

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

CHIPS

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**MARKMONITOR: DIE EERSTE
/ DRIE MAANDE VAN 2021
OP VARSPRODUKTEMARKTE**

**POTATO TUBER MOTH
INSECTICIDES, MODES OF ACTION,
AND SENSIBLE USE**

**Mechanisation training for
Limpopo producers**

**PSA's roll-out of its
mass media campaign**

**Limpopo-kultivarproef
onder besproeiing: Dendron**

Hope comes in a potato bag

How true this is: Where there is hope, there are potatoes! When Potatoes SA (PSA) recently announced their #WhenHopeWhispers campaign, it got me thinking about history and how the humble potato has played a crucial part in feeding the world throughout the ages.

Just think of the Irish Potato Famine, or Great Hunger, which started in 1845 after *Phytophthora infestans* (*P. infestans*) spread through Ireland. As in many other parts of Europe, potatoes were a staple food in Ireland as they could be grown under difficult conditions and be used with just about any cooking method. The result of the infestation was mass starvation, which lasted for approximately seven years. Without potatoes, people went hungry and when scientists finally found a way to combat *P. infestans*, renewed potato production restored hope.

Fast-forward a mere year after the famine ended in 1852, when Vincent van Gogh painted his infamous 1853 'The Potato Eaters' with its earthy, potato-like colours and clear depiction of the harsh reality of country life. Though dark in colour and expressive of challenging times, this painting honoured manual labour, working the land, and earning one's food honestly – in this case, once again the trusted potato, a staple food of the time.

Creating hope

By the 1900s, potatoes were being grown commercially just about everywhere in the world, and consumers and producers alike were starting to respect this crop's versatility, dependability, and ability to produce more nutritious

food very fast, on less land and in harsher climate conditions than any other major crop.

From the 'old world' in the Americas some 8 000 years ago to where we are today, a great deal of time and effort has gone into improving the production ability of potatoes, its varieties, and its ability to tolerate diseases. These efforts and successes create hope – not only for a healthy, successful crop and sufficient yield, but also for nutritious and affordable food on the table.

Here, at the southernmost tip of Africa, poverty is a harsh reality. We are frequently confronted with statistics indicating how more people are living below the breadline due to growing unemployment and dire economic conditions.

Behind the potato curtain

What we don't often see or read about is the work done behind the scenes to improve potato production, processing and consumption in South Africa. Behind the proverbial PSA curtain, it is a hive of activity. Researchers are researching, varieties are being improved, diseases are being combatted, technology is being developed, markets are being opened, traders are trading, marketing campaigns are creating hope, and real transformation is taking place.

And amid it all, quietly and unassuming, potatoes are allowed to multiply in the soil, ready to make their way to an empty plate and a hungry tummy.

The pages of this magazine aim to showcase these activities and, most importantly, the successes. Enjoy this issue of *CHIPS*, which once again offers readers a smorgasbord of great content generated from the fruitful and productive activities of the PSA team.

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