



# Sustaining inclusive potato production in Limpopo

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

**T**he history of the transformation division of Potatoes South Africa has been well-documented, and the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) has acknowledged that it has the potential to implement potato industry development programmes across the country.

During the previous season, as requested by DALRRD, Potatoes SA submitted a proposal that would initially see developing farmers and food security projects being supported with production inputs for their respective production scales in the Capricorn district of Limpopo. Following feasibility studies, a compilation of a business proposal, and a due diligence exercise by DALRRD and Potatoes SA, approval for the proposal was granted early in March 2022.

The proposal was initially designed to support potato projects under Potatoes SA's development programmes, but due to the database provided, with additional projects at variable production scales located within the Capricorn district, it had to be amended to support other feasible projects. All these farmers are situated along the various parts of the Limpopo potato belt.

## Partnership with DALRRD

Potatoes SA, as a co-funder and implementing agent, initiated the implementation of these projects. As implemented by Potatoes SA over the years, information days, training and mentorship in potato production are expected to be rolled out during the 2023/24 production season. The execution of this project is bound to be a success story seeing as Potatoes SA's transformation division staff are equipped with knowledge

of agronomic practices, agricultural economics, as well as project management and administrative skills.

With the price of fuel and electricity having more than doubled in the past five years and potato prices not adjusting to inflation, farmers have been struggling to break even. As mandated by the National Agricultural Marketing Council's (NAMC) guidelines, Potatoes SA continues to commit to sustaining farmers under its programmes. Not only does external funding offer an opportunity to existing farmers, but it also sees Potatoes SA expanding its support to a greater number of farmers and hectares in other regions across the country.

The department and Potatoes SA have been operating parallel to one another, with no overlapping occurring when it comes to the monitoring of projects. Potato



production training was offered by the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), with seed potato production training also conducted along with one of the country's top seed potato growers, Wesgrow.

It is important to note that Potatoes SA and DALRRD cannot fully meet the individual needs of potato producers. However, these farmers have built their own support networks through secondary co-operatives across the district with role-players such as PepsiCo offering off-take prospects.

Potatoes SA remains the mouthpiece of the potato industry, offering support to developing farmers by way of institutional models and facilitating business development units that ensure farming sustainability.

### New possibilities

There is still a need for packhouses and sorting and washing facilities to be provided to 95% of the funded farmers. This brings with it a further possible opportunity to invest in a



“As often stressed by Nomvula Xaba, the late Potatoes SA transformation manager, “developing farmers should not be reliant on grants, but should see this funding as an injection to bolster cashflow and possibly expand production”.

central agro-processing facility that can house post-harvest services located in central points within the province/district with easy accessibility for potato farmers.

It is therefore ideal to align with other programmes in order to determine how issues of market access and infrastructure can be addressed. Potatoes SA sees

itself continuing with this form of collaboration, not only in Limpopo, but also in other provinces across South Africa where potato production is feasible. 🌱

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