

SANDVELD POTATOES

FAQ'S



Potatoes
Aartappels SA

SANDVELD

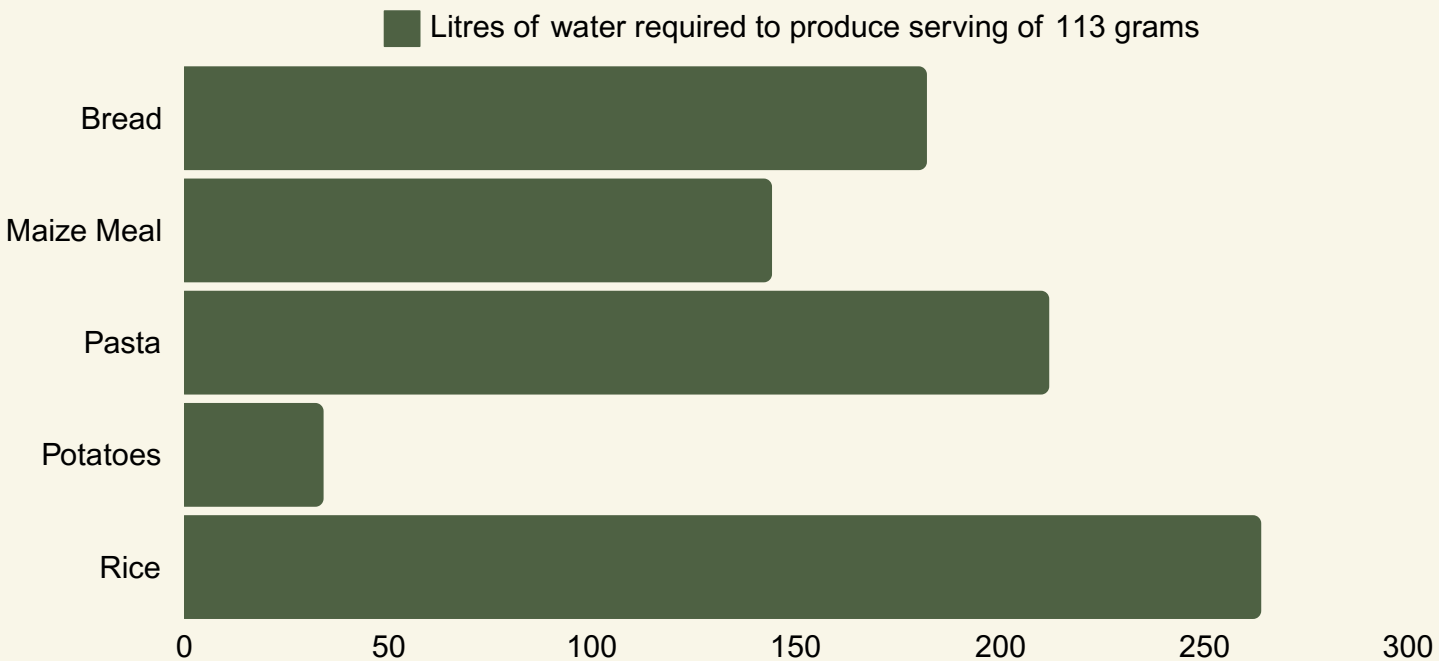
POTATO PRODUCTION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1

How does water usage for potatoes compare to other staples like maize, rice and wheat?

In determining the best use of resources, it is important to take the water footprint of a crop into account. A water footprint is the volume of water required to produce a unit of a harvested crop. Potatoes have the lowest footprint of all staple foods and therefore make an excellent choice when deciding how best to use resources for food production.

The Water Footprint Calculator provides the following figures for the four main staple foods globally:



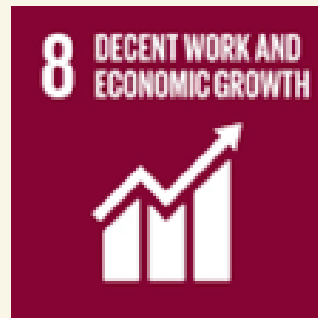
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

2

Is potato production in the Sandveld sustainable, considering that it is a water-scarce region?

According to the United Nations (UN) Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), potatoes are eaten by over one billion people globally making it a crucial staple. It also has the best water footprint of all staple crops.

Potato production contributes to key objectives of the UN's Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs):



Potatoes are not just a staple in the diets of many people but also provide key opportunities for employment and sustainable economic growth along their value chains.

As far as production in the Sandveld specially goes, potatoes tick all of these boxes too. There are also several factors that further make a strong case for potato production in the Sandveld:

- **High efficiency**

Sandveld potato farmers do exceptionally well to maximise the yield they get from their land. Since their daylight hours are higher than in the rest of the country, their yields are naturally higher. On average they yield up to 70 tons per hectare in summer and 44 tons in winter, whereas the national average is 40 tons per hectare, according to data from the National Agricultural Marketing Council.

Water efficiency is continuously being worked on. Sandveld farmers have on average reduced water consumption per hectare by 20% over the last decade, according to research conducted by the University of Pretoria.

- **Best case scenario for food security**

South Africa as a whole is classified as a water-scarce country. Locally grown food however still needs to be produced to ensure a stable food supply. As far as food production options for the Sandveld goes, potatoes are one of the best choices considering its water footprint to calorie ratio.

The Sandveld's proximity to the Cape metropole means that this food does not need to travel extensive distances to reach consumers. This has a favourable impact on both its price and carbon footprint related to transport carbon emissions.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Community upliftment**

The Sandveld is the only region in South Africa that has climatic conditions conducive to growing potatoes for 12 months of the year. This has a significant impact job creation and economic stability since workers can be employed full time rather than seasonally. It also means staff have a greater chance of accumulating skills and advancing in the workplace.

Sandveld potato farming contributes between R3 billion and R4 billion to area's economy. Sandveld potato farmers employ around 3000 permanent workers and 8800 seasonal workers.

- **National potato prices**

The Sandveld contributes 17% of the national potato supply. If this were to be removed from the market, the impact on prices would be adverse and South Africa's food security index would be negatively affected.

Although an exact price increase is difficult to pinpoint, the 2023 national production season provides some insight. In 2023 national potato production reduced by 3% due to loadshedding, resulting in a 173% increase in the potato price.

If Sandveld potato production were to cease, consumers in the Western Cape would especially be hard hit since their potatoes would need to be sourced from the Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo, adding considerable transport costs to the higher potato price.

3

Is potato production in the Sandveld having a detrimental effect on the Verlorenvlei?

The Sandveld Potato Producers' Organisation (SAKO) has best practices in place that guides potato cultivation to protect the biodiversity of the area. This includes responsible water management. Please click [here](#) to read the full document.

The abstraction of water for irrigation, whether from groundwater, a dam or a river requires registration of both the source and the abstraction volumes with the Department of Water and Sanitation. In many parts of the Sandveld, water allocations have been regulated by Subterranean Government Water Control Areas, each with its specific allocations.

The South African Water Act of 1998 states that before water use can be allocated, the total volume of the water must be quantified and basic human needs and aquatic ecosystem requirements (called a Reserve) set aside from this total volume. Thereafter water can be allocated to other users such as municipalities, agricultural irrigators and industry.

The 2017 to 2021 drought in the Western Cape resulted in extremely low water levels in the Sandveld. With water in the Verlorenvlei catchment area dwindling, the Verlorenvlei had little inflow of water. Since 2022 however average to above average rains have replenished the system.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

During the May 2024 Greater Cederberg Biodiversity Corridor meeting, a report by the Department of Water and Sanitation on water levels in the Verlorenvlei catchment indicated that water levels in the boreholes in the primary Verlorenvlei catchment showed good recovery in 2022 following the return of normal rainfall patterns. The outlook over the long term for water levels is stable.

Furthermore, rain received in the 2024 winter pushed water levels to a point where the Vlei broke its bank and flowed into the sea in the Elandsbay. The water levels have therefore been restored to pre-drought levels, indicating the importance of taking rainfall patterns into account when measuring water availability.

4

Are farmers clearing fynbos and renosterveld to increase potato production in the Sandveld?

The cultivated area under potato production in the Sandveld has remained stable over the last ten years at around 6500 hectares to 7000 hectares.

Land on which potatoes are planted must be rotated every year, with a field only being planted to potatoes every fourth year. Since few other crops are viable in the area, these fields are mostly left to rest for the three year in between period.

Farmers need to conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as per the National Environmental Management Act if they want to clear virgin land for farming activities. During the EIA, research is done to determine the impact on the natural environment where the land is to be cleared. The Department of Environmental Affairs then either grants or refuses permission based on the impact. Extensive consideration for the environment is therefore given before land is cleared.

