

# Empowering small-scale producers

By Rachici Marokane, national transformation co-ordinator, Potatoes SA

**P**otatoes SA has embarked on a transformative journey through initiatives such as the Smallgrower Development Programme (SGDP) and the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP), aimed at uplifting small-scale producers. Collaboration between government departments and Potatoes SA is pivotal in transforming producers' lives and enhancing agricultural productivity.

Collaboration is instrumental in enhancing agricultural knowledge and practices among producers. Government agricultural departments offer extensive expertise and resources, including research facilities, extension services and training programmes. When combined with the specialised knowledge offered by Potatoes SA, these resources provide producers with comprehensive and practical information to improve their farming techniques.

## Key resources

### Smallgrower Development Programme

**Programme:** Potatoes SA focusses on educating individuals in potato production through the SGDP. Over the years, Potatoes SA has aligned this programme with food security initiatives, resulting in

the expansion of hectares under cultivation and individuals gaining an appetite for producing potatoes as private entities. Workshops on soil management, pest control, irrigation methods, and crop rotation practices cover essential topics.

These initiatives optimise yields, reduce losses, and promote sustainable farming practices. By equipping producers with modern agricultural practices, the SGDP enhances productivity and profitability.

**Access to quality inputs and resources:** Government departments and Potatoes SA can significantly improve access to quality inputs and resources essential for successful potato farming. Producers can receive improved seed varieties, fertilisers, pesticides, and other necessary inputs at subsidised rates or through organised distribution channels through joint initiatives. This ensures producers have access to high-quality resources that can enhance their crop yields and overall farm productivity.

### Enterprise Development Programme

**Programme:** The EDP is Potatoes SA's flagship development programme, fostering partnerships with government departments. Memorandums of understanding and service-level agreements have been obtained with key stakeholders such as the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), the Limpopo Department of Agriculture (LDA), Joe Gqabi Economic Development Agency (JoGEDA), and the Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDA).

The EDP has been successfully implemented in several provinces, including KwaZulu-Natal, the Free State, North West, Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Limpopo. This programme focusses on developing emerging producers into fully-fledged commercial producers. The EDP provides comprehensive support,

including mentorship, access to finance, business training and market linkages. The programme aims to empower producers to scale up their operations and become sustainable agribusinesses.

## Success in Limpopo

A significant factor contributing to the high concentration of producers within the EDP in Limpopo's Capricorn district, is the strategic efforts and comprehensive support geared towards developing an inclusive potato sector in the region. The DALRRD, along with the LDA, has not only provided production input support but also the necessary infrastructure for potato production.

## Infrastructure and support

The support includes the provision of essential implements, irrigation systems (such as centre pivots), and backing for organised secondary co-operatives. This infrastructure is vital for optimising production and ensuring sustainability. By encouraging producers to organise themselves into secondary co-operatives, they can leverage collective resources and enjoy enhanced government support, including financial aid and technical assistance.

Over the past season, four new projects have been initiated in the Capricorn district of Limpopo, known as the 'potato belt'. The names of the producers in Limpopo who have benefited from this support are Walter Nabane, William Maseka, Andries Masoga, and Vincent Rapeta. They have received comprehensive support in the form of fertiliser, chemicals, seed, and mentorship through the collaboration of Potatoes SA with the co-operatives and Enterprise Development Directorate (CED) under director Lethabo Rakgoale of DALRRD.

Aldrin Lawrance, another producer in Limpopo, was funded by way of



Solomon Makobela, Potatoes SA Enterprise Development producer, Koena Mokgohlwa, DALRRD senior project officer, and Arnold Malema, LDARD extension officer, share some ideas.

a sorting and washing machine, packshed, and a forklift provided under DALRRD's AgriBEE fund and implemented in collaboration with Potatoes SA. Plans are underway to fund more producers across the country.

### Eastern and Western Cape success

The EDP has shown significant progress in the Eastern and Western Cape, contributing to the growth and development of small-scale producers in these regions.

#### Eastern Cape

Three new producers have joined the EDP over the past season: Mzimasi Jalisa, Gedlumlhanga Co-operative, and Vumile Mzinzi. They farm on a combined area of over 50 ha, all under dryland conditions. These producers have received support under the AgriBEE fund in the form of sorting and washing machines as well as a shed.

Despite the challenges associated with dryland farming, these producers have shown resilience and adaptability, benefitting from the tailored support provided through

the EDP. The collaboration between Potatoes SA and local government departments has been crucial in ensuring that these producers receive the necessary training and resources to succeed in a more challenging environment.

#### Western Cape

Two new projects have been initiated under the EDP. These projects focus on enhancing emerging producers' capabilities, providing them with the resources and knowledge needed to scale up their operations. The WCDA has played a significant role in this success, offering support in terms of infrastructure development, financial assistance, and market access. The integration of new producers into the EDP in the Western Cape has bolstered regional agricultural productivity and set a precedent for future growth.

#### Success in KwaZulu-Natal

KwaZulu-Natal has also added one more producer, Sikh Matomane, to the EDP, reflecting the programme's



*Lethabo Rakgoale, director of the Co-operatives and Enterprise Development Directorate (CED) that is part of the DALRRD.*

ongoing expansion and success in various regions. The continuous addition of new producers into the programme highlights the EDP's effectiveness as well as the dedication of Potatoes SA and government departments in empowering small-scale producers and enhancing their productivity. 

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