

Reflecting on transformation activities in 2023

By Rendani Murovhi, transformation manager, Potatoes SA

Potatoes SA's commitment to the transformation agenda is unapologetic and 2023 was marked by successful initiatives and achievements. The foundation and systems aimed at empowering, commercialisation, and inclusivity of black producers into the overly-developed potato industry are yielding significant outcomes.

Transformation collaborators

Despite the cost containment measures in place, amid the limited levy which is the main funding source for the transformation programmes, the multifaceted stakeholder relations strategy has yielded positively, securing co-funding for the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP).

Among other stakeholders, a Nedbank-funded initiative implemented by Agri Enterprises, followed by the Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) forms part of the partners that have contributed to the transformation deliverables.

On 30 November 2023, Nedbank hosted the Nedbank Green Economy CSI Awards. Solomon Makobela, an EDP producer from Limpopo, walked away with the Green Thumbs award for an outstanding project reflecting growth and sustainability. Makobela forms part of a group of 22 EDP producers that were co-funded by DALRRD. He runs a multi-diversified business, comprising potatoes, peppadew, cucurbits, livestock and grains on a 100 ha farm. His project contributes to the socio-economic needs of his community including employment in the surrounding villages of Avon, Indermark, Pex and Bochum.

The mandate, namely to 'fast track' the transformation goals and commercialise black potato producers is clear and shared by the various industry role-players.

Skills development

Potato Seed Production (PSP) and Prokon SA are among many role-players that have consistently offered workplace experience and transferred potato



Rendani Murovhi interacted with the students and mentors during the site visit at Nelspruit Fresh Produce Market in Mpumalanga.



Producers during a seed trial and demonstration.



Producers during a seed training session in Christiana.

production skills to undergraduate students, forming part of the Potatoes SA tertiary pipeline bursary.

The workplace experience is a compulsory practical programme required by the technikons and colleges for a student to be granted a junior diploma, and plays a key role in introducing soft skills to their theoretical agricultural studies. On 22 November, the transformation team visited the students placed under PSP to assess their performance and progress. Lesedi Motsemme and Makgabo Maswinyane, two beneficiaries of the Potatoes SA undergraduate bursary who study at Potchefstroom College of Agriculture, were visited.

On the second day, the transformation team visited a former PSP student, Olivia Mariri, who recently received a diploma in mixed farming from the Potchefstroom College of Agriculture and is now pursuing an internship at the Nelspruit Fresh Produce market under Prokon SA. The vibrant and ambitious young lady continues to showcase her commitment and is now a qualified inspector. Collen Masiya, her supervisor, is pleased with her progress and work ethic. Mariri's journey under the Potatoes SA bursary was covered in the



Rotondwa Raligidima interacted with students and mentors during the site visit in Lydenburg, Mpumalanga.

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Seed production training

Potatoes SA has maintained its standards by providing new potato producers, under various developmental/transformation programmes, with relevant industry information and linkage to stakeholders. Wesgrow hosted the new EDP producers on a two-day excursion, demonstrating the laboratory seed multiplication process at Rascal Seed Research Laboratories, the undercover seed production systems and seed trials at Christiana.

Lessons learnt

The exposure visit created enthusiasm among the producers and their confidence increased. The timing of the visit was perfect as all seed production operations could be observed in the field and at the laboratory. The visit provided an opportunity for one-on-one interaction with the seed role-players and engagements with other producers from other provinces.

The most important lesson learned was that the exposure visit, besides increasing knowledge, acts as a medium for building confidence and understanding and validates the importance of utilising certified seeds.

The provision of practical learning or industry-related soft skills creates a pool of experienced and marketable agricultural graduates and gives them a competitive advantage for employment security. Co-funders play a crucial role towards the sustainability of Potatoes SA's development programmes.

Recognition of producers that perform exceptionally well boosts confidence and plays a role in encouraging other producers in the pipeline and South Africa as a whole. 🌱

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