

# NAMC'S MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INTERVENTIONS - POTATOES SMALLHOLDER FARMERS DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT FACILITATION

By: Nonhlanhla Gwamanda | 29 June 2022

*The development support for smallholder farmers is critical to the rural economy. Such a vision, can be achieved through new and innovative public-private partnerships, increasing public investments in research and extension system, including development-oriented local governance and institutions*

**T**he National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) strategic placement and relationship with public and private institutions built over many years enables it to contribute meaningfully on facilitating the support for the smallholder farmers. In addition, the organisation through its Agribusiness Development Division (ADD) is committed towards facilitating the development support for smallholder farmers, in particular those that they have already linked with markets.

On 30 June 2022, Potato SA together with the KZN Provincial and Local Departments of Agriculture had organized a demonstration of basic steps of planting potatoes and conducted information session and provided certified seed to the farmers, as part of the NAMC's multi-stakeholder interventions to help farmers meet their supply target for the identified markets. A number of identified farmers are located in Jozini, Ndumo and others in nearby areas and those specialising in planting various vegetables, including potatoes.

Nonhlanhla Gwamanda explained that the session was held to assist farmers who were previously linked to markets. The NAMC had conducted market facilitation programmes based on market analysis, farmer readiness, and market demand. "A market readiness assessment often reveals that smallholder farmers face a variety of challenges, including a lack of information, technical support, and quality inputs and production technology like certified seeds. Now today's session is part development support facilitation by multi-stakeholder interventions aimed at addressing the above challenges", she explained.





The demonstration was led by Potatoes South Africa's (PSA) Transformation Coordinator for small holder farmers, Louis Pretorius. He explained to farmers the correct way to plant potatoes before the actual demonstration.

"There are a few basic things that are very important to consider before planting: firstly, selection of cultivars that work very well in the rural regions secondly, moisture content, at least this region is under irrigation and finally for this part of the country it's a winter planting," said Louis.

Despite the fact that farmers came in large numbers to attend the demonstration, Nomvula Xaba, the Transformation Manager from PSA was delighted that the demonstration was well received.

"It would be a great idea if we could come back for another demonstration in other Districts of the KZN province, even if it's done once a year. However, the budget and the number of farmers we would be receiving from the KZN Provincial Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (KZNDALRRD) will determine that" she said.

"Food security is the primary goal, but if projects are well executed, they go beyond that. They promote entrepreneurship, job creation, and wealth creation in the communities. People with land always have access to food security, and potatoes are easy to produce" said Louis.

The majority of the farmers who attended the demonstration session were females, youth, and a few pensioners. "Having witnessed such an informative demonstration of the basics of planting and caring for potatoes, I will never grow potatoes the same way again" said Mr. Qiniso Mathenjwa, Field owner where demonstration was held.

Other challenges that smallholder farmers were facing revolved around issues of quality, quantity, and consistency that the market requires. It was a delight for Ms Cebisile Mabika, the smallholder farmer from Jozini, to learn skills that would help her increase her yields .

"Using the correct planting method, I have learnt, I will be able to achieve large volumes that are often required by the market" she said.





There are a few steps that farmers need to follow before they plant potatoes, including land preparation, appropriate seeds, and chemical application for maintenance.

“What happened today is, we shared with the farmers how to do the basics. For instance, firstly, we started with land preparations, correct fertilization of the potatoes and then for different varieties, we demonstrated seed spacing and closed the potatoes. Also, we got to teach farmers how to spray preemergence chemicals” said Pretorius.

The actual demonstration for farmers to learn the correct method of planting potatoes, was done on a 0.2 hectares demonstration plot. The process included land preparation, which was done with a tractor and ridges were opened. Secondly, application of 2:3:4 (30) fertilizers and hand placing of potatoes seed on the ridges at a 15-23cm apart in rows that are 76-91cm apart.

Three different types of seed varieties namely, Mondial, Electra, and Panamera seeds were planted. This was done in order to determine which one would perform best on this area. Round up Chemicals were applied on the Electra seed, Cypermethrin, Agromectin, Sencor and dual Gold. However, no chemicals were applied on Mondial and Panamera seeds, until harvesting.

“We did this so we could compare the yields, so we could judge which one would perform better. Especially since most smallholder farmers cannot afford chemicals, so if they can achieve higher yields without them, production costs will decrease” said Louis.

In order to ensure traceability and record keeping, labelled sticks were placed at the beginning of each row indicating the type of seed cultivar planted in it.

The initiative was also applauded by the representative of the KZN DALRRD, Ms. Mpume Mhlongo. “There were so many challenges faced in the KZN province in a space of 12 month” she said.

Among the issues she mentioned was the July unrest of 2021 that left many local farmers with no markets to supply and people jobless due to the looting of stores across the province. Additionally, she mentioned the spate of flooding that left many households homeless and food insecure.

“There is a real need for farmer support in KZN, where people will be taught how to produce their own food” she added.

At the end of the demonstration, each farmer received a bag of certified potato seeds to plant on their field, as well as PSA branded t-shirts, and caps or hats.