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

CHIPS

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SIRKEL-N-LANDGOED: GESONDE MOERE VIR VOLHOUBARE AARTAPPELPRODUKSIE

SATELLITE-DERIVED CROP GROWTH INDICES FOR MANAGEMENT OF POTATO CROPS

Alternatiewe kragbronne vir jou plaas

KZN small growers hold farmers' day

Limpopo-kultivarproef op Dendron, 2022

Balancing stocks and understanding complications

By Willie Jacobs, CEO, Potatoes SA

Do we have enough potatoes? Will we have enough potatoes? And exactly how much is 'enough'? Let's start the conversation by first looking at some viewpoints or vantage points:

If we say we have enough, I can immediately hear the plea from every irrigation farmer who will not yield enough potatoes to cover their expenses and cost of living.

If I say we don't, the hungry import wolves will pounce on the opportunity to call on government to relinquish import duties to allow them to dump more heavily discounted products on our already suffering local economy.

Then … let us refer to the previous remark about our embattled irrigation farmers. By the time they recover from Eskom's knocks, they will have to face and compete with a market of discounted products. It doesn't take rocket science to see where this is heading.

But let's turn to the facts that illustrate the capabilities of this industry.

We meet local demand!

The potato production industry is already down almost 3 000 hectares in production. Yet last September we managed to deliver approximately 700 000 tons of potatoes in a market space that could handle only 500 000 tons. That is almost half the import demand surplus and, take note, in a mere three months!

Moreover, this is from a single production region! So how can we ever justify the fact that potato product imports are needed? Which gets me to the problem.

I'm not going to go through the load shedding narrative again. Yes, it is currently the biggest disability and challenge we are facing, but we also need to increase processing capacity in South Africa. Apart from the big four manufacturers, the rest of the participants in the French fry value chain are traders and food and beverage wholesalers. We need to be able to put something in place to fill the gap in the market.

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What is the gap? Generic pre-processed fries. And note – I did not say French fries. This will enable our processors to buy selected quality products for further processing or trading, and the traders can access local products for their market. Why? Discussions with leading processors led us to the fact that they simply cannot afford to incur losses due to contaminated material. With potatoes being a product from the soil, no producer can guarantee these levels.

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What we want to solve

- More accessible products for our kings and queens of food – the *kasi kos* outlets.
- More alternatives for potato producers who plant for processing.
- More alternatives for processors and traders.
- Significant opportunities for our potato producers to increase production.
- Significant improvement in accessibility to potato food alternatives for our hard-hit consumers.

Which brings me to my very last question: Who is in?