

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

CHIPS

VOL 35 NO 05 • NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2021

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Food security: A concept not to be taken lightly

Food security is a term that has been receiving a lot of attention over the past few years. There are several definitions for the phrase. A decade ago, approximately 200 definitions of 'food security' could be found in published writings. The term emerged in the 1970s when discussions focussed on issues ranging from food supply and access to food prices, and famine, as well as focussing on penning a fixed definition of food security.

An adequate definition

During the 1970s and 1980s, this definition changed from "availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices", to "ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food that they need", and later to "access of all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life".

In 1916, the World Food Summit adopted a more complex definition, which was refined again in 2001 to read: "Food security [is] a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life".

What it boils down to

Ultimately, we should ask ourselves what food security comes down to when all the definitions

are stripped down to their basic meaning. In my mind, it is quite simply the ability to put food on the table every day – whether it is produced and supplied by someone else or by oneself.

Given the realities of the times we live in, it seems almost impossible that we will be able to reach a state of food security at any point. There has not been a time in the history of mankind when food security has ever existed globally. Neither has mankind been able to make any progress in getting the world's population to embrace more nutritious food as a global lifestyle. The latter is proven by statistics showing that what is perceived as hunger and malnutrition, is in fact often undernourishment.

Food security is certainly also a concept that is in the eye of the beholder. For some, it might indicate the ability to obtain any kind of food every day; for others, it might entail healthy, fresh food rather than just any food. It might also be related to culture and honouring religious beliefs which exclude certain foods and must include other foods; and for many it relates to the availability of certain foods at certain times.

The work done at Potatoes SA along with its co-workers, can easily be described as all-encompassing in terms of addressing the issue of food security: it covers everything from production, the supply chain, and markets, to empowering smaller farmers to produce better, and last but not least, the consumption of healthy potatoes.

The November/December issue of *CHIPS* covers all of these aspects and is testament to the significant role that potatoes can play in food security across the world.

Lynette Louw, editor
lynette@plaasmedia.co.za



EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Executive editor

Hanrie Greebe
076 116 7206
hanrie@potatoes.co.za

Editor

Lynette Louw
084 580 5120
lynette@plaasmedia.co.za

Publisher

Plaas Media (Pty) Ltd
217 Clifton Ave, Lyttelton, Centurion
Private Bag X2010, Lyttelton, 0140
Tel: 012 664 4793
www.plaasmedia.com

Deputy editor

Jayne du Plooy
jayne@plaasmedia.co.za

Sub-editors

May Nel
may@plaasmedia.co.za

Lize du Toit
lize@plaasmedia.co.za

Layout & design

Annemie Visser
annemie@plaasmedia.co.za

Sales manager & accounts

Marné Anderson
072 639 1805
marne@plaasmedia.co.za

Advertising

Karin Changuion-Duffy
082 376 6396
karin@plaasmedia.co.za

Susan Steyn
082 657 1262
susan@plaasmedia.co.za

Esmarie Moodie
076 330 0745
esmarie@plaasmedia.co.za

Rowena Simmons
079 568 6025
rowena@plaasmedia.co.za

Juan de Villiers
060 508 3188
juan@plaasmedia.co.za

Subscriptions

Beauty Mthombeni
064 890 6941
beauty@plaasmedia.co.za

Printed and bound by

Typo • +27 11 402 0571

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Published on behalf of

Potatoes SA
012 349 1906
6 De Havilland Crescent,
Persequer Techno Park,
Persequer Park, Pretoria
www.potatoes.co.za

Bydraers in hierdie uitgawe:

Aartappels SA: Willie Jacobs, dr Fienie Niederwieser, Immaculate Zinde, Janó Bezuidenhout, FP Coetzee, Chantel du Raan, Louis Pretorius, Enrike Verster, Herman Haak, Nomvula Xaba, Masabatha Motsoeneng en Rotondwa Raligidima.

Ander bydraers: Prof Marin Steyn, Universiteit van Pretoria, Isobel van der Stoep, Isowat Consulting, Jamie Jansen van Vuuren, Aartappelsertifiseringsdiens, Carmen Rensburg en Jacque van der Waals, Universiteit van Pretoria, dr Jacques van Zyl, Wes-Kaapse Departement van Landbou, Chris Barnard, Besproeiingsakademie, Stephan Fourie, produsent, dr Gerhard Verdoorn, Roleen la Grange en Desireé van Heerden, CropLife SA, Anneline Scriven, LWO Werkgeversorganisasie, VDT Prokureurs en Prokon.