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FROM FARM TO FASHION: SOUTH AFRICA'S SUSTAINABLE MOHAIR JOURNEY



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Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

THE AGRIPRENEUR QUARTERLY:

A PUBLICATION BY THE SMALLHOLDER MARKET ACCESS RESEARCH UNIT OF THE NAMC

PREFACE

Welcome to the 39th edition of the Agripreneur, a publication produced by the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) to create a platform where agripreneurs and farmers, primarily smallholders, can share their knowledge, skills, challenges, experiences and insights. This publication is intended to assist smallholders to learn from other agripreneurs, develop strategies, adopt models and become part of the value chain by marketing commodities and products that meet market standards and are safe for consumption. The Agripreneur also promotes and profiles aspects of South African agriculture as a brand. Each edition features compelling stories that aim to persuade readers to #LoveRSAAgric.

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EDITOR'S NOTE



Matume Maila

Dear readers, I am pleased to present the latest edition of our Agripreneur Issue 39, which contains a wealth of information and insights that I believe will be of great interest to all our stakeholders. In this edition, we delve into the latest trends and developments in the agricultural industry, offering in-depth review and inspiring stories that can help you navigate the ever-evolving landscape of modern agriculture.

One of the highlights of this edition is the festive and well wishes message from the Minister of Agriculture, honourable John Steenhuisen, which inspires hope and sustainability of the industry in the face of economic and climatic shocks. This article presents a narrative of the strong agricultural relationship between South Africa and Angola, and the Terbufos manufacturers inspections that will be conducted by the Department of Agriculture with the five primary manufacturers of the pesticide Terbufos in South Africa to ascertain controls.

The Agri-tourism series continues with Part Nine, which covers hospitality services, including four of the most common ones on farms. The Mohair Empowerment Trust (MET) series continues with Part Five, which provides insights from the NAMC visit.

Issue 39 continues with Part Two of the South African Olive Industry, which provides insights from production to consumption. This edition also includes inspiring stories about women and young people engaged in agriculture. Each unique story demonstrates passion and renews optimism in accomplishing sustainable development goals one and two (no poverty and zero hunger).

The fascinating stories of Neo Siphesihle Mdluli, Lehutso Mphahlele, Noluthando Khumalo, Sophie Bafedi Mofokeng, and Kgotlelelo Mahlake are covered in this edition.

Enjoy the reading!

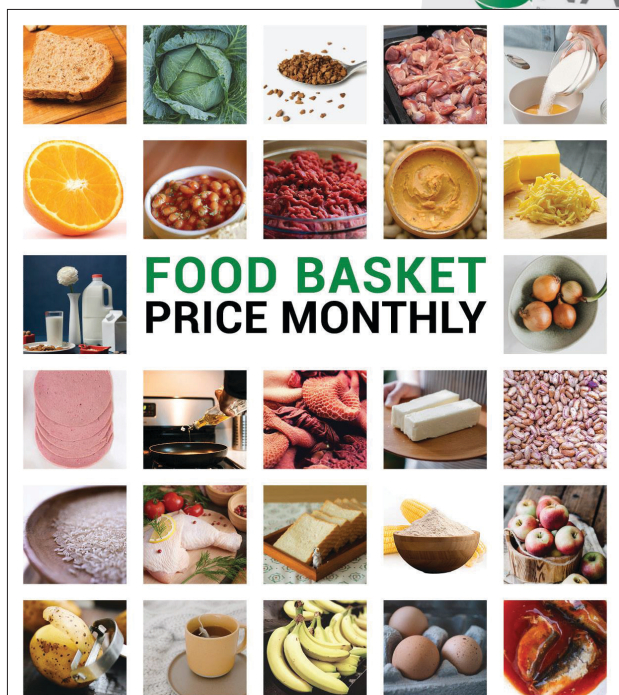
Matume Maila



NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL MARKETING COUNCIL

AGRO-FOOD CHAIN UNIT

Tracks and report
food price trends in
South Africa to advise
the Minister on any
possible action that could be
taken when national and
household food security
is threatened



NAMC FOOD BASKET: 28 SELECTED FOOD ITEMS PRICES
Issue 98 – January 2024



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NAMC partnered with ARC, FABCO Primary Cooperative Limited (FABCO), and TIPS to conduct a feasibility study on cassava value chain.

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AGRI-HIGHLIGHTS: OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2024

MINISTER 'S FESTIVE SEASON MESSAGE TO THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR.

Hi everybody, John Steenhuisen Minister of Agriculture here. As we head towards the end of the year and the festive season approaches, I want to send a special message to everybody involved in the agricultural sector, to thank you for your incredible contribution during the course of this year. In particular, I would like to pay tribute to our incredible farmers and farm workers who make sure that South Africans have food on their table every single day. Without our farmers we wouldn't have food security, so thanks to each one of you.



I know this year has been a particularly difficult year for everybody in the agricultural space, we have seen droughts, we have seen fires, we've seen floods and we have even seen snow causing havoc in the agriculture space and yet each and every one of you continue to get up every single day and make your contribution to the well-being of our incredible country, for that we are all truly grateful.

The year is ending in a difficult mode as well, with droughts still gripping large parts of the country and our thoughts and prayers are with those farmers and farm workers in the spaces that are grappling with this drought and dryness at the moment. I am convinced however that next year (2025) is going to be a great year for agriculture. As the Minister and the department, we look forward to working together with you to make sure that our sector succeeds and that you go forward with prosperity, peace and harmony into the new year. Let's work together next year (2025) to abide by the department's slogan "let's grow together". I wish you a happy end of year, merry festive season and all the best for the new year. We'll see you in 2025.

https://x.com/DOAgov_ZA/status/1868995160581062860



THE STRONG AGRICULTURAL BOND BETWEEN SOUTH AFRICA AND ANGOLA

The South African government hosted the Angolan delegates at the Union Buildings in Pretoria on Thursday, December 12, 2024, as part of a State Visit aimed at strengthening ties between the two nations. Among the South African participants, Minister John Steenhuisen represented the Department of Agriculture. This was an important opportunity for South African agriculture to deepen the cooperation as well as to enhance the industry by learning from our Angolan counterparts' successful stories and experiences.

In an interview with SABC journalist, Minister Steenhuisen mentioned the existing Bilateral Trade Agreement, under which South Africa sells grains, wine, and essential agricultural items to Angola. Furthermore, the minister emphasized that Angola's agricultural innovation and technology, as well as its ability to attract many smallholder farmers to the value chain and agricultural exports, are critical in transforming the South African agricultural sector and dealing with the devastating effects of climate change. "Angola's thriving small-scale farming sector is an inspiration. There are lessons here for South Africa as we continue to support and grow our own smallholder farmers." – said Minister Steenhuisen. He emphasized the importance of continental partnership in advancing sustainable agriculture methods and boosting economic prosperity throughout Africa.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isNVsE70cMI>

THE TERBUFOS MANUFACTURERS INSPECTIONS BY THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

The South African government has classified the foodborne illnesses as a national disaster. In attempt to stabilize the outbreak and the surge of foodborne illness, the South African department of agriculture made it possible to conduct inspections at all five registered manufacturers of Terbufos to ascertain controls, and to determine if markers are put into locally produced products to distinguish between illegally imported and locally produced chemicals. This comes after at least 22 people, including children, have died and many others have been hospitalized because of food-borne chemical poisoning.



The media briefing held by the minister agriculture Minister John Steenhuisen revealed that the Terbufos found in the South African spaza shops does not come from local manufacturers. According to the minister, the government believes that the Terbufos discovered in Gauteng did not come from one of South Africa's five manufacturers, but rather from outside South Africa. The independent laboratory results, as well as the discussions with the five manufacturers, will reveal where these chemicals are originating from and how the department may take preventative measures to keep them from entering

<https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/agriculture-conduct-inspections-terbufos-manufacturers#:~:text=%E2%80%9CIt%20is%20the%20department's%20view,in%20South%20Africa%20in%202016>





PART 8: HOSPITALITY SERVICES

By: Christelle Van Zyl

Hospitality services are the fourth agri-tourism category and perhaps one of the most popular, particularly in South Africa. It encompasses any hospitality service provided on a farm.

Here are four of the most popular hospitality services on farms:

(1) Farm stay / accommodation

A farmer can host a variety of accommodations. The type of stay is determined by present resources (for example, historic buildings), financial resources (how much money to invest), and the overall image of the agritourism farm. Typical

accommodations include a guesthouse (or guest farm), bed and breakfast, or lodge. These often require a structure. As a result, you have the option of renovating/restoring old farm buildings or creating new ones specifically for this purpose. Remember to observe building standards and laws as needed. Camping is a kind, popular and low-impact accommodation. If there is an open and unused

place on your farm, you can clean it up and install basic ablution blocks for convenience. Glamping (luxurious camping) and treehouses (unique wooden houses) are two emerging trends. Accommodation is quite popular in South Africa, and with a variety of styles and patterns, it is critical to choose one image and market your farm accordingly.

(2) Social Events

This is a broad category. Farm weddings have become popular, and farmers can pick between an extravagant wedding venue or simply placing seats to a woodland or open area. Just make sure you market the venue properly. Other social events include birthdays and parties. Regardless of the theme, make sure the event is authentic and incorporates aspects from your farm. In many circumstances, having accommodations on the farm would enhance the venue. If individuals need to drive long distances in the dark, ensure the roads are well-maintained and that there is enough of signage.

(3) Restaurants

Restaurants are another prominent form of hospitality. 'Farm-to-table' is a developing trend. All the restaurant's items are harvested on the farm. While this contributes to an authentic agri-tourism experience, be careful not to overuse the term. There is nothing wrong with purchasing your products from others, but always be honest with your customers. Depending on whether you choose a large restaurant with a well-equipped kitchen or small tea garden, you may be able to use agricultural resources. You, like any other restaurant, must follow food safety regulations and, if required, obtain alcohol permits.



(4) Spa

This is a very specific hospitality service and is usually a complementary product to an existing business. For example, to offer additional services to your accommodation guests, you can open a spa. For this, you would require a specialist in the type of services you want to offer. Another alternative is to outsource the spa. In other words, clients make reservations ahead of time, and a qualified

spa therapist visits the farm for treatments. This could reduce your expenses (e.g., full-time therapist or fully equipped spa) while increasing collaboration with locals.

Many agritourism farmers rely on their accommodations as their primary product. All other items (hospitality services, outdoor recreational activities, or educational events) are intended to enhance the farm experience.



PART 5: ENHANCING SUSTAINABILITY IN THE MOHAIR SECTOR: INSIGHTS FROM THE NAMC VISIT

By: Dineo Chiloane



In continuation of our series on the Mohair Empowerment Trust, this article explores the multifaceted practices that enhance sustainability and quality within the mohair sector. Recent engagements, particularly the visit by the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) to the House of Fibre and OVK factories in Gqeberha, have underscored the importance of supporting local industries and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. By examining these elements, we aim to highlight how stakeholders can contribute to a more sustainable mohair industry while ensuring high-quality production that benefits both farmers and consumers alike.

Introduction

The Mohair and OVK factories are integral to the processing and distribution of high-quality mohair, a luxurious fibre obtained from Angora goats. This visit underscores the significance of the mohair industry as not only an agricultural enterprise but also a vital source of income for many local farmers.

Purpose of the visit

The main goals of the NAMC's visit were: Interacting with both factory managers and workers to understand production methods, obstacles, and possibilities in the mohair sector.

This tour of the mohair processing plants underscored the importance of processors in assisting small-scale and large-scale farmers, fostering inclusivity in the industry. These processors play a major role in supporting local jobs and guaranteeing appropriate compensation for farmers, which is crucial for maintaining rural livelihoods. The NAMC views their efforts to enhance sustainability by reducing waste and enhancing energy efficiency as a blueprint for other agricultural industries. Furthermore, an increasing international need for mohair, especially in high-end fashion industries, is creating substantial growth prospects for domestic farmers. The House of Fibre is also committed to promoting job and internship openings in the industry, with a focus on skill and excellence.

The Process of Converting Raw Mohair into Finished Products

The transformation of raw mohair into finished products involves several meticulous steps that exemplify both craftsmanship and technological advancements:

1. Shearing

The process begins with shearing Angora goats to collect their mohair. This humane practice is performed biannually, ensuring that goats are handled gently to minimize stress.

Shearing equipment is well-maintained to prevent injury. Careful techniques are employed to clip fleece from various parts of the goat.

2. Sorting and Classing

Post-shearing, raw mohair is sorted based on length, diameter, and quality. This sorting process is critical for ensuring that only high-quality fibers proceed to subsequent stages of production, thereby adding value to the final product.

3. Cleaning

The sorted mohair undergoes a thorough cleaning process designed to remove impurities such as dirt and grease. This step is essential for enhancing fiber quality before processing.



* NAMC visits OVK factory



* NAMC visits House of Fibre

4. Dyeing

Once cleaned, mohair can be dyed using sustainable methods that align with environmental best practices. This step allows manufacturers to create a diverse range of products that cater to varying market demands.

5. Spinning

The cleaned and dyed fibres are spun into yarn through:

- **Carding:** Aligning fibres to prepare them for spinning.
- **Spinning:** Twisting fibers together to form yarns of varying thicknesses suitable for different applications.

6. Weaving or Knitting

The spun yarn can be woven or knitted into fabric:

Weaving involves interlacing yarns at right angles.

Knitting loops yarns together to create stretchy fabrics suitable for garments.

7. Finishing

Finished fabrics undergo processes such as fulling (to enhance texture) and brushing (to create softness), ensuring high-quality outputs that meet consumer expectations.

8. Quality Control

Quality control measures are integrated throughout the production process to maintain industry standards, including checks for consistency in dyeing and overall appearance. From environmentally friendly dyeing methods to humane shearing techniques, sustainable practices are essential to this process. Manufacturers are putting more effort into reducing their environmental impact while maintaining high-quality products that appeal to consumers who care about the environment.

Promoting industry best practices is a major function of groups like the Mohair Empowerment Trust (MET). These include guidelines for animal welfare, environmentally friendly farming

practices, effective processing procedures, and ongoing training for farmers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the NAMC's visit of the OVK and House of Fibre facilities revealed the significance of the mohair industry and reaffirmed its commitment to advancing sustainable business practices and enhancing agricultural markets. Stakeholders may contribute to ensuring the success of South Africa's mohair industry and provide economic opportunities for local farmers and communities by supporting initiatives that promote growth and long-term viability in this vital sector.

Looking ahead, it is evident that cooperation between farmers, processors, and governmental entities will be essential to overcoming obstacles and seizing opportunities in the dynamic agricultural sector. The commitment demonstrated during this tour sets the stage for future development in the mohair sector in South Africa.

PART 4: INTEGRITY AT SA OLIVE'S HEART

By: Wendy Petersen

A few years ago, the SA Olive Industry Association was in a major problem. Its members produced a fantastic product in form of South African Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO), but the competition from often inferior imported and blended olive oils provided a nagging difficulty in terms of product education and sales. How was the South African olive industry going to overcome the quality and price challenges and assert itself so that consumers, retailers and all stakeholders in South Africa could both recognise and appreciate the excellence of the local EVOO products available to them?

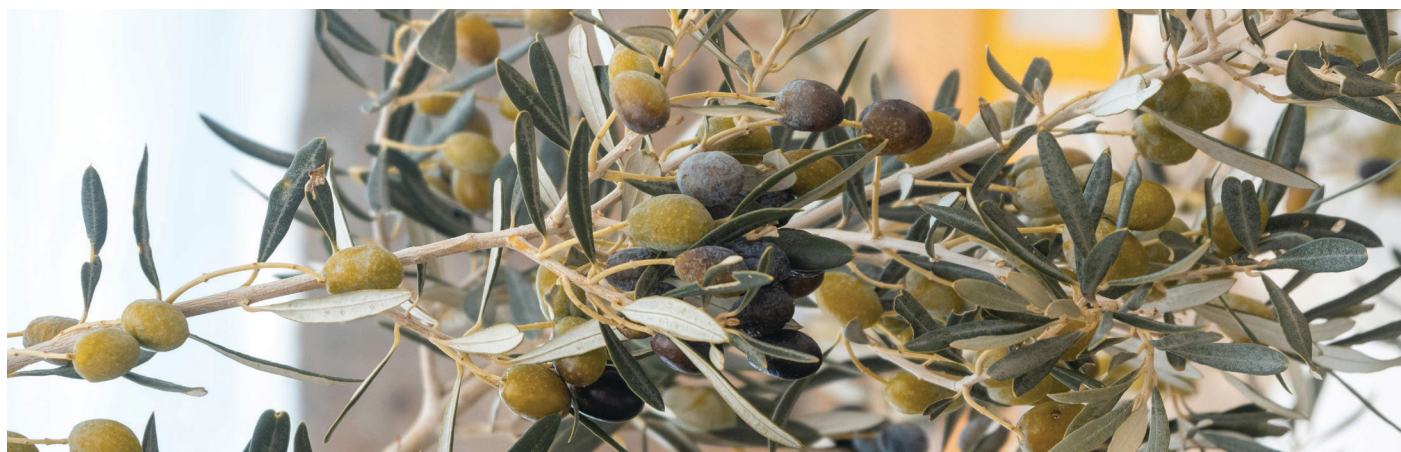
After scrutinising the market and assessing the problems posed by not only rival imports but also a general lack of category education, SA Olive developed a foolproof strategy that is now growing in stature year after year. The SA Olive Commitment to Compliance (CTC) scheme was launched in 2011.

The SA Olive seal ensures that the producer is committed to and sustains strict compliance in olive oil production. The SA Olive Commitment to Compliance (CTC) Scheme is a voluntary integrity-based scheme run by SA Olive for locally produced extra virgin olive oil.

The SA Olive label on a bottle of Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO) is a guarantee of quality. It certifies that the EVOO is 100% locally (South African) produced, real Extra Virgin Olive Oil, and produced within the harvest year specified on the seal. It also implies that consumers can enjoy and reap the benefits of freshly extracted juice from newly picked olives. From a health standpoint, the CTC seal verifies that the SA Olive Organoleptic Tasting Panel finds the content free of organoleptic flaws and that it meets the International Olive Council (IOC) chemical analysis requirements for free fatty acids (FFA) and peroxide value (PV).

The seal demonstrates not just legitimacy but also devotion to the quality of the Extra Virgin Olive Oil and ensures that the product labelling is correct and transparent. The harvest year and 'best before' date are clearly marked on the label to ensure the oil's freshness. The SA Olive seal ensures all of this while encouraging consumers to support the local olive oil industry and the producers that have acquired the seal.

The CTC scheme is also a unique solution because it closely correlates with SA Olive's overarching goal to support a sustainable future for its members, consistent growth and



development for the sector, and a healthy lifestyle for all South Africans.

The CTC seal is novel in that it serves as the entry point for promoting the excellence of South African EVOOs in the biennial SA Olive Awards. The awards represent the pinnacle of the South African olive industry, shining a spotlight on the highest quality and best-tasting EVOOs, as judged by local and international olive oil panels.



The event has grown in prominence and popularity year after year, and the judging results are eagerly awaited by producers, media, retailers, and anybody else who enjoys a good drop or two of liquid gold. The SA Olive Awards honour the hard work, talent, and dedication of South African EVOO producers. And now, with the redesigned Agri-worker Prize, all workers' efforts are honoured with this special award. Agri-workers along the entire olive value chain are the backbone of the South African olive industry; without them, it would be difficult to create a superb EVOO year after year.

International attention is also drawn to the SA Olive Awards, especially now that so many South African EVOOs are becoming well-known worldwide and winning contests against producers from some of the world's most developed and established markets. More and more South African EVOOs are winning gold, silver, and bronze medals in international olive oil competitions, with some even going on to win the top prize of

best EVOO worldwide. These distinctions, both domestic and international, demonstrate that the quality and pride put into manufacturing South African EVOOs is worthwhile. They deserve recognition because they can compete with the greatest worldwide peers with confidence and vibrancy.

Wendy Petersen, CEO of the SA Olive industry Association, perfectly conveys the essence of what the SA Olive Awards mean to the business. She emphasizes the importance of healthy competition and recognition by highlighting the rigor and devotion required to produce a world-class EVOO. "It's not just about creating a product — it's about pushing boundaries, benchmarking against the best, and continuously striving for excellence. The comparison to a South African runner resonates strongly here, illustrating the importance of validation through competition. It's this sense of achievement that drives producers to not only improve their craft but also

inspires others to join the olive industry. The Awards serve as a beacon, encouraging new talent and innovation, ensuring that the industry thrives and grows."

The SA Olive Industry Association advocates for its stakeholders, supporting local product excellence and preserving quality ideals in its work, as well as promoting the health and wellness benefits and the power of shopping locally. With additional entrants to the market, with stronger commitments from consumers and retailers, SA Olive will be able to realize its transformation goals and make the industry more inclusive. "We are committed to transforming the olive industry from its current small but growing state into a major agricultural force", says Wendy Petersen. "Our vision for the South African olive sector is that it continues to expand its presence both in Africa and globally. This industry has the potential to be bigger, better, and even more glorious, and with your support we are determined to help it get there."

FROM GROWING UP ON THE FAMILY FARM TO BECOMING A **SUCCESSFUL AGRIPRENEUR**

By: Matume **Maila**

Growing up amidst the rolling fields and bustling barns of a family farm, one might not instantly envision a future in the fast-paced innovative world of agripreneurs. However, for those who have experienced the unique challenges and rewards of agrarian household, the transition from corporate to agripreneur can be a natural and rewarding one. Born into the humble confines of an agrarian household, Neo Siphesihle Mdluli defied the expectations of her humble beginnings, embarking on a remarkable journey that would lead her from the toil of the fields to the heights of the agripreneur world.

Neo Siphesihle Mdluli, a 27-year-old agripreneur, was born and nurtured on the family farm in Zuurbekom. A young female entrepreneur's path began in 1990, when her grandparents bought a 2.5-hectare farm in Zuurbekom with the intention of exploring their agricultural interests. Her grandmother, Puleng Evelyn Mdluli, had been managing the farm's daily poet for many years when she succumbed to old age. Neo had the opportunity to learn and experience growing veggies from seeds that her grandmother had dried at home throughout her early childhood. As a result, she founded Mdluli Agri- Ventures in 2022. "My enthusiasm, love, and interest in agriculture derives from witnessing my grandma dry her own pumpkin seeds, can fresh peaches, air dry chilies, and make blackberry jam. These recollections are nostalgic and will live in me forever." – Said Neo.

In 2023, Mdluli Agri- Ventures was fortunate to be afforded the opportunity to lease land from

the Randwest City Local Municipality. This has been the most life changing experience for Neo and her family. In her word Neo said, "I strongly believe that the hard work that we have been putting into growing the business has earned us the opportunities that are in front of us today.". Mdluli Agri- Ventures is currently operating 10 Hydroponic Tunnels at Westonaria Agripark, where they produce vegetables seasonally. In the winter season they produce leafy greens such as Spinach, Mustard Spinach and Lettuce.





* Tomato harvest

In the summer season they produce Tomato and Hubbard Squash. One of Neo's main objectives is to specialise in the production of tomato during both the summer and winter seasons. They have been prioritising and investing in upskilling their team and exploring more innovative ways to produce high quality vegetables throughout the year using different sustainable farming techniques.

Mdluli Agri-Ventures has received support from the local municipality who have awarded them with a lease to operate 10 Tunnels at Westonaria Agripark. They have also received support from GDARD who offered them extension services as well as production inputs such as seeds, fertiliser and garden tools. Mdluli Agri-Ventures is currently supplying informal local street markets, and this market has

allowed the venture to maintain a healthy cash flow. "We also supply online markets as well as vegetables buying agents across the region. We are happy with these markets because we can meet their demands. However, we have an interest in exploring bigger and more formal markets that could open the door to export our produce". – Said Neo

Farming has been a hard learning process for Mdluli Agri-Ventures, with many ups and downs. Mdluli Agri-Ventures suffered a substantial harvest loss in the summer of 2023 because of absence of advice and support during the growing season. The enterprise couldn't afford to bring in enough labour and had a limited supplies of production materials such as fertilizer. However, the resilience of growing up on a family farm, as well as the reward of seeing

grandparents provide food for the family from the backyard garden, have contributed to Mdluli Agri-Ventures' success. Furthermore, one of Mdluli Agri-Ventures' most significant problems has been transportation, as they rely greatly on outsourcing to bring their produce to markets. Despite the hurdles, Neo remained dedicated, hopeful, and resilient, and she recommended timely support. Neo stated that farming is a seasonal business. If support arrives late and a farmer misses a planting season, the farmer may lose a whole year's profit. Timely assistance is consequently critical for the success of agricultural businesses."

Social media has become an increasingly effective method for advertising Mdluli Agri-Ventures. Neo uses a variety of social media platforms to efficiently interact with her target markets, publish

product information, and even engage directly with customers. Neo, like many farmers, has previously used digital marketing channels such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and X, formerly known as Twitter (@MdluliAgri_V), to interact with specialists and make informed decisions to increase her output. "Social media has had a significant impact on the growth and development of our farm. It has introduced us to some of the most exciting opportunities of my career. Social media has enabled us to have an influence in the farming community. I've been using social media to share my everyday agricultural adventures with my followers." - Said Neo.

The establishment of Mdluli Agri-Ventures has a tremendous impact on shaping and growing young people's interest in farming. Mdluli Agri-Ventures' expansion has enabled them to make a significant influence on the Bekkersdal community. Mdluli Agri-Ventures is now offering a NQF Level 1 Learnership Programme in Plant Production at Westonaria Agripark in collaboration with AgriSETA. The programme has enabled Mdluli Agri-Ventures to employ 20 young people, the bulk of them are youth and women. The programme has proved to be eye-opening and life-changing for every member of the team. Mdluli Agri-Ventures intends to expand its existing learning programme to serve more communities in the Randwest City Region, as well as venture into animal production.

To expand the existing learning programme and improve



* Neo Siphesihle Mdluli

efficiency in managing Mdluli Agri-Ventures, Neo has attended several workshops focusing on Waste Management, Business Management, Marketing and Administration, Financial Literacy, Plant Production and Administration of Chemicals in plants.

During an interaction with Neo, she concluded by sharing her inspiring experience and a motivational message to young people and future affluent farmers. "Four years ago, I took a massive risk. I quit my job as an administrator and established my own business. I was terrified, apprehensive, and had no idea how things would turn out. But

I believed in the vision and took the plunge regardless. Today, that risk has led to some of the most rewarding opportunities of my career. It wasn't easy, but I wouldn't trade the journey for anything. If you're on the urge, trust the process and take that first step."

Furthermore, Neo stated, "Try to surround yourself with people who are best at what they do. You will emulate their behaviours and rapidly learn that you are capable of far more than you previously believed. To be the best, first recognize that it is possible. Find a big fish and swim alongside them."



TOMATO FIELDS OF HOPE: THE STORY OF LEHUTSO AGRIBUSINESS IN MARALENG GA-MPHAHLELE, LIMPOPO

By: Khathutshelo **Rambau** and Bernard **Manganyi**

Lehutso Mphahlele is a 24-year-old self-taught farmer. She established Lehutso Agribusiness in 2019 while pursuing a BA in Environmental Management at the University of South Africa.

The Lehutso Agribusiness falls under the jurisdiction of Maraleng Ga-Mphahlele, Capricorn District Municipality, Limpopo Province. She started modestly, with 0.3 hectares of community land. She used her savings to cover the start-up capital costs. Lehutso Agribusiness specializes in agricultural farming, particularly tomato planting. The farm provides roughly 1000 kg of tomatoes to the local community and street vendors each planting season, generating revenue to sustain its operations. Her passion and determination have enabled her to expand steadily.



* NAMC farm visit

To date, she is preparing to cultivate one hectare, with the possibility to expand further in the near future. Her business also gives back to the community by providing job opportunities and mentorship initiatives. Lehutso also participates in numerous research groups with the objective of gathering information and sharing best practices with other farmers. "Growing your own vegetables is not only excellent for the environment but also a fantastic way to generate income and stay active," she states. However, she emphasizes

the need for support in expanding her business and ensuring its long-term viability.

Ms. Mphahlele faces various obstacles that are typical to small-scale farmers, including high labour costs, water scarcity, and rising seed, fertilizer, and pesticide prices. Limited access to land further restricts her ability to expand operations. Despite these challenges, her vision on the future is both bold and encouraging. Over the following five years, she hopes to construct a seedling nursery and



* Tomato field



* Produce for market

expand her farm to more than ten hectares. Her ultimate goal is to supply produce to the official market, generate new jobs, and make a significant contribution to local economic progress.

Offering advice to aspiring farmers, she emphasizes, "Start with what you have and be dedicated to your work; never give up on your dreams." Her story reflects the resilience, innovation, and community driven determination needed to overcome obstacles and achieve success.

Ms. Mphahlele's dedication to sustainability and community engagement has established Lehutso Agribusiness as a model for small-scale farming in local economies. She is growing her business while inspiring a new generation of farmers to see agriculture as a viable and rewarding profession.



FROM SOIL TO SUCCESS: HOW NDO AGRIBUSINESS IS TRANSFORMING COMMUNITY FARMING

By: Lwazi Dladla and Thulani Ningi

Noluthando Khumalo began her farming journey in classrooms, laboratories, and libraries, where she studied soil science. Her journey stems from a small town called Impendle where she attended local schools before pursuing her passion at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, where she earned a bachelor's degree, as well as honours degree in soil science which she obtained in 2019. This foundation sparked her interest in agriculture and taught her the importance of healthy soils in sustainable farming. Furthermore, Noluthando holds entrepreneurship certificates from the Google Hustle Academy and an agriculture insurance assessor certificate from Land Bank. These credentials, paired with her experience, positioned her well to take on many demands that comes with farm management. Motivated by this knowledge and a commitment to give back, Noluthando ventured into agripreneurship. Today, she co-owns NDO Agribusiness Pty Ltd, a thriving crop production enterprise she established together with her business partner, Thobani Zuma.



* Nolutando Khumalo

NDO Agribusiness was formally established in 2018. Nolutando and Thobani envisioned creating a venture that would connect Impendle's local community and the fresh produce market. Starting with limited funding, they made the most of the resources they had, including a 2-hectare plot of family-owned land. Their goal was both simple and impactful: to produce high-quality vegetables that would benefit the community. NDO Agribusiness soon established a strong reputation for producing high-quality produce by focusing

on staple commodities such as cabbages, bell peppers, and potatoes. They supply these commodities to local supermarkets, schools, street vendors, and even customers who came straight to the farm.

Overcoming Resource Challenges and Building Partnerships

"Starting from scratch wasn't easy" said Nolutando. "But Thobani and I knew that challenges were part of the process". With perseverance and hard work, they sought partnerships to support their

vision. Nolutando emphasized the importance of receiving financial assistance from reputable organizations such as Tony Elumelu Foundation (TEF) which enabled their business to expand and reinvest in its operations. Furthermore, the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) provided infrastructural support, allowing them to improve their facilities, and flood relief assistance assisted them in rebuilding following the catastrophic flooding of 2022. Despite these hardships, their resilience and team's commitment kept them moving forward, laying a solid foundation that could withstand future challenges.

A Local Business Making a Global Impact

NDO Agribusiness has made a significant impact on the Impendle community, offering more than just fresh produce. The business has created employment opportunities, especially for the youth, helping to strengthen the local economy. Currently, the farm employs two permanent staff members, including Nolutando and Thobani, along with 13 seasonal workers during peak seasons. They cultivate their crops on privately-owned land, drawing water from nearby rivers to irrigate their fields. The team utilizes tractors and other essential farming tools, enabling them to produce high-quality vegetables for the community.

Market Expansion Through Social Media

With the emergence of digital

platforms, NDO Agribusiness recognized the potential of social media to expand its reach and engage with a broader audience. By leveraging platforms such as TikTok, the business has attracted new customers while sharing insights into their farming journey. This approach has enabled them to connect with a younger, more tech-savvy audience and showcase the dedication that goes into each harvest. Noluthando's engaging content, featured on her TikTok page (@nolukhumaloo), has drawn positive attention to the business and educated viewers

about the challenges and rewards of farming.

External challenges and Future Aspirations

Despite its achievements, NDO Agribusiness faces continuous challenges. Climate change has brought about new weather patterns, and Impendle is no stranger to hail and unexpected snowfalls. These unpredictable weather events often disrupt the farm's cash flow and work schedules, impacting production and finances. However, Noluthando and Thobani remain undeterred. They perceive these challenges as opportunities

for growth and resilience. In the future, they aim to expand their market by supplying their produce to well-known supermarkets, increasing both their production capacity and their community impact.

Advice to Aspiring Agripreneurs

In her own words, Noluthando advises anyone interested in farming to start small, gain practical experience, and continuously seek knowledge. She emphasizes that farming is not just a job but a way of life that requires dedication, patience, and resilience. "Start small and grow with experience. Never stop learning. Farming requires hard work and dedication," she says, reflecting the ethos that has guided her journey.

Celebrating Achievements and Looking Ahead

For Noluthando, the journey itself has been her greatest achievement. Starting and sustaining a successful farm against all odds is something she takes immense pride in. From overcoming natural disasters to establishing a reliable customer base, NDO Agribusiness has become a pillar in the Impendle community. Their journey inspires not only local farmers, but to anyone with a desire and the determination to work hard.

With dreams of expanding and making a positive impact on the community, Noluthando and her business partner are shaping the future of sustainable, community-based farming in South Africa. Follow her journey on TikTok at @



* Harvesting

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THAHAMESO GENERAL TRADING'S COMMITMENT TO AGRIBUSINESS SUCCESS

By: Dineo Chiloane

Thahameso General Trading, directed by Sophie Bafedi Mofokeng, is making a significant impact in the South African agribusiness industry. This firm, founded in 2014, works on a 10.8-hectare plot in the Midvaal Local Municipality, specializing on cattle rearing and meat processing. Thahameso, which aims to fight food insecurity and create jobs, illustrates how agriculture can be a source of community support and economic prosperity.

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Sophie Bafedi Mofokeng not only runs Thahameso General Trading, but she also acts as an inspirational role model for her children, encouraging them to embrace the virtues of hard work and entrepreneurship that are





*Merino Landskaap

skills they have learned through their studies. This unique combination of traditional agricultural traditions and modern business savvy improves farm operations, demonstrating that varied professional choices can still connect and support the family's agribusiness objectives. Their involvement demonstrates how Ms. Mofokeng instils a sense of duty and pride in her children, emphasizing that farming is more than just producing land; it is also about nurturing a legacy. By bringing their knowledge to Thahameso, they help to streamline procedures, boost efficiency, and provide new ideas that add value to the family business. This collaborative endeavour reinforces the concept that a farming family, regardless of individual job choices, can create a sustainable future and develop generational wealth for the benefit of both the family and the community.

The Heart of the Operation

Thahameso General Trading's success is based on its continuous commitment to quality livestock production, which is supported using high-quality feed such as honey grass and oats grass. These nutrient-rich forages have played a critical role in improving cattle health and growth, resulting in an astounding increase in animal numbers—from modest beginnings to over a hundred within just two years. The farm specializes in breeding Merino Landskaap and Brahman cattle, as well as sheep, and ensures that each animal is grown with precise care and attention. Ms. Sophie Bafedi Mofokeng, the enterprise's driving force, holds an approved certificate in meat processing and is currently pursuing a butchery license, which would expand the company's capabilities.

The business generates revenue primarily through the sale of mutton processed at approved abattoir. In addition, wool from the Merino Landskaap sheep is sold twice a year through the informal market, demonstrating a diverse income stream that contributes to the sustainability of the farm. By prioritizing quality feed and animal welfare, Thahameso not only addresses food insecurity but also establishes itself as a reliable source of quality livestock products for the community.

Commending Accomplishments and Contributions to the Community

Thahameso has achieved remarkable success on its journey. Ms. Mofokeng has accomplished various significant achievements, such as winning the Best Smallholder Producer title at the Women Entrepreneur

Awards 2024, becoming a Merino Landskaap Stud Breeder, obtaining water license rights in 2023, and securing 176 hectares of land through the Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS).

Thahameso not only impacts its activities but also plays a significant role in enhancing local food security through the provision of high-quality livestock to the community. The company engages in charitable actions by distributing meat to local households and sharing information with fellow farmers in training sessions. Teamwork in the community fosters positive connections and promotes the adoption of beneficial farming methods.

Partnerships

Thahameso thrives on strategic partnerships that enhance its operational capacity. Collaborations with key stakeholders include:

- Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, which offers extension services, veterinary care, and training.
- Merino Landskaap Association; Provides support with stud breeding and selection.
- Pannar; Supports maize production efforts.

Thahameso has been able to obtain important resources like a handling facility with a weighing scale and a tractor by forming partnerships with the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP). These tools have made operations more efficient, resulting in faster

land preparation and higher crop yields.

Current Challenges and Future Opportunities

Although Thahameso General Trading has achieved great success in the agribusiness industry, it is encountering various obstacles preventing additional expansion. One major problem is the restrictions in infrastructure; a damaged riverbank limits the use of 4.7 hectares of land for raising livestock, which could increase production capacity. Furthermore, machinery limitations are also a factor; insufficient meat processing equipment hinders the capacity to meet bigger orders, leading Ms. Mofokeng to depend on external companies for certain processing duties. This dependence affects income generation, as she mainly works in informal markets and is unable to fully utilize her business's potential for profit.

Moreover, even though the existing pastures are flourishing without irrigation, there is a critical requirement for an irrigation system. Introducing this system could greatly improve the production of forage, enabling more efficient planning and prompt establishment of pastures. Ms. Mofokeng acknowledges that by enhancing irrigation, she can boost the quality and quantity of feed for her livestock, resulting in improved growth rates and healthier animals. It will be essential for Thahameso's future success and longevity in the competitive agribusiness industry to tackle these challenges.

Despite these obstacles, Ms. Mofokeng is confident about potential prospects. She plans to introduce an irrigation system to boost forage production and enhance livestock health, stressing the importance of applying knowledge: "Remember to always act on it."

A Message of Encouragement

Ms. Mofokeng advises aspiring farmers to leverage their learning experiences for practical success. Her journey from selling properties to finance her farming venture is a motivating example of perseverance and dedication in the farming industry.

Conclusion

Thahameso General Trading shows how agribusiness can successfully address food insecurity and promote economic development in local areas. By forming key alliances, involving the community, and prioritizing high-quality output, this company not only boosts local economies but also motivates upcoming generations of farmers.

Thahameso serves as a symbol of hope and strength in South Africa's agribusiness sector amid ongoing agricultural difficulties, showcasing the potential of cooperation and perseverance in farming. With dreams of growth and creativity on the horizon, Thahameso is prepared to continue its significant impact in the field of agriculture for many years.

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PARAGON PRODUCE: A DREAM REALISED THROUGH PASSION AND PERSEVERANCE

By: Maremo Mphahlele and Thulani Ningi



Paragon Produce is a flourishing livestock farm specialising in goats and sheep located at Mpumalanga in the village of “Matibidi”. The farm was established in 2021 by Mr Kgotlelelo Mahlake, a young farmer with a master’s degree in animal sciences. Driven by a lifelong passion for farming, Mr Mahlake embarked on a mission to build a successful agricultural enterprise. His journey began in 2014 when his sister gifted him five Boer goats, igniting his interest in animal farming. Despite early setbacks, such as losing livestock due to lack of experience, he persevered. Prior to becoming a farmer, he gathered significant expertise that helped him develop his herd.

After completing his master’s degree, Mr Mahlake returned to his hometown “Matibidi” and was granted permission to use a piece of vacant land by the local Tribal leadership in order to fulfil his dream of being a farmer. Using his savings, he built essential infrastructure including kraals, storage facilities, and a borehole. He gradually improved the herd’s genetics and diversified into sheep farming, ostrich farming, broiler chickens, and free-range egg production, later adding cattle. By 2024, Paragon Produce, had evolved into a multi-faceted operation, employing three permanent workers and creating temporary jobs within the community. The farm today focuses on diverse livestock and poultry operations, which contribute to food security and employment.



* Livestock heard



* Paragon Produce farm

Beyond its commercial success, Paragon Produce serves as a beacon of hope for its community, addressing issues such as poverty and food insecurity. The farm not only supplies safe, nutritious food but also shares agricultural knowledge with local farmers, fostering community development. The National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) and Standard Bank have helped the farm flourish by providing crucial materials and resources. Despite being a new business enterprise, Paragon Produce operates as a national market, attracting customers from nearby areas and

even distant provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal.

However, the farm confronts persistent obstacles such as veld fires, market demand volatility, and financial limits that prevent growth. Despite these obstacles, the farmer perseveres, learning vital lessons from each obstacle and constantly changing his operations. One notable challenge has been aligning production with market needs, a critical learning curve that he continues to navigate. Through trial and error, the farm has refined its approach and adjusted

its livestock offerings to better match consumer demand and support sustainable growth.

Looking forward, the farmer offers valuable advice to aspiring agripreneurs. He emphasises the importance of conducting extensive market research, urging future farmers to understand community needs and find creative ways to improve their product offerings. He also highlights the significance of business knowledge, recommending that prospective farmers pursue training and education to ensure their ventures are not only passion-driven but also financially sustainable. With a strong foundation, ongoing growth, and a commitment to community development, Paragon Produce is well-positioned for future success in South Africa's agricultural landscape.

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What is SMAT?

Smallholder Market Access Tracker (SMAT) is a tool that has been developed by the NAMC, with the help of a reference group, to measure the progress in the achievement of the market access goal for smallholder farmers in South Africa.

Why do we need SMAT?

Despite a number of interventions that seek to enhance market access (both locally and abroad) for farmers in the country, smallholder farmers still face barriers to entry into the mainstream marketing channels. Furthermore, there is no tool used currently to track market access for this group of farmers, hence there is a need for the SMAT tool.

Who is going to use SMAT?

The SMAT seeks to provide information to assist with policy debate and the formulation of more effective programmes towards achievement of market access. As such, the SMAT could be used (largely) by policymakers.

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