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CHIPS

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Potato maestro fills PIDT chair

By Elmarie Helberg

A thought leader and prominent figure in the potato industry has a challenging new task at hand – taking the Potato Industry Development Trust (PIDT) to new heights. Dr Ben Pieterse, whose illustrious career in the agricultural sector has spanned close to four decades, recently took over the reins from Ernst Yzel as chairperson of the PIDT.

Dr Pieterse's career started in 1981 as a potato researcher at the Agricultural Research Council (ARC). His involvement in potato research started when he worked as an undergraduate student on a project for Potatoes South Africa (PSA) with Prof Hans-Peter Hammes of the University of Pretoria.

This piqued his interest in potatoes and, as they say, the rest is history. The project was the beginning of a year-long

commitment to the potato industry. Dr Pieterse was then appointed research manager at PSA in 2004. In 2011, he made another move and accepted a position as agronomy manager at McCain Foods until his recent retirement.

An invaluable contribution

Dr Pieterse was awarded the Solanum Tuberosum Meritum Award for excellent performance. This is the highest accolade awarded in the South African potato industry. The award is given to individuals or organisations who make a significant contribution to the success of the potato industry and strive to play a leadership role in sustainable potato production in South Africa.

The PIDT is tasked with receiving and applying statutory levies as prescribed by the relevant legislation. These goals include research, transformation, information and marketing projects that are all critical to the sustainability of the potato industry.

According to Dr Pieterse, the PIDT finds itself in the middle of this process and is an important driver of the pursuit of sustainability. Trustees of the PIDT have come a long way in the potato industry, and their skills and expertise make their involvement a critical component of the ongoing development process.

"My involvement in the potato industry has created many opportunities for which I will always be very grateful. I was also privileged to work with excellent scientists and was able to learn from outstanding agricultural leaders. I believe that the opportunity to be involved as a

trustee will be yet another highlight for me," Dr Pieterse says.

Committed to prosperity

According to chief executive officer of PSA, Willie Jacobs, Dr Pieterse brings a wealth of highly relevant experience to the current work of the PIDT. "He is well positioned to support PSA in its mission to provide strategic support services to a dynamic industry and catapult it to even greater success," says Jacobs.

"I know the management team at PSA as professionals who are knowledgeable in their respective fields and have the prosperity of the industry at heart. I look forward to supporting them within the mandate of the PIDT," Dr Pieterse mentions. "I also learned early on that there is a great source of expertise among producers and that it is essential to promote liaison with them. This co-operation is an indispensable source of knowledge that will make a major contribution to sustainability."

Regarding his predecessor, Dr Pieterse says Yzel played an instrumental role in instituting a competitive industry with the establishment of programmes. "I am excited to continue building on these successes with Yzel and the rest of the trustees.

"Enhancing the sustainability of the potato industry in South Africa is not only a passion, but an ideal I am committed to achieving. I look forward to making a meaningful, tangible and groundbreaking contribution in my duties," Dr Pieterse says. 🍌

To find out more about the PIDT, contact Potatoes SA at email info@potatoes.co.za or 012 349 1906.



Dr Ben Pieterse.