

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

CHIPS

VOL 37 NO 2 • MARCH / APRIL 2023



**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

Disclaimer: The views and information contained in these news pages do not represent that of Potatoes SA, Plaas Media, or their affiliates.

SA scraps frozen chip anti-dumping duties

South African consumers can likely expect to pay less for frozen French fries after provisional anti-dumping duties on certain imports have lapsed. In 2021, South Africa imported nearly 24 000 tons of frozen chips, according to *Business Insider*. In July last year, concerns were raised about higher prices and even shortages after the International Trade Administration Commission (ITAC) imposed provisional anti-dumping duties of up to 181% on such imports from Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany.

The provisional duties were imposed for six months, pending the finalisation of an investigation by the Commission. These duties have now lapsed since the Commission did not extend them beyond the six-month period. The provisional duties were meant to ensure that the local industry is protected from alleged 'injurious dumping' while the investigation is under way. Although the duties have now lapsed, the investigation continues.

Pending the outcome of the investigation, minister of trade, industry and competition, Ebrahim Patel, may still decide to impose definitive anti-dumping duties. "The Commission is ensuring that all due processes are followed to ensure the completion of the investigation, and thereafter the minister's decision will follow. Further developments will be communicated in due course," said ITAC. – ITAC

State of disaster after flood damage

President Cyril Ramaphosa has declared a national state of disaster to enable an intensive response to widespread flooding that has affected seven of the country's nine provinces. Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape have been most affected by the floods, which were brought on by heavy rainfall as a result of the La Niña weather phenomenon, according to a statement from the office of the presidency.

Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, the Northern Cape and North West have also experienced flooding. Invoking the *National Disaster Act* gives the government additional powers, including in the procurement and delivery of goods and services, and the ability to bypass restrictions under current law. – Reuters

Huge increase in minimum wage

The minister of employment and labour announced the amended national minimum wage in the *Government Gazette* on 21 February 2023. The amended minimum wage will come into force on 1 March 2023.

Agri SA said it was concerned by the 9.6% increase in the minimum wage. Any increase in costs will further strain already hard-pressed farmers. As the sector battles to contain the costs associated with load shedding, crumbling infrastructure and high input costs, this increase will further undermine food security and put much-needed jobs on the line. The increase continues a trend of above-inflation increases for more than a decade.

Whereas farmers were previously in a position to absorb these increases thanks to sustained growth in a number of agricultural industries, that period is now over. The sector faces extreme headwinds, which on their own threaten food security in the coming years. Notwithstanding the challenges the sector faces, Agri SA made a submission proposing a CPI minus 2% increase in the national minimum wage. This proposal recognised the financial pressure on workers in this inflationary environment, but also addressed the reality of farmers' inability to continue to absorb above-inflation increases.

That government has ignored this balanced position is a devastating blow not only for the sector, but also for the consumers who will eventually see this increase reflected in their food expenditure. – Press release, LWO Employers Organisation and Agri SA

Saai launches AI-platform for producers

The Southern African Agri Initiative, Saai, recently launched a WhatsApp-based artificial intelligence (AI) platform for family farmers. The chatbot, known as Hi Saai, uses various data points on the Internet to answer users' farming-related questions within minutes, said Francois Rossouw, CEO of Saai.

"There are still many issues that we need to address, and this is the second test phase that we are rolling out. However, we hope that users will help us move the platform forward by providing feedback," said Rossouw.

Dr Theo de Jager, chairperson of Saai, stated it is becoming increasingly important that new technology should remain within the reach of small- and medium-sized family-owned farms. – Susan Marais, Plaas Media

Potato tuber moth update

Potato tuber moth remains a concern to many potato producers in South Africa's key production areas. This pest causes severe damage to potatoes, which results in losses to growers due to its impact on quality. The spread of this disease can be attributed to high summer temperatures.

Potato tuber moth reaches the potatoes underground through cracks in the soil and producers can reduce these cracks through irrigation. This practice is unfortunately challenged by the current intense load shedding the country faces. Infected potatoes are a source of secondary infestation, which is why they must be discarded and buried at a depth of at least 50 cm.

Potatoes SA commissioned a research study headed by Prof Hannalene du Plessis of the Unit for Environment Sciences Management at North-West University to evaluate the status of susceptibility of potato tuber moth to some of the registered insecticidal options. This study showed a shift in the sensitivity of the pest to some of the important insecticides. It is advised to rotate existing insecticides to optimise efficient insecticidal control.

– Press release, Potatoes SA

Agriculture must prepare for El Niño

Rain-fed agriculture in South Africa will soon be under pressure due to a predicted decline in rainfall. Despite experiencing severe rainfall in the recent past – with numerous areas across the country flooded – South Africa is expected to enter El Niño weather patterns by the end of October 2023, bringing drier conditions across the country.

South Africa has experienced four years of above-average rainfall due to La Niña climate patterns, but this is expected to end by October 2023, according to Wandile Sihlobo, chief economist at Agbiz. He expects that South Africa will have to suffer through a mild drought similar to what occurred in 2018. From a more positive angle, it won't be as bad as the drought conditions experienced in 2015, the economist said, so agricultural activity should remain fairly smooth.

He recommended that farmers avoid tilling their land and use fallow agriculture where certain land is intentionally unplanted, as it helps retain soil moisture. He also said farmers should prepare for a slightly different cycle when purchasing inputs. – *Business Tech*

Biosensor to detect soft rot in potato tubers

Volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which are gases emitted by plants and play a role in various processes such as growth, survival, communication, signalling, and pest and disease defence, are an exciting area of research with great potential for rapid application in plant science.

Researchers have identified over 1 000 different plant VOCs and discovered differences between the VOC profiles of healthy and infected plants, with infection causing changes in the VOC profiles. Traditional approaches to VOC profiling are complicated, and the results of alternatives such as gas sensors and so-called 'e-noses' are inconsistent. According to researchers, biosensors are a better option for agricultural VOC profiling.

Biosensors are low-cost, easy to use in the field and allow for continuous tracking of VOC presence without sample preparation. Whole-cell bacterial sensors, for example, integrate microbes with an analytical format to measure signals, detect the target sample, and track its biological activity by observing different bacterial responses. Results are often available within one to two hours and can test for membrane/protein damage.

– *Potato News Today*

Irish producers struggle with land prices

The Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) has warned that many farmers in Ireland are struggling with unaffordable prices and limited availability of land for planting as the planting season approaches. This situation, along with existing challenges for potato growers, is causing a decline in growers' confidence, according to the IFA's weekly market report.

The IFA is advising producers not to pay excessively for land to avoid jeopardising the viability of their crop. The report also indicates that recent Irish retail trade and home consumption have remained largely unchanged, with an increase in demand for processing material due to the school mid-term break. The price of peeling material remains high, and there are indications that stocks are tighter than the same period last year. – *Potato News Today* 