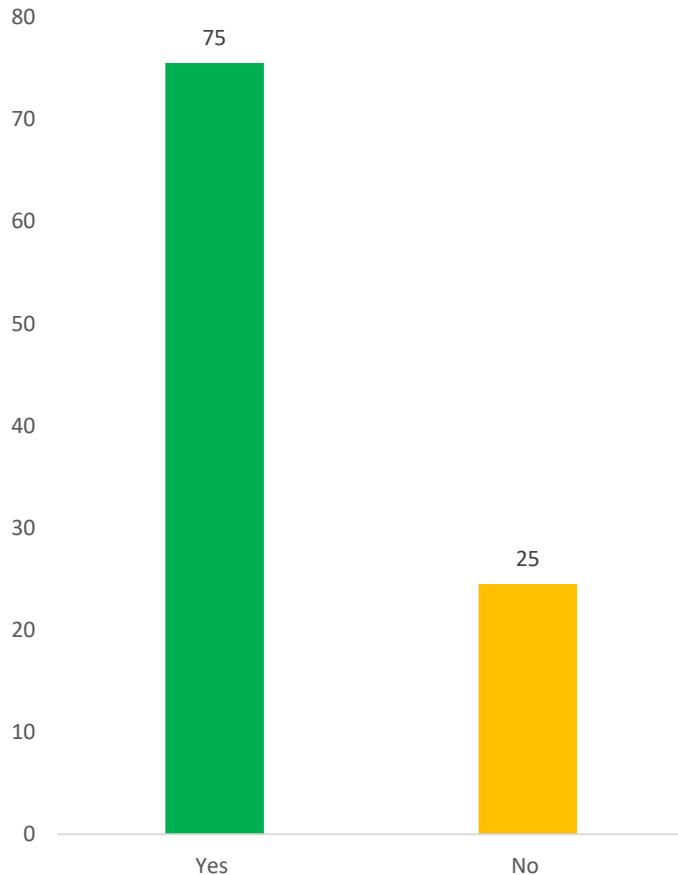
About 51 percent indicated LDARD does not have sufficient budget to support extension services, 36 percent indicated the extension officers do not have the necessary resources and equipment required to perform their functions and 12 percent indicated that extension officers provide extension services that were not relevant or helpful to farmers.

Challenges experienced by farmers



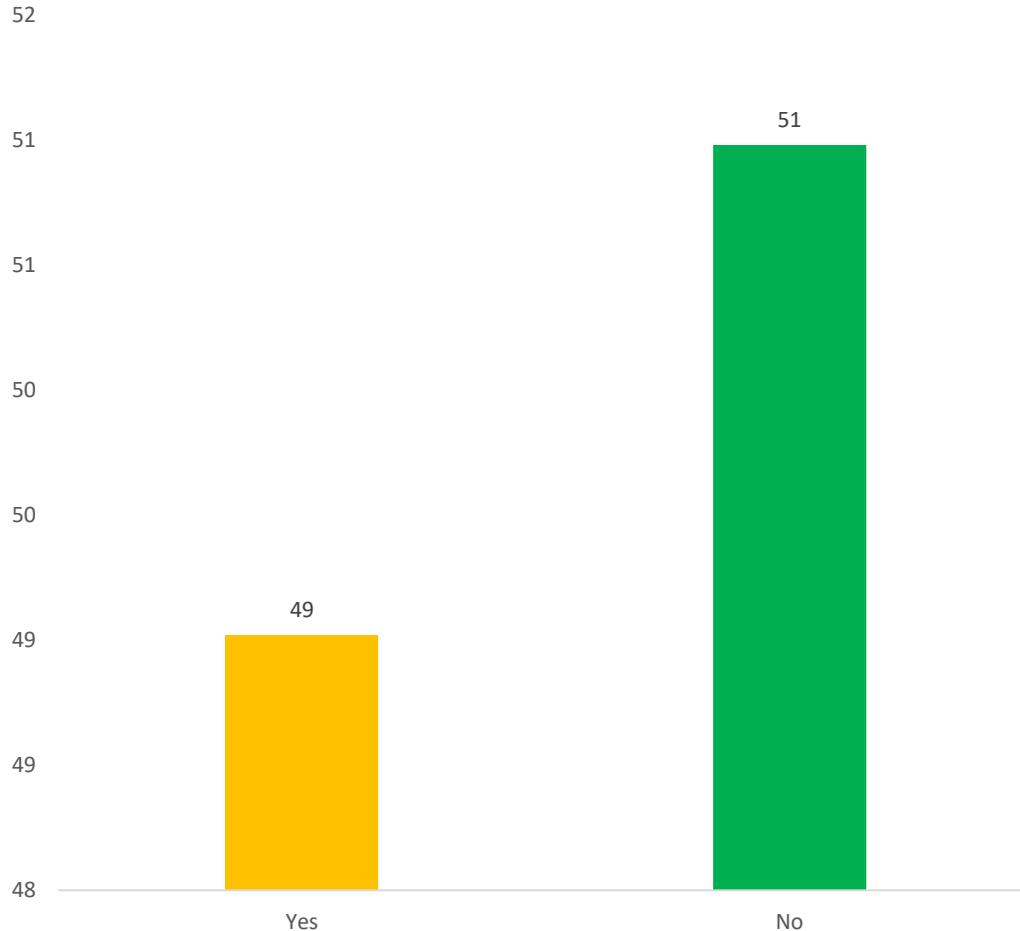
- Extension officers are not experienced enough
- I am a commercial farmer that don't need government services
- The equipment/ production inputs bought by the Department is not reaching me
- The Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural Development does not have sufficient budget to support the extension services
- I don't have the capital to implement the recommendations of the extension officers

Improvement in the quality of products in the past three years



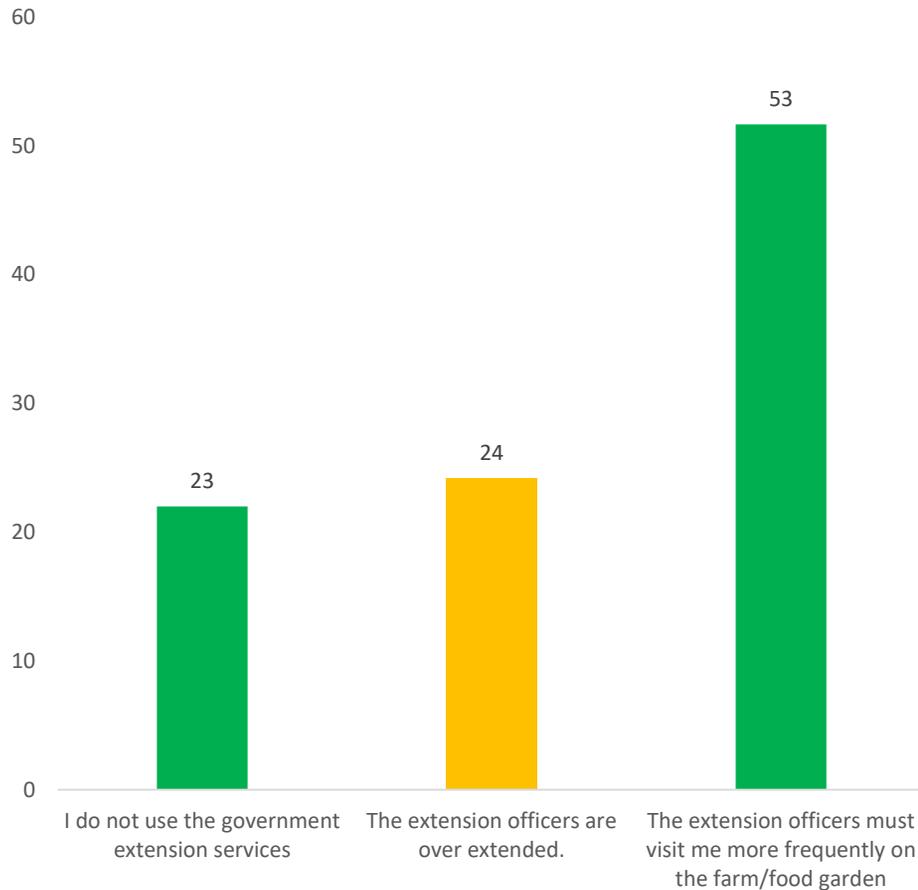
About 75 percent of farmers indicated that they think it improved and 25 percent did not share the opinion.

Adequacy of extension officers in Municipalities



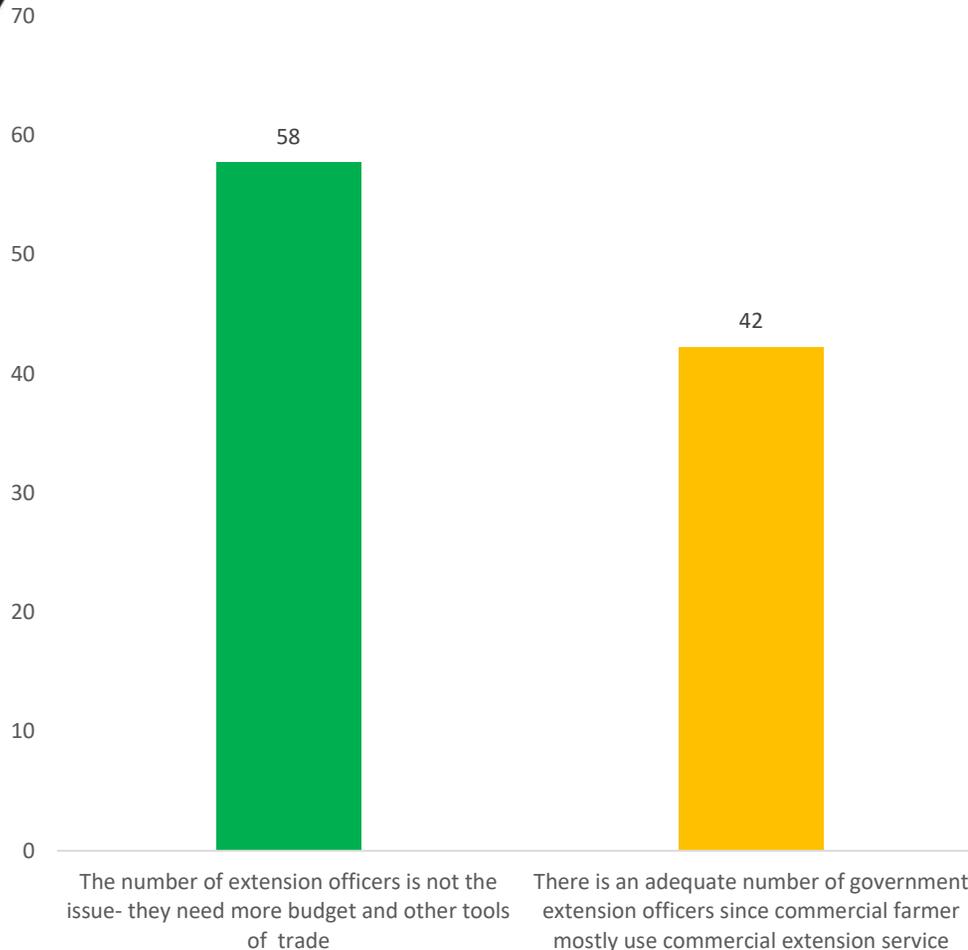
About 51 percent of farmers answered Yes and 49 percent No. The question was wrongly answered in the sense that some farmers who answered yes marked in the no block.

If they answered no the had to choose the following



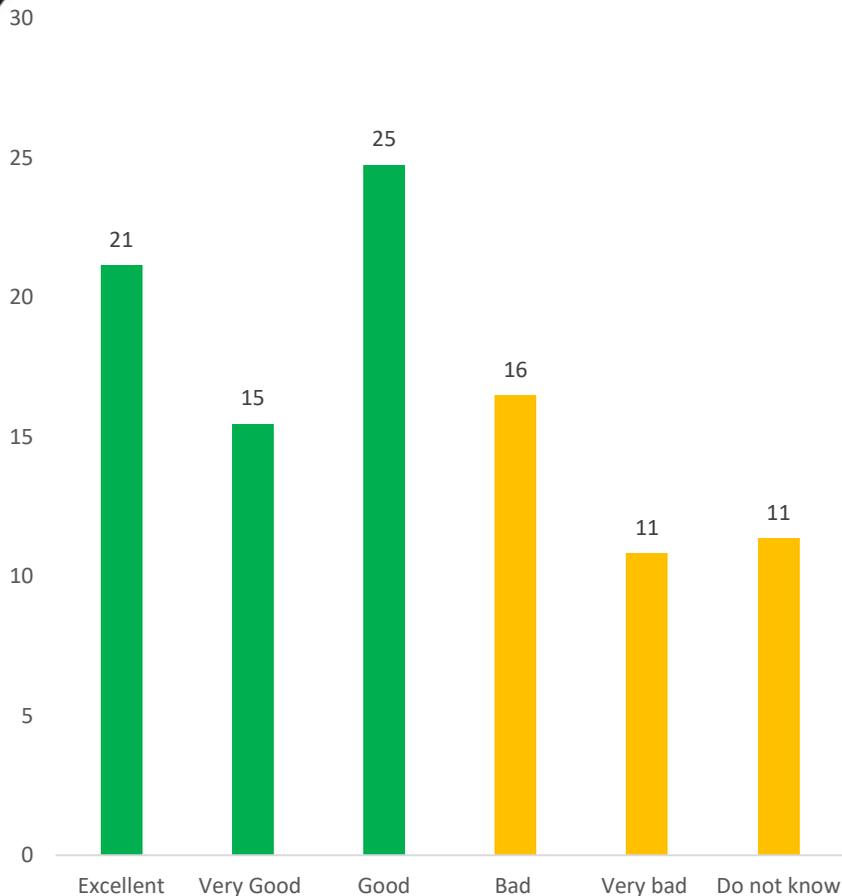
About 53 percent indicated that extension officers should visit their farms more frequently, 24 percent answered the extension officers were over extended and 23 percent indicated they did not use extension services.

If they answered yes, they had to choose the following



About 58 percent of those who answered yes indicated that the number of extension officers was not the issue but they needed more budget and other tools of trade, while 42 percent indicated that there was an adequate number of government extension officers since commercial farmers mostly use extension services.

The level of extension services in Limpopo



About 25 percent of farmers rated the service good, 21 percent excellent and 15 percent very good. About 16 percent of farmers rated the service provided to them as bad and 11 percent Very bad, with the other 11 percent indicating that they do not know.

Any other issues raised by farmers

Some of the issues raised includes the following:

- The Department must provide skills training to young farmers.
- Department must provide more funds for the youth.
- Department should provide pipes and fertilizer to the municipality to enable them to support farmers.

Key findings and recommendations

- **Majority of extension officers have a high number of years of experience** and they have been occupying their post for a period of over twenty years and they have the required qualifications needed for their post, in fact about seventy percent of them are in possession of a post graduate qualification. The extension officers are found to be having the required qualifications to perform their work, though an issue of them possessing the required skills to do the job remains a key factor, given the fact that the extension officers are found to be having qualifications that might have been acquired so many years ago. The experience and qualifications of the extension officers suggest that they should be in a position to provide suitable extension service to the farmers, though it is advised that the LDARD should conduct a further skills assessment on their extension officers so that gaps can be identified in relation to the current skills requirements given the current evolution in the agricultural sector, as the sector is now moving towards advanced way of farming and the increased introduction of technology in the sector is found to be leaving the extension officers lagging behind.
- **Majority of the extension officers are not furthering their studies** because they do not have sufficient funds to further their studies, some are demoralised while some is due to the fact that they have family responsibilities and some of their children are at universities. This finding raises a serious concern given the high level of technological changes and innovations in the agricultural sector. It is recommended that LDARD find ways to encourage its extension officers to continue to improve their skills so that they can be kept abreast with the recent developments in the agricultural sector. This can be achieved in the form of offering study bursaries and organising short courses for the staff to keep them updated with recent developments in their field. The LDARD should have workshops that will encourage young people to enter into farming, this will encourage innovation. The LDARD should ensure that there is amalgamation between the young and old extension officers in order to ensure that there is uniformity.

Key findings and recommendations cont...

- **Extension officers raised challenges that some of the farmers feel and think that the LDARD does not have enough budget for extension services.** Some of the officers do not have the necessary equipment/resources required to perform their functions. It is recommended that the LDARD find ways to redeem itself and claim its rightful place in the farming sector in terms of providing extension service that is timeously and to the benefit of all farms in the province. This can be achieved through relooking at the ways in which the department allocates its subsidies and other working tools to the officers. Proper planning and implementation is required to ensure that officers have the required resources to perform their functions at all times. LDARD should plan, lead, organise and control the extension delivery programme in such a way that there are plans and strategy on how to meet their farmers. Information sharing on the best practices from different district and municipality on how best extension services can be rendered is also encouraged.
- **The results indicate that majority of extension officers in Limpopo are serving 500 and above farmers,** of which majority of the farmers are emerging and food gardens farmers. It should be noted that the 500 farmers indicated is not only linked to one extension officer but is in many cases serviced by more than one extension officer.
- **It is a fact that the emerging and food gardens farmers do not have enough capital** to implement the recommendations received from the extension officers, which then lead to low productivity of farms leading to low contributions to the mainstream agriculture by the farmers. This is found to be of serious concern for the province given that agriculture should be creating employment for the people in the rural areas province.

Key findings and recommendations cont...

- **The LDARD should find ways to relaunch the extension services** in such a way that it will assist the emerging farmers to progress from being forever emerging and graduate to commercial farmers who will be contributing meaningfully to the economy of the province. Farmers should be entered in a progression programme with a time frame, where their progress will be measured against the funding and support provided to them by the LDARD. This will help the department to monitor the farmer's progression and help to minimise the forever dependence of farmers from the department.
- **The study has revealed that the extension officers spend very minimal of their time assisting or rendering their services to commercial farmers.** This could be due to the fact that white commercial farmers do not use the government extension service or officials as they regard them as not suitable or qualified enough to assist them in their farming operations. It should also be noted that the commercial farmers were not attending the sessions were the questionnaires were administered. LDARD should find ways to repackage the extension services in the province so that they become helpful to all the farmers in the sector.
- **Majority of the farmers that were surveyed are relatively new emerging farmers and the extension services are not used by the commercial farmers.** Access to finance and financial support is also found to be a key constraint for the emerging farmers that should be urgently addressed by the LDARD so that it can help elevate the farmer's contribution to the provincial economy. It is recommended that the department should start training farmers on how to source and access finance from other institutions so that it will relieve the burden from the LDARD as the main funder of farmers.

Key findings and recommendations cont...

- **It has been found in the study that about 70 percent of farmers interviewed are new entrants** in the agricultural industry with less than ten years of experience in farming and their level of literacy is found to be very low with more than 60 percent of them having matric or less as a qualification. It is suggested that the farmers be upskilled in terms of their education levels with the help of the Department of Education.
- **Farmers' days in the different areas are not planned and executed with the same efficiency and focus throughout the province.** The farmers' days and related demonstrations should be linked to achieving specific outcomes and addresses specific needs of specific farmers in the area and not be hosted for the sake of hosting a farmers' day. It is recommended that the LDARD should establish and set standards that will be adhered to in terms of the requirements of a farmer's day, the department should also have platforms to get feedback on the services that they are providing to the farmers. The farmer's days should also be conducted in a language and level that will make it simple and understandable to the farmers. This can be in the form of physical demonstration on the farms or farmers invited to a farm where the demonstration can be carried out to enable easy transfer of farming skills to the farmers. .

Conclusions

- Agriculture Extension and Agriculture continues to take a central role in the economy of the province as one of the key strategic economic sectors with potential to support the acceleration of inclusive economic growth and job creation in the province. For the sector to claim its right full place in the province the extension services need to play a very evocative role as they are the link between the current developments in the agricultural sector in terms of research, innovation and technology, as these new developments need to be descended and be practised by the farmers on their farms.
- In terms of the value for money of the extension services the conclusion is that the majority of farmers receiving support from the extension officers are satisfied with the service received and will recommend the extension services to other farmers. A concern that was picked up during the research is the dependency syndrome amongst some of the emerging farmers expecting all inputs and equipment to be provided by government. It should be clarified to the farmers that the role of the extension officers is to provide technical support and not money or production input.
- Despite the fact that the results indicated a positive link between the inputs of the extension officers and the production on the farm a limitation found in the study was that no objective information is available on the link between the extension services provided and the actual impact on the farm. It is suggested that the department should implement a monitoring tool where farmers will be traced from the time they received support and their progression over a period of time. This will help the department to gauge its impact to the farmers as well as its impact to the overall contribution to the economy of the province.

Conclusion cont....

- The fact that the majority of farmers that are serviced by the department are emerging farmers and food gardens that are relatively new, will increase the demands for LDARD to provide inputs like seed, feedstock and implements, like tractors, to the emerging farmers. This should be done in such a way that farmers are aware that they are funded so that they can move from emerging to become commercial farmers and that the funding will only be provided if certain requirements are met or the farmer is showing signs of progression.
- Some of the challenges that should be addressed by the Department includes the issue of access to tools of trade raised by the extension officers and the participants, as this is key to service delivery in the service centers and areas where services need to be rendered. The department should have a system that will ensure that the extension offices will have suitable mode of transport to access the farmers in their farms to allow for proper training and monitoring of the farms.
- Enforcement of the use of the Smart pen should be treated as a matter of agency as this tool is meant to improve the services rendered to the farmers and it will assist in minimizing the levels to those farmers that are not satisfied with the services delivered by the extension officers. Training and support in the use of the Smart pen should be prioritized. There is also a need for the LDARD to improve its extension service standards to services that are professional, reliable, relevant and accountable.
- The evaluation of extension services in the LDARD will serve as a basis to enhance the standard of extension provision in the province, which will then improve the agricultural production output from the farmers in the province. This will assist the provincial government in addressing the issues of food security and employment creation through the agricultural sector, as agriculture is one of the sectors in the economy of Limpopo.

THANK YOU

Limpopo Provincial Treasury Macro-Economic Analysis