

Commercialising cannabis offers huge opportunities for employment and economic growth



Cannabis use has long been a taboo in South Africa, but opinions are beginning to shift since it became legal for private use. Commercial cultivation for scientific and medical purposes is becoming increasingly acceptable across the continent, with Lesotho, eSwatini, Zimbabwe and Morocco legalising the drug over the past few years. While we are lagging behind our neighbours, government is now looking at how the commercialisation of cannabis can be used as a way of boosting the economy, with legislation on the cards aimed at paving the way. To take advantage of this potentially massive industry, skilled labour will be required, and Temporary Employment Service (TES) providers with experience in the agricultural sector are well positioned to assist.

A burgeoning opportunity

South Africa has excellent resources and is an ideal climate for the cultivation and commercialisation of cannabis production, and global demand for medical cannabis creates significant opportunity. The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development estimates that the cannabis industry is worth an estimated R28 billion in South Africa and could create anywhere between 10,000 and 25,000 jobs across the sector.

The cannabis sector has huge potential in terms of the development of Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs). It could be especially beneficial for rural areas, where unemployment levels are

typically high, because these are the areas where cultivation would most likely take place.

Focus on the entire value chain

The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development has established a “national cannabis master plan framework” aimed at the establishment and growth of the cannabis sector to contribute to economic growth and alleviate poverty. To build a sustainable cannabis industry, it is essential to focus on the entire value chain, from cultivation to end products, with emphasis on manufacture and sale to develop longevity.

To this end, the framework focuses on regulatory systems such as legislation, sustainable seed supply, research and development, producer support systems, market development, manufacturing, and product development, as well as education and communication.

The goal is to increase economic development and streamline the processes in the industry, to create more employment and contribute to job creation, thereby directly benefiting the entire economy and in particular impoverished communities.

The skills for the job

While cannabis itself may be a new crop, South Africa is no stranger to agriculture, which puts us in an excellent position. However, there are many processes involved, from cultivation and harvesting to packaging, storage, and distribution. All these processes in the supply chain will require skilled and unskilled labour. This creates numerous job opportunities for both permanent and temporary employment at various stages.

A reputable TES provider with industry experience in agriculture, logistics and warehousing can assist businesses by supplying skilled labour to enable the businesses to focus on their other core functions such as growing their pipeline and business in this new sector. This will position South Africa well to leverage a significant portion of the international market share of the booming cannabis industry.