

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

CHIPS

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Hats off to the Qumbu small farmer development project

By Louis Pretorius

During May 2020 Potatoes SA (PSA) met with officials of the Department of Agriculture in Mthatha, to determine the details of seasonal projects relating to small-farmer development in the OR Tambo region. Nine projects were identified, including the Mhletywa project near Qumbu.

The small town of Qumbu is situated 40 km from Mthatha on the N2 highway heading towards East London. Planting was done at the Mjikweni village co-operative situated at Balasi, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Mhlontlo local municipality.

A female hand

This co-operative's main objective is to fight poverty and enhance food security in the local community. The co-op is mostly female-led by women who are passionate about cultivating vegetables. This well-organised farming community forms part of the Qumbu Potato Farmers' Organisation. The region is very poor with very few job opportunities, a situation that was of course compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Given its circumstances, the community embraced the opportunity to participate in Potatoes South Africa's (PSA) small farmer development project, showing real determination to uplift the community in terms of food security during difficult times.

The project was planted on 26 October 2020, during which the small farmers in the community were able to witness the soil



Planting for the Qumbu project was done at the Mjikweni village co-operative situated at Balasi.



Farmers taking notes during the information day in March this year, to discuss the yield and production process.

preparation, fertilisation using soil sample results, and the planting process. Everyone worked diligently on the land that day and the entire 0.2 hectare project was fully planted by 11:00.

The Department of Agriculture's regional extension officer, Benedict Mhletywa, played a pivotal role in the success of this project by assisting the farmers in following the spraying programme provided by PSA, to control pests and blight. PSA monitored the progress of the

project and provided advice during the production season.

A joyful harvest

The potatoes were harvested on 10 March 2021. An information day was held at the site to discuss the project and to evaluate the yield and quality of the potatoes. The cultivar planted was Valor. Just before the information day, the yield on the land was determined at 31.3 tons per hectare under dryland production. The quality was



The cultivar planted was Valor and a high-quality yield of 31.3 tons per hectare under dryland production was realised.

also examined and found to be excellent.

Department officials as well as local small farmers attended the proceedings. The production process was discussed in detail, especially regarding the spraying process to control blight and pests. Farmers diligently recorded notes during the meeting for future reference.



Farmers listening attentively as Ms Zangqa discussed potato cooking processes, nutrition and value addition.

The issue of food security was also addressed by department officials, along with the important role these projects play in local communities. One of the highlights of the meeting was a talk on value addition with potatoes by Ms Zangqa. Her talk also addressed the nutritional value of and cooking methods used for potatoes.

Those present had many questions that were answered

during the proceedings, after which a very fitting lunch mainly focussing on potatoes, was served and enjoyed by all. 🍌

For more information on this and other PSA small-farmer projects, contact Louis Pretorius at email louis@potatoes.co.za.



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