

Mondstuk van die Suid-Afrikaanse aartappelbedryf • Mouthpiece of the South African potato industry

CHIPS

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**BASELINE AND MARKET
DYNAMICS FOR THE
COMING SEASON**

Growing tomorrow's
producers, today

**OOS-VRYSTAATSE
DROËLANDKULTIVARPROEF
OP WARDEN 2019/2020**

Importation of French
fries takes a nosedive

Waarde van navorsing
oor blaarsiektebeheer



Growing tomorrow's potato producers, today

Over the last few decades South Africa has been experiencing a revolution in agriculture. In the past, many believed farming to be a practice that belonged to older generations. Today, however, we see millennials

leaving cushy professions to venture into farming.

One such a person is Petrus Ratsomana, a 30-year-old, vibrant and hard-working farmer, born and raised in Pax Village in the Capricorn district in Limpopo. Petrus, also known as Peter, studied mechanical engineering and

worked in the automotive industry, repairing and maintaining vehicles for seven years. Nevertheless, he always knew that he would one day end up farming – just like his father and uncles.

He recalls that at some point he resigned from his full-time job as a mechanic in Johannesburg to help



Peter Ratsomana's high-quality potatoes have been sold at an open market at reasonable prices.

his father on their leased farm in Limpopo. His father later advised him to return to Gauteng, since the family farm was not generating enough income. He was still in the process of obtaining the necessary infrastructure and machinery that would enable them to produce on a larger scale. And so, Peter returned to his job as mechanic.

PSA lends a helping hand

In 2019, Peter's father sadly passed away while he was participating in the Potatoes South Africa (PSA) Enterprise Development Programme. Peter then made a firm decision to return to full-time farming and in 2020, he picked up

where his father had left off with the development programme.

Peter, who successfully planted 10 ha of the Mondial potato cultivar in the winter, was assisted by his uncle, a well-known commercial farmer in Blouberg, Limpopo. He was also supported by a mentor appointed by Potatoes SA (PSA), who saw to it that his farming skills were honed to ensure better management of the crop and the overall farming enterprise he had inherited.

“Mentorship is necessary for farmers to develop and grow, because in farming, every day holds a new lesson.”

PSA introduced Peter to VKB, which further added value by providing production, financial, and technical support. Peter says he is extremely grateful for the support he received when planting the initial 10 ha of potatoes. “Mentorship is necessary for farmers to develop and grow, because in farming, every day offers a new lesson.”

The technical support he received, Peter says, has helped him realise an average yield of 50 tons/ha. His high-quality potatoes have been sold at an open market at reasonable prices.

During the season, Peter learned about:

- Scheduling and monitoring irrigation.
- Identifying pests and diseases through regular scouting.
- Application rates of fertilisers based on a tailored fertiliser programme.
- Understanding the growth, development, and maintenance of potato crops.

Expanding in more ways than one

During the 2020 potato production season, Peter created four permanent and 80 seasonal job opportunities for community



Peter Ratsomana successfully planted 10 ha of the Mondial potato cultivar during the winter of 2020.

members in Eldorado, Limpopo. He also managed to purchase a disc harrow and a potato planter, which he will use in the next season.

Crop rotation is one of the vital practices he has learned about through the enterprise development programme. Recently, he planted sugar beans, which are known for generating nitrogen which in turn improves soil fertility. The sugar beans will assist in boosting the enterprise's income due to the favourable market price. This will be followed by planting sweet corn.

Peter has expanded his potato production to 20 ha, which will be planted in May 2021. He is already engaging with his mentors and input suppliers for the upcoming season. PSA's transformation division is also working closely with Peter to compile a business plan and ensure that he operates a compliant enterprise.

According to Peter, farming is in his blood and he draws inspiration from his late father and uncles. He says farming is not always fun, easy, or stylish, but he enjoys it thoroughly. 🍅

For more information on PSA's transformation projects, email Nomvula Xaba at email nomvula@potatoes.co.za or visit www.potatoes.co.za.