

SAVE THE DATE

Potatoes SA Research Symposium

The 2023 Potatoes SA Research Symposium will be held in Parys from

18 – 20 JULY 2023.

The theme of the symposium will be **'Roots in the ground with the future in mind'.**

Topics such as irrigation, mechanisation and loadshedding, soil health, and foliar diseases will come under the microscope.

Watch the press for more details or email lethea@first-choice.co.za for more information.

Potatoes SA and Western Cape take hands

The Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDoA) and Potatoes SA recently signed a three-year memorandum of understanding (MoU).

According to the head of the WCDoA, Dr Mogale Sebopetsa, the MoU commits both parties to growing the potato industry to advance economic growth and increase employment opportunities. This sector employs an average of 55 000 people. The country's leading potato producing regions are Limpopo, the Free State, Western Cape, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape.

Willie Jacobs, CEO of Potatoes SA, welcomed the MoU as a significant step forward for the industry. He highlighted that the potato industry makes a significant contribution to South Africa's fresh produce turnover. "The potato industry is estimated to contribute at least R6,6 billion to South Africa's economy and contributes 30 to 50% of the fresh produce turnover in the country," he said. – *Press release, Western Cape Department of Agriculture*

Consumers are paying more for potatoes

Food inflation continues to rise sharply in South Africa, with consumers having to fork out much more for vegetables compared to last year. According to Statistics SA, inflation for food and non-alcoholic beverages continued to accelerate, with prices increasing by 14% in the 12 months to last month. It said this represented the largest annual increase since the 14.7% rise in March 2009.

The Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity Group (PMBEJD) said there have been major year-on-year increases in the price of potatoes, onions, carrots, and tomatoes. Agri SA attributed the higher prices to the impact of load shedding on food production.

Mervyn Abrahams, programme co-ordinator for PMBEJD, said there has been a massive spike in the price of basic vegetables: "Two of the most bought vegetables that we have seen increases in are potatoes and onions. We have seen a 52% increase in the price of potatoes and a 67% increase in the price of onions year-on-year. In March 2022, you would have been paying R63.70 for a 10 kg pocket of potatoes, but in March 2023, you were paying R97.12 for the same pocket." – *IOL*

Weather challenges impact weed control efforts

Potato growers in the United Kingdom (UK) are facing challenges in weed control due to delayed planting caused by a wet March, which saw 80% more rainfall than usual, according to a news report by *Farming UK*. This prevented planters from working and kept seed stocks in storage. Southwest and southeast England were the most affected, while the north faced frosts and snow.

While planting is now well underway, Corteva says main-crop potatoes are likely to have been drilled later than planned. And, where April showers have continued, residual herbicide programmes may not have been applied in a timely manner, if at all. The bulk of the weed control workload in potatoes is carried out using residual chemistry applied to ridges shortly after planting. Weeds evading the scope of residuals are tackled with a post-emergence spray, typically in May. – *Farming UK*

Egyptian potato production marks successful season

The potato season in Egypt is marked by abundant production, high demand, stable prices, and no particular challenges except for a few shipment complications. The increase in volumes is mainly due to the increase in acreage. The government has made a lot of effort in land reclamation, turning huge areas arable and available to public and private sector companies.

Egyptian potato production benefits from weak competition in the international market. Role-players claim that other origins that have export calendars at the same time as Egypt, such as Pakistan, have lower volumes. – *Potato News Today*

Weather-resistant potatoes on the cards

A gene-editing potato project aims to boost the rate of photosynthesis in potato crops to promote yield, water-use efficiency and drought tolerance. The project is known as PhotoBoost and focusses on a 20 to 25% increase in photosynthetic performance, which could lead to a 30% increase in plant biomass.

The European Union (EU)-funded project draws on a range of genetic engineering disciplines and focusses on six key points to improve C3 photosynthetic performance in potatoes: Optimise light reaction efficiency, engineer a photorespiratory bypass, integrate algal carbon dioxide concentration mechanisms, optimise source-sink capacity, improve water-use efficiency, and integrate an oxygen scavenging mechanism.

Dr Jonathan Menary, social scientist at the University of Oxford, stated that by combining two or more biotechnology strategies, scientists have seen rates of photosynthesis increase by at least 20 to 25%. Menary sets out the timeline for breeders to take commercial lines of potato forward, as soon as 2025. – *Fresh Plaza*

Kenya to supply KFC with potatoes

KFC and other global restaurant chains will soon be prohibited from importing pre-cut potatoes, as part of a policy change aimed at increasing the capacity of local farmers to supply these international establishments.

The Kenyan ministry of co-operatives and small enterprises has announced that the country has imported 'Memphis' potato seedlings, a variety endorsed by KFC and currently being tested in major potato-producing regions.

Co-operatives cabinet secretary Simon Chelugui confirmed that the seedlings had received approval from the Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (Kephis) and the ministry of agriculture.

"Already in our possession, the seedlings have undergone Kephis procedures, gained approval, and are now being introduced to our farmers in Nyandarua, Timboroa (Baringo), Molo, and Elburgon [Nakuru]," Chelugui stated in Nairobi recently.

He added: "We foresee that all varieties of potatoes used in KFC (restaurants) and other international food chains will be sourced from Kenya in future. This will result in increased income for our farmers, conserving our dollars, and fostering our industries." – *Business Daily*

European processing potato prices at record levels

European processing potato prices have hit record highs recently, with increased competition from processors for a limited volume of uncontracted (free-buy) stocks pushing up physical prices. The Mintec Benchmark Prices for Dutch processing potatoes were assessed at €330/Mt on 18 April.

Delays in new crop plantings in Europe led to market participants suggesting that the arrival of the early crop could be delayed, increasing pressure on stocks for the remainder of the 2022/23 season. Furthermore, the volume of free-buy stocks is below average and global demand for processed products remains robust, which has resulted in increased competition between processors to secure uncommitted volumes.

For the remainder of the season, market participants expect free-buy prices to remain at or near record highs until processors take delivery of sufficient volumes of early processing varieties. – *Fresh Plaza*



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CHIPS

VOL 37 NO 3 • MAY / JUNE 2023



**MARKET AGENTS REMAIN
A CRITICAL LINK
IN THE POTATO VALUE CHAIN**

Baseline and market dynamics
for the coming season

**SUIDWES-VRYSTAAT KULTIVARPROEF
ONDER BESPROEING
OP PETRUSBURG IN 2022**

Weerstandigheid
teen plaagdoders

Oorlewing van *Ralstonia* spp.
in die grond