

## Media Release

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### **World Food Day 2024: Better resource management will bring us closer to food security**

Despite being an agricultural powerhouse, over 20% of South Africa's population is food insecure. This year, as Potatoes SA commemorates World Food Day on 16 October, we look at challenges that hinder food security. Here, natural resource allocation and management is recognised as a key factor that will either promote or hinder food security going forward.

"In a world where water is becoming scarce, and rainfall patterns are erratic and often destructive, we require a concerted effort to ensure that our resources are used in a way that solves hunger," said Willie Jacobs, CEO of Potatoes SA.

He noted that climate change has had a monumental impact on rural economies and food production this year. Ensuring that no person goes to bed hungry in future will take greater collaboration between scientists, farmers and policy-makers to agree on how our natural resources will be managed and allocated.

The theme for this year's Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations World Food Day is "Right to foods for a better life and a better future". The theme underscores the importance of nutrient dense, available, fresh and affordable food. Jacobs believed that potatoes tick all these boxes, not only because of their nutritional value, but because potatoes are produced in South Africa year-round, making optimum use of natural resources. Sustainable production systems should therefore be supported.

Potatoes are more nutrient-dense than many other staple foods in South Africa. They are high in carbohydrates, naturally fat-free and very low in sodium. Additionally, potatoes are high in mineral chromium and have the highest levels of potassium when compared to other vegetables and starchy foods. Potassium is a crucial mineral in our diets since it helps move nutrients into cells, and waste products out of cells, it reduces blood pressure and water retention, and aids proper kidney and heart function.

South Africa currently produces 2,5 million tons of potatoes annually, of which 17% is produced in the Sandveld region of the Western Cape. This 17% however has a disproportionately big impact on potato availability and prices in South Africa since it is the only region that can produce potatoes for 12 months of the year. It is also responsible for the majority of potatoes consumed in the Western Cape, since the next closest potato production region is 700km away.

With the Western Cape being a region destined for drier years as a result of climate change, it is prudent that any consideration for water allocation take the importance of continued potato production into account. Earlier this year, the Department of Water and Sanitation proposed that water allocations for agriculture be cut by 30% in the Sandveld. This would result in 30% of the hectares under potatoes in the Sandveld taken out of production.

Monique Vlok, chairperson of the Sandveld Potato Growers Association, said that the role of water in achieving a sustainable future is acutely felt in the Sandveld. "Tackling the greatest challenges of our time starts with water. This includes food security. Sandveld potato production is not only vital for the region's economy and our ability to put food on our own tables, but any reduction in production will mean South Africans across the country will pay more for potatoes as a result of lower supply. We therefore need sustainable solutions for water use to ensure food security across the country."

Farmers in this region are playing their part to ensure every drop of water provides the maximum calories. By using advanced irrigation techniques and careful water management practices, farmers in the Sandveld have reduced their water usage by 20% over the last ten years, while increasing yields. Improved genetics and management practices are also continuously being employed to maximise yields while minimising inputs.

Vlok noted that South Africa's food security hinges on its ability to effectively manage water to ensure food crops flourish, and that every drop produces value. "Potato farming in the Sandveld is uniquely suited to the region's environment. The sandy soils, coupled with the moderate climate, create ideal conditions for growing potatoes. Potatoes are a water-efficient crop when compared to other staple foods. By focusing on potato production, the Sandveld makes the most of its limited water supplies, ensuring that every drop is used to its maximum potential."

Potatoes have proven their worth in a country that is still working towards total food security. Potatoes are a staple food for many South Africans, providing essential nutrients and forming a key part of the diet. Ensuring the continued production of this crop in the Sandveld is crucial to maintaining an affordable supply for the nation and moving one step closer to food security.

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