



National Agricultural
Marketing Council

Promoting market access for South African agriculture

AGRIPRENEUR

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From a farm worker to a
farm owner

The future of agriculture

Making farming fashionable





THE AGRIPRENEUR QUARTERLY: A PUBLICATION BY THE SMALL- HOLDER UNIT OF THE NAMC

This is the fourteenth edition of the Agripreneur publication from the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC). Through this publication, the NAMC seeks to create a platform where farmers, particularly smallholders, share their knowledge and skills, challenges, experiences and insights with one another. It is believed that this publication will assist smallholders to learn from one another, develop strategies, adopt models, and become part of the value chain by marketing commodities that meet quality standards and are safe for consumption.

Presented in Agripreneur 14 are the following topics:

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- (2) The future of agriculture
- (3) Could the NRMDP auctions offer marketing opportunities for other enterprises? A test by the Department of Agriculture in KwaMaphumulo Local Municipality
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AGRIPRENEUR

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FROM A FARM WORKER TO A FARM OWNER

Written by:
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This is the story of Guy Mphahlele, a 34-year-old Bachelor of Technology graduate, who is now co-owner of the 4 200-hectare Bekendvlei Boerdery farm in Limpopo. Guy graduated with his BTech degree in 2009 at the Central University of Technology, Free State. After graduating, Guy applied for a farm from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR). While waiting for the results of his application, he worked for the Department of Agriculture in the Eastern Cape for a few years. He then decided to start working on a farm (Bekendvlei Boerdery) in 2013.

Although he is not quite sure of his psychic abilities, one could argue that he saw into his future and hence he quit a job in government to be a farm worker, becoming the co-owner in less than two years. In 2014, Guy was interviewed by the DRDLR based on the application he made some four to five years previously.

The application was approved two months later. In the same year, the previous owner of Bekendvlei Boerdery quit the farm, citing the challenges with water. This appeared to be a blessing for Guy as he acquired this farm under the Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS) programme. However, given the size of the farm, he had to form a co-operative, whereby he recruited five of the former farm workers to form a co-operative of six members (all males).

They are now farming with four enterprises, namely crops (sunflowers and maize), vegetables (sweetcorn, butternut, potatoes, peas, green beans and pumpkins), game (impala, kudu, blue wildebeest, blesbok and nyala) and livestock (cattle, sheep and goats). They have a contract with NTK for crop produce and with McCain for vegetable produce. They sell weaners (from 220 kg) to the Valkon feedlot in Nelspruit. Sometimes, they also sell to Vleissentraal auctions.



Green Beans

Livestock is their main source of production inputs. However, they did receive support from government in a form of Recap, which they used to redo the fencing and purchase implements. Furthermore, they received 30 Nguni heifers as a loan from the Department of Agriculture. As at 10 September 2018, they had more than 1 000 head of livestock comprised of cattle (Nguni, Brahman, Simmental, Boran and Bonsmara), Boer goats and sheep.

They do face a few challenges on the farm, mainly cable and transformer theft, high electricity bills and a shortage of water for irrigation. The latter is due to low rainfall in their area, leading to their boreholes running dry. Remember, water shortage was cited as one of the reasons the previous farmer left the farm and it has been evident in the reduced tons harvested on supposedly irrigated land since the new owners took over.

As a means of transferring their knowledge, the new owners receive students from colleges and the Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to undergo experiential training on the farm. This year (2018), they hosted two students from the Potchefstroom College of Agriculture and one intern from the Department.

In 2015, they received an award from McCain for being best butternut producers. In 2017, they were runners-up in the same category.

Their plan is to expand on potatoes (due to a guaranteed market and relatively high revenue compared to the other vegetables and crops). In addition, they are planning to build chalets for a game lodge to accommodate game hunters during the hunting season.



Potato harvest



THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE

Written by: Kayaletu Sotsha

Andile Matukane is an agriculturalist from Bushbuckridge in the Mpumalanga Province. She obtained a Diploma in Plant Protection from the University of Mpumalanga in 2012 and a Bachelor of Technology (BTech) degree in Crop Science from the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) in 2016, majoring in Plant Propagation. She is currently busy with her Master's in Plant Pathology at TUT.

Andile worked for numerous organisations within the agricultural sector. These include the Dry Bean Producers' Organisation in Pretoria, the Grain Crops Institute of the Agricultural Research Council in Potchefstroom, and DICLA Training and Projects in Queenstown, and she is currently working for Farmer's Choice in Magaliesburg.

Her Master's research focuses on diseases of dry beans, which emanated from her observation that dry-bean farmers often experience low yields due to diseases. Therefore, she is interested in finding out if she can come up with recommendations to reduce the effects of diseases on dry beans production.

In addition to studying, she leases 10 hectares from a farm in Magaliesburg, where she plans to plant dry beans. She also leases another four hectares at Sterkfontein Country Estate, where she plans to grow vegetables. She admits to the difficulty of mixing studying with farming, both of which are demanding. However, she is determined to succeed at both. She is currently trying to raise funds through off-farm employment to support her farming activities.

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Andile's 10-hectare farm



COULD THE NRMDP AUCTIONS OFFER MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OTHER ENTERPRISES?

A test by the Department of Agriculture in KwaMaphumulo Local Municipality

Written by: Kayaletu Sotsha

The National Red Meat Development Programme (NRMDP) was in operation again on 31 July 2018 at KwaMaphumulo Local Municipality in the ILembe District of KwaZulu-Natal. The auction yielded R798 950, 00, with 101 cattle sold, benefiting 68 farmers – eight of them being females. The highest price was R13 200, 00 and the farmer who received the highest income went home with R65 400, 00. There was appreciation for the Maphumulo Local Municipality's support of the event.

However, it was not the auction that stood out on the day, but rather the initiative taken by the KwaMaphumulo Department of Agriculture to test the usefulness of the NRMDP auctions to provide a marketing opportunity for other enterprises. This initiative was led by Mrs Khethiwe Ngema, who works as an agricultural advisor at the Maphumulo Department of Agriculture. Her major role is to assist farmers to sell their produce. Therefore, the idea of having a tent for vegetables and other enterprises was driven by an interest in assessing whether the people and the farmers who attended the auction would be interested in purchasing other items. Her observation was that such a market would work for other farmers as well.



This highlighted the fact that women are not only the backbone of the rural economy, especially in developing countries, but they also serve as change agents in their villages and communities. Whether they work on a farm or in an office, women have the potential to transform agriculture to be more resilient and sustainable. Furthermore, Mrs Ngema is heading an initiative between the Department and ILembe Enterprise Development to support the School Nutrition Programme, which serves as the main market for farmers in KwaMaphumulo.



One of the attendees of the auction buying some vegetables

Zintle Mbatha (33 years old) started farming in 2017 and says she was motivated to farm by having access to a piece of land and water for irrigation. She plants cabbages, sweet potatoes and 85 orange trees on about 1.5 hectares. She acknowledges the assistance of extension advisors in helping her with production information. Her irrigation infrastructure is manual. She runs the operation as a family business and has therefore not registered as a co-operative. As such, she has not been in a position to secure funding. Her main market is the School Nutrition Programme. She plants based on the market demand, and the price is determined upfront. She manages to sell more than 120 bags (25 kg bags) of cabbages per harvest. Sweet potatoes are sold within the community. She is currently negotiating with the owners of unused land to enable expansion to meet the current demand.

The municipality liaises with agriculture to indicate the enterprises they want, so agriculture can strategise with the farmers to ensure they produce according to the specifications of the municipality. However, many of the co-operatives around the municipality still lack infrastructure that should enable them to produce consistently. The government is trying to prioritise funding for these co-operatives to meet the demand of the municipality.

Some of the people who got a chance to display their produce at the auction included Ms Ntombe Shandu of the Sakhokuhle project from Emaqadini, KwaMaphumulo. She has been beading for about eight to 10 years, with the support of the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) with a building in which to work. Their challenge is marketing and they rely on such events where they attract some customers.



Zintle Mbatha (left)



Ms Shandu



MAKING FARMING FASHIONABLE

Written by: Andile Siphesihle Ngcobo

F“Fashionable” is a term that describes something that is either influenced or represented by a current popular style. I believe that this is a standard starting point required for any occupation that lacks engagement from the current youth of South Africa, such as farming.

Generally, the average farmer in South Africa is 65 years old. This gets one thinking as to why the industry lacks involvement from the youth in this country. In fact, looking back at high school, I do not remember ever seeing an aptitude test result that stated that one would perform well as a farmer one day. In fact, I do not think any of the tests actually had a measure of what the required traits of a good farmer would be. Yet, based on marks and personality, it was very easy for many results to come back with more suitable and desirable occupations such as medical doctor, dentist, accountant, businessman – and the one that was considered the worst of the lot, with a guaranteed measure of success – was that of being a boilermaker/tradesman.

The pressure to become a professional overlook the essential balance between vocation, profession and occupation. Yes, it is clear that the average farmer would tend to be much older because it has become an industry of inheritance, whereby the farmer will run operations for as long as possible, until his/her children are able to take over, usually at an older age, and so it goes.

However, what about the farmers who do not have children? What about those who decide they are no longer happy in this lifestyle and decide to sell their farms, move to the city and start an earth-moving company? These situations lead to a decrease in productivity on a commercial scale and the supply no longer meets the demand, which eventually impacts on the price and accessibility of food in the economy at large.



Andile Ngcobo on a farm

So, to look at it from an agricultural perspective, (i) despite having culled all of the worst cows in your herd of dairy cows in order to be left with the best cows that calve every year without giving you issues of prolapsing during birth, and (ii) without decreasing from the average 22 litres of milk let down per day and being left with cows that drop more heifer calves than bull calves, you realise that after eight or so calvings you cannot ignore the fact that there is a need to rear successive heifers, not only to maintain your production, but also to grow your output. Same applies with farmers in this industry. There is a shortage of strong, eager and young individuals who are willing to maintain and grow the potential that this industry has for our country. Yes, the issue of resources for young people who are willing to get started is a hindering factor, but if there were many who really are interested, the process of acquiring assistance, not only from government but from potential investors, would set the bar pretty high, pretty quickly.

After spending three years at an agricultural institution in KwaZulu-Natal (having known absolutely nothing about farming, coming from an above average city

life), my calling or my vocation to farming was solidified by the amount of exposure that I received. All the information I acquired from the ground up (literally), right up to understanding the value chain, processing and marketing as well as the economic response to it all, helped me understand where the role I want to play is situated. For me, that happens to be right down on the ground. My role is one of a farmer in the true sense and one that requires me to understand what goes on all the way up there in order for me to realise what I need to do to produce the best quality to the best of my ability.

The only way I figured out that agriculture can be elegant and sophisticated is from the aspect of exposure. So, every day I find an opportunity to expose the greatness in the little bit that I see, do and feel, as a plea to attract more of the younger generation to consider feeding the nation as something that can be seen as “fashionable”.

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