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# CHIPS

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# Developing farmer experiences true transformation with PSA

By Nomvula Xaba and Masabatha Motsoeneng, Potatoes SA

The Potatoes South Africa (PSA) Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) facilitates the participation of previously disadvantaged groups and promotes the development of emerging farmers for a sustainable potato industry. One of the programme participants, Andrew Nekgotha, recently walked us through his journey with PSA.

## Small beginnings

Andrew credits the PSA EDP for helping him reach the next level of success in his potato production enterprise. He was born and raised in the village of Devrede, also known as Ga-Mabelele, situated in the Blouberg Local Municipality in Limpopo.

The municipality is known for its favourable climate, as well as its vast arable land and water resources for farming purposes. Andrew had been involved in livestock production for several years, but felt inspired to venture into potato production after witnessing the success of sub-commercial and commercial black farmers. He began learning about the management of potatoes in 2012, when he switched from full-time employment to full-time farming.

## From livestock to potatoes

Andrew rented a piece of land in Dendron for his cattle and received potato seed from a commercial farmer to plant on a two-hectare field. "The two hectares delivered a good

yield and made me realise that this is the only crop that will give me high returns compared to other vegetables I have planted. Today, I even practice crop rotation with watermelon, but the returns I get can't be compared to that of potatoes."

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He says the input costs of potatoes are high, but at the end of the season he manages to make good net profit, which he reinvests in farm infrastructure or machinery to improve his operation.

While Andrew was planning to expand his potato production in 2013, he sadly had to vacate the farm he was renting, because it lacked sufficient water resources. He decided to plant two hectares at his homestead in Devrede. It was during this time that he formed a solid friendship with commercial farmer, Phophi Raletjena, who was participating in PSA's development programme.

Through this friendship, Phophi supported him by providing seed, machinery for land preparation, as well as planting, harvesting and technical advice before Andrew



Andrew Nekgotha scouting potatoes planted in June 2021.



From left is Alex Jandrell, a PSA mentor, Andrew Nekgotha, producer, and Josh Jandrell, also a PSA mentor.

himself joined the EDP. For this, he required a bigger piece of land as his backyard was very small.

He approached the Ga-Kibi Tribal Authority to request a piece of land to produce potatoes, and presented his business proposal to the chief and council. The tribal authority granted him permission to occupy 50 ha to produce potatoes, seeing that the farming enterprise would add value to the community by creating jobs and contributing to the local economy.

### A helping hand from PSA

Phophi introduced Andrew to the EDP in 2017. To be eligible for the programme, Andrew needed the following:

- Access to enough arable land for rotating fields and exiation for the duration of the programme.
- His business to be a registered entity with a business bank account.
- Access to sufficient quality water.
- A centre-pivot irrigation system.
- Access to machinery for land preparation, planting and harvesting.
- Access to funding for

purchasing fertilisers and chemicals, and to contribute to the purchase of potato seed in the second year.

Andrew was very eager to join the programme. He decided to sell his cattle and used the money to install electricity and purchase a 7-ha centre-pivot irrigation system. He completed and submitted an application form to PSA, after which the organisation conducted a pre-feasibility study.

Andrew was fortunate to also receive a farmer support grant from the Limpopo Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, which he used to purchase an additional 10-ha centre pivot, a 950 000-litre reservoir, a tractor, potato planter, two additional boreholes, and fertilisers and chemicals.

In 2019, PSA approved his application, and with the water infrastructure he had secured, he received a seed grant for 7 ha. The development programme played a vital role in helping him achieve a good yield of 60 t/ha. Unfortunately, he had no washing and sorting facility,

and therefore relied on selling unwashed potatoes in bulk to local Mozambicans, street vendors and supermarkets.


### Facing challenges head-on

The following season, in 2020, Andrew experienced delays with development of the 10-ha centre-pivot system and installing two additional boreholes. This resulted in him planting late and harvesting during the rain season. He realised a yield of 48 t/ha which was lower than the previous year. "That did not discourage me. Farming is what I love, and it is my full-time job. Giving up was not an option," says Andrew.

Alex Jandrell, a mentor appointed by PSA with over 50 years' experience in potato production, helped Andrew to plan in advance for the 2021 season. Alex guided him in terms of land preparation, seed inspection upon delivery, and monitoring the crop throughout the season.

This season, Andrew expanded by 10 ha, making the total planted area 17 ha planted with the cultivar Mondial. He has since arranged with a commercial farmer to wash, sort and pack potatoes to sell at national fresh produce markets.

"I appreciate PSA because the seed grant support makes a huge difference in my cash flow. The technical advice and mentorship ensure good quality potatoes and yield. The training ensures that I improve my farming practices with a view to sustainable crop production.

"The accounts management training has helped me to better manage my finances, and soon my business will be VAT registered. All the support I get from PSA adds value and creates a credible image for my business," he adds. 

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