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CHIPS

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**MANAGING CRISES THROUGH
PUBLIC RELATIONS:
LAPSE IN ANTI-DUMPING DUTIES**

Empangeni farmers get
the know-how

Span weerdata in vir
besproeiingskedulering

**SANDVELD-KULTIVARPROEF
ONDER BESPROEING OP
AURORA IN 2020/2021**

Kultivars wat op
varsproduktemarkte presteer

Producer builds a sustainable enterprise with PSA by his side

By Masabatha Motsoeneng

Robert Chauke was born and bred in Trapoort, a village located in the Vhembe district of Limpopo. Robert currently resides and farms in Avon Village, also known as Marobjane, in the Blouberg Local Municipality in Limpopo. Robert has been participating in the Potatoes South Africa (PSA) Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) for the past three years.



Robert Chauke in his potato field in Avon Village, Limpopo.

Robert relocated from Trapoort to Avon Village in 1985, where he attended high school. After matriculating, he worked as a general labourer at a game farm. Soon after, he got married and was blessed with two daughters. As his family grew, he decided to start his own business and established a hair salon in Avon Village, which operated for six years. He then decided to focus solely on farming.

Humble beginnings

In 2008, Robert became interested in venturing into a farming enterprise. He acquired a PTO (permission to occupy) for 100 ha through the Seakamela Tribal Authority, for the purpose of producing crops. He researched possible crops, the technical aspects of farming, and the markets where he could sell his produce. He recalls interacting with various producers who already had a foot in the door, producing and selling vegetables to various markets.

Robert then started to deforest the land to prepare it for vegetable cultivation, for which he received funding from the Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The funding gave him the start he needed to install water infrastructure, which is one of the most critical inputs in vegetable production. Two boreholes were drilled and equipped, and a 5 ha centre pivot was installed.

"Not having a tractor or implements was very tough," says Robert. "All I had was land, an irrigation system and water. Most of the work was done manually or by hiring machinery from nearby farmers. My first crop was

watermelon because it was what I could afford at that time. The production cost involved was low and manageable."

Support from PSA

In 2018, he partnered with his neighbour and planted 10 ha of Mondial potatoes for the local market. This was his first experience in producing potatoes. His partner, who was already part of the PSA EDP, then introduced him to the programme. "After experiencing the production of potatoes, I knew that I had to contact PSA to join the EDP," says Robert.

He followed the process of applying for approval to participate in the programme. This included completing and submitting the EDP application, along with supporting documentation regarding his business. After this, a pre-feasibility study was conducted, which included an in-depth analysis of his enterprise. A business plan was then prepared and presented for approval of a seed grant, after which a mentor was assigned to him to guide and advise him on the overall production of potatoes.

Robert mentions that the business plan prepared by PSA also unlocked other forms of funding for him. "I first planted potatoes through PSA's EDP in 2019. I planted 2,5 ha of the Innovator and 2,5 ha of the Daisy cultivars, which were sold to McCain Foods."

In 2020, he expanded his potato production to 13,5 ha and planted Sifra, realising a yield of 48 tons/ha, and in July this year, he planted 11 ha of Mondial. He was hoping to expand with another 5 ha, but unfortunately



Robert Chauke's Sifra planting of 2020.

his centre pivots were vandalised and the electrical transformer and cables stolen. Despite this setback, he continued planting potatoes as his primary crop.

"Farming is not easy; it requires one to be focused and to have patience," he says. He elaborates that while he started farming without implements or a tractor, he used the profits generated from


producing potatoes to invest in his business. He purchased two tractors, a potato planter, a disc, ripper, potato harvester and an additional centre pivot.

Growing in leaps and bounds

Through the development programme, PSA has not only provided Robert with a seed grant, mentorship and training, but a

company has also been appointed to assist him with account management for his farming enterprise. The company provides him with guidance on recording transactions with debtors and creditors, and they have assisted him with registering a VAT number.

"All the support I received from PSA has played a big role in setting my business up to operate at a commercial level. The programme has really enabled me to understand the practices that must be applied when planting, monitoring and harvesting potatoes.

"That does not mean I have it all figured out. I make mistakes and I learn from them, and I am still guided by mentors and officials from PSA," Robert adds. 

For more information, contact Masabatha Motsoeneng at masabatha@potatoes.co.za.



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