

# Yorkshire agri-tech solutions set boost South Africa's sustainable energy future

A project led by a Yorkshire agri-technology company is setting out to address South Africa's energy challenges with innovative approaches to its agricultural sector.

York-based AgriSound is working with the UK Agri-Tech Centre and GYO Systems based in South Africa, to help boost yields of sugarcane by improving crop pest monitoring. The project will also explore ways to increase bio-energy production in South Africa.

The project, led by AgriSound, has received a grant of over £200,000 from Innovate UK's African Innovation Collaborations for Net Zero Places. AgriSound will deploy its innovative 'Polly' insect listening device to enable growers to track and eliminate the increasing damage caused by pests such as the Eldana Stalk Borer.

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Casey Woodward, founder and CEO of AgriSound, said: "We are embarking on an ambitious mission to pivot South Africa towards a net-zero carbon economy by optimising bio-energy production. This project is more than an innovation in agriculture; it's about reshaping the country's energy landscape and uplifting its people to continue doing so on their own terms.

"We have begun work this month and our aim for the project is to harness the power of nature-based solutions to revolutionise the South African agricultural landscape. We

expect it to contribute to tackling the energy crisis and climate change while providing substantial economic and social improvements, and reduce the country's carbon footprint, all within the span of 12 months.

“AgriSound's long-term plan is not only aimed at boosting energy generation but will also ensure the land remains fertile and available for future food and housing needs.”

As well as improved pest monitoring, the project will investigate expanding bio-energy production near urban land areas that would otherwise be inappropriate for housing or food, by introducing low-cost hydroponic technologies.

Dr Jenna Ross of the UK Agri-Tech Centre said: “The increased availability of sugarcane has the potential to be used to generate bio-energy, a type of renewable energy with the potential to replace fossil fuels. As biomass grows, it absorbs carbon from atmosphere which is then released when incinerated. This makes biomass carbon neutral. Therefore, sugarcane offers massive economic and environmental rewards for South Africa.

“However, with yields seriously impacted by crop pests and excess land-use for crops under heavy scrutiny due to competing food/housing resources, this project aims to solve two pressing local problems in one move all whilst working closely with local communities to deliver employment and economic development opportunities.”

Carine Kroukamp, founder of GYO Systems, added: “We are very excited to do this groundbreaking research which has the potential to revolutionise the bio-energy industry in South Africa. This will not only solve a part of the power crisis but will provide countless employment and economic development opportunities.”