

agripreneur

ISSUE 40 | MARCH 2025



START SMALL, DREAM BIG:
PAULINE MAHLARE'S
AGRIBUSINESS LEAP.

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THE AGRIPRENEUR QUARTERLY:

A PUBLICATION BY THE SMALLHOLDER MARKET ACCESS RESEARCH UNIT OF THE NAMC

PREFACE

Welcome to the 40th edition of the Agripreneur, a publication produced by the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) to create a platform where agripreneurs and farmers, primarily smallholders, can share their knowledge, skills, challenges, experiences and insights. This publication is intended to assist smallholders to learn from other agripreneurs, develop strategies, adopt models and become part of the value chain by marketing commodities and products that meet market standards and are safe for consumption. The Agripreneur also promotes and profiles aspects of South African agriculture as a brand. Each edition features compelling stories that aim to persuade readers to #LoveRSAAgric.

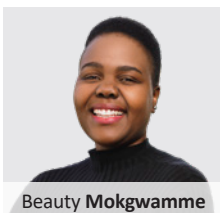
CONTRIBUTORS:



Francois **Baird**



Dineo **Chiloane**



Beauty **Mokgwamme**



Khathutshelo **Rambau**



Christelle **Van Zyl**

CREDITS

Manager: Smallholder Market Access Unit
Kayaletu **Sotsha**

PRODUCTION TEAM

Editor in Chief:
Matume **Maila**

Compiled by:
Matume **Maila**

Graphic Designer:
Daniel **Rambau**

RESOURCES

Cover Story Images:
Supplied

Images:

NAMC
Pexel
Pixabay
Supplied

CONTACT US

Physical Address:
Hillcrest Office Park, 177 Dyer Road, Barbet Place, Ground Floor, Hillcrest, Pretoria.

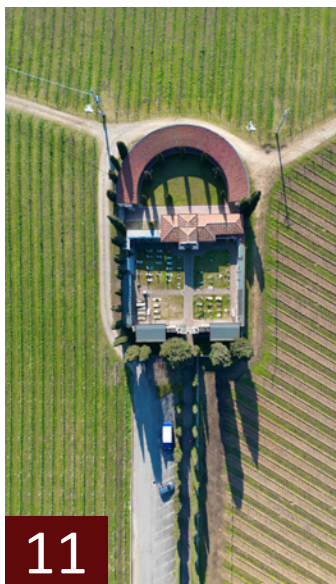
Tel:
(012) 341 1115

Email:
info@namc.co.za

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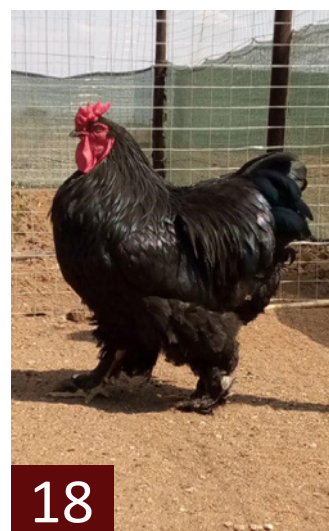
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EDITOR'S NOTE



Matume Maila

Dear Readers, I am delighted to share the most recent edition of our publication Agripreneur Issue 40. In this edition, we present a summary of agricultural trends from January to March 2025, and showcase success stories from smallholder farmers.

The return of South African apples to the Thai market is one of the edition's highlights. This is a significant milestone towards the renewed trade partnership between South Africa and Thailand.

The ongoing prevalence of foot and mouth disease outbreaks in South Africa and the plan for conserving crop diversity as part of a hunger alleviation strategy by the Department of Agriculture is also covered.

The Agri-tourism series continues with Part 10, which discusses on-farm direct sales. The Mohair Empowerment Trust (MET) series continues with Part 6, which emphasizes the importance of stakeholder engagement and partnership in the development of smallholder farmers.

Issue 40 features the amazing agribusiness journeys of Pauline Mahlare and Tshanduko Agro Investment Farm.

The editor wishes to thank the devoted authors who provided their expertise to assure the excellence and authenticity of the articles published in this issue. This is a collaborative effort to increase awareness, market access, productivity, and sustainability in the agriculture sector in the face of ongoing environmental and economic shocks.

Enjoy the reading!

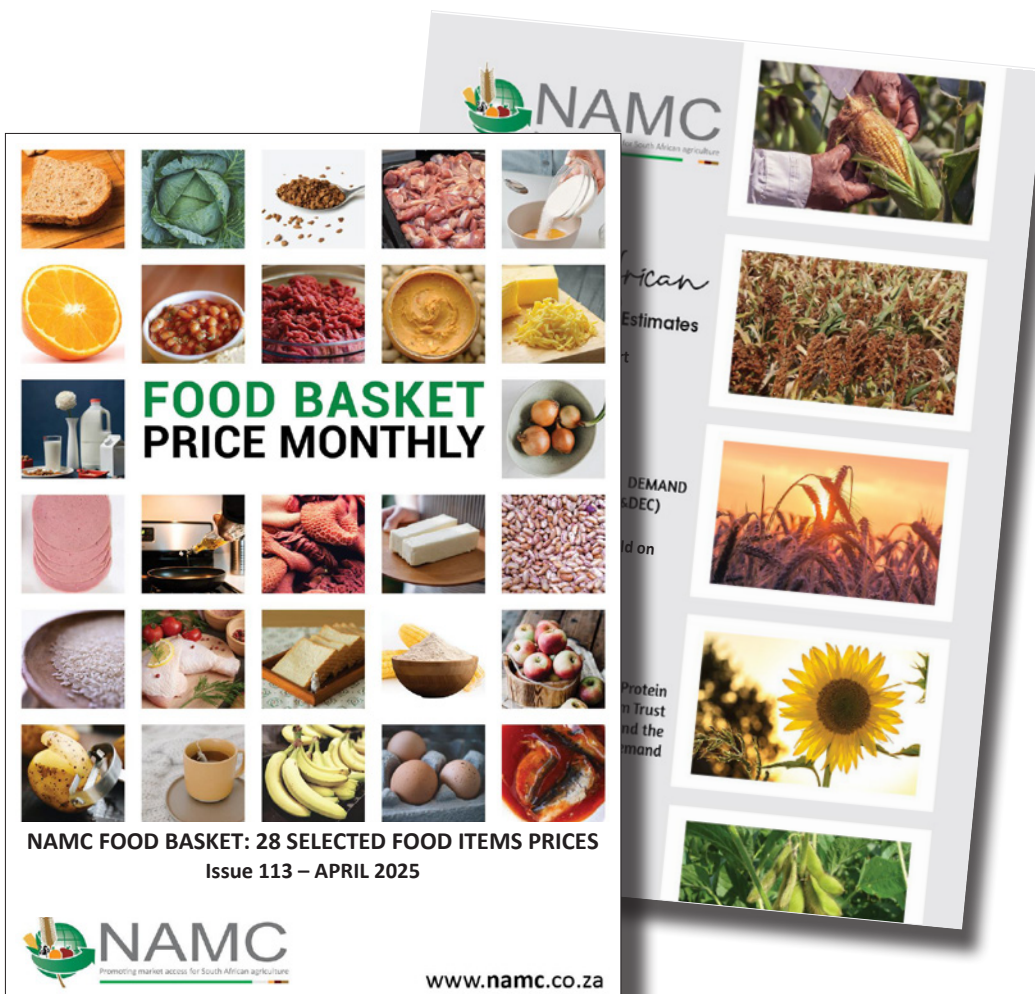
Matume Maila



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AGRI-HIGHLIGHTS: JANUARY - MARCH 2025

SOUTH AFRICAN APPLES HAVE OFFICIALLY ARRIVED IN THAILAND



* Minister of agriculture John Steenhuisen

John Steenhuisen, Minister of Agriculture announces the arrival of south African apples in Thailand. Speaking from Paris, during the Nutrition for Growth Summit held from 27 to 28 March, the overjoyed minister of agriculture expressed his excitement for the arrival of South African apples following 16 years of absence in the Thailand market.

In a video released on the department of agriculture X account, Minister of Agriculture John Steenhuisen proclaimed fantastic news.

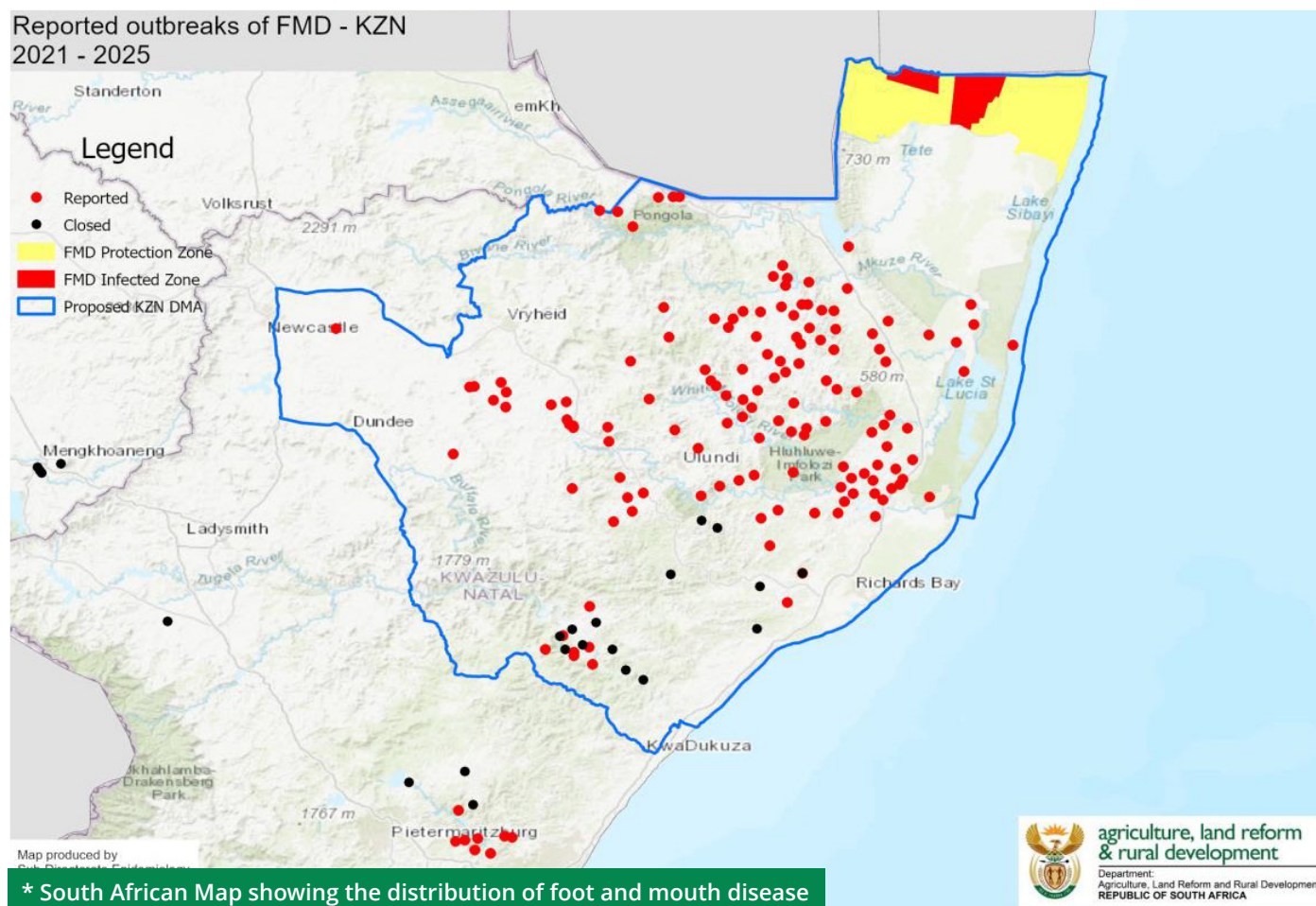
“Our apples to Thailand have arrived and have been well received on that side of the world. The first time in 16 years that our apples have been sent to Thailand, and I want to say a huge congratulations to the farm workers, farmers, producers, the packhouses, and the exporters for making this happening. We are looking forward to opening up some exciting new markets for South African products. We began with apples, but we also have grapes, wine, nuts, avocados, and so many other

products that we are seeking major markets for, not to mention citrus, which is one of our leading exporters. So, South African agricultural products are in high demand; we just need to ensure that the protocols are in place, and that the process of bringing our excellent agricultural products to the globe is expedited. When we grow overseas market, we grow local markets, and when we grow local markets, and increase its profitability for our local producers, it also means more jobs at farm level. That’s what we are about, economic growth and jobs and it has to be led by opening new markets for our products.”

The return of SA apples to Thailand market symbolized the renewed trade partnership between the two countries. The minister further highlighted that “This is just the beginning, we’re on a mission to bring even more of South Africa’s delicious, farm-fresh goodness to the world.”

Click [here](#) to watch the minister’s video.

FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE OUTBREAK IN SOUTH AFRICA



The escalating Foot and Mouth Disease crisis in South Africa presents a formidable challenge to the nation's agricultural sector, demanding urgent and comprehensive intervention strategies. The department of agriculture announced that the outbreaks of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in KwaZulu-Natal have not been successfully contained, with new cases recently detected in the Newcastle area.

The department indicated that the disease has now spread beyond the initial Disease Management Area (DMA) declared in 2021, when outbreaks of the SAT2 FMD strain first emerged in the province. To curb further spread of the virus, the Minister of Agriculture John Steenhuisen has taken the decision to extend the boundaries of the DMA.

This measure aims to control the movement of cloven-hoofed animals (cattle, sheep, and goats) and their derived products in affected areas. No

cloven-hoofed animals, their products, or genetic material may be moved from, to, or within the DMA unless authorized by a state veterinary permit and in full compliance with the stipulated conditions of such permit.

The Department reiterates that movement control measures, originally declared in October 2022, remain in place nationwide, and these control measures have been included again in the new Government Gazette notice.

Any suspicious clinical symptoms, such as salivation, blisters in the mouth, limping, or hoof lesions, should be reported immediately to the local State Veterinarian, and such animals must not be moved under any circumstances.

The detailed announcement by the government is available [here](#).

CONSERVING CROP DIVERSITY - SOLUTION TO END HUNGER

Millions of farmers in Africa cultivate traditional crop varieties, save seed for the following season and exchange seed with their neighbours and other farmers.

Minister of Agriculture John Steenhuisen explains that farmers manage and conserve crop diversity to safeguard crop production and boost crop yields to meet current and future food demand owing to increasing population growth.

“Internationally, farmers were however not formally recognised as custodians of crop diversity, until the adoption of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture which recognises the enormous role played by farmers and indigenous local communities in conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food security and agricultural biodiversity.”

The Department of Agriculture, recently announced

that South Africa ratified the International Treaty, making South Africa the 154th Contracting Party to this international agreement.

Minister Steenhuisen says by joining the Treaty, South Africa will have to ensure that national policies and programs fully recognize farmers’ contributions in conservation and sustainable use of traditional crops, particularly neglected and underutilized crops such as millets, cowpea, sorghum, Bambara groundnuts to name but a few.

In the 2025/26 financial year, the Department plans to establish two new Community Seed Banks, in KwaZulu-Natal and Northern Cape province. These Community Seed Banks are hubs for conservation and revitalization of local seed systems focusing on crops suitable for local conditions.

Click [here](#) to read more about conserving crop diversity.



PART 10: ON-FARM DIRECT SALES

By: Christelle Van Zyl

Since agri-tourism is seen as an additional product/service to add to your already existing agricultural business, on-farm direct sales refer to the sales of your agricultural products. There is an ongoing debate about whether farmer markets in town classify as agri-tourism. However, based on our definition, the sale must take place on the farm.

Typical on-farm direct sales in South Africa include roadside stands/ farm stalls, u-pick operations, and auctions. In the USA, Christmas tree cutting farms would also be included.

1. Roadside stands / farm stalls

This would require a building or some form of structure, even just a roof, depending on the business model you want to follow. For example, if you want to be more formal and have the shop open every day for eight hours, you might consider a building to keep all the products that is locked at the end of the day. However, if you only want to sell fresh farm products during the high season, you might be less formal and only have a certain number of products to sell per day for a week or so.

The sales of products are not limited to only the raw products you produce on your farm. This can be expanded to include pickled or baked foods, or even non-food items produced locally. Remember, “local is lekker,” so try to keep your products local to the area. This also supports local entrepreneurs who don’t have a shop to sell their products in. This can be an opportunity to connect with the local community.



This can be used in combination with other agri-tourism practices, such as a restaurant, picnic area, or even accommodation.

2. U-pick operations

In simple terms, this refers to fruit (or vegetable) agricultural operations where you open your farm at certain times of the year to the public to pick their own fruit from the trees. This is your opportunity to sell your fresh products directly to the consumer.

Tourists come for the experience and to cut out the middleman. While the products might be cheaper to buy on the farm than in the store, you can charge tourists for the experience of picking their own fruit. Popular examples include strawberry picking and cherry picking. This is a very seasonal event.

Therefore, you cannot rely on this income for the entire year, but it is a good boost in income during your harvest time. Typically, only certain sections of your harvest would be open to the public, depending on the size of your operation.

This can also be combined with other agri-tourism operations. You can either have additional agri-tourism products/services all year round and add this as a 'special event,' or this can be the only event on your farm, and you add a farm stall, restaurant, picnic area, etc., to the event.

3. Auction

While this example is not focused on tourism but rather an agricultural event, people have to travel to your farm to buy your livestock. This might be a once-off event or an annual practice. To capitalise on the people visiting your farm, you could sell food, drinks, and other local produce to the people visiting. In other words, this is simply an opportunity where people are already visiting your farm, to sell additional products/services to them.

This concludes the five types of agri-tourism on a farm.

For any questions or comments, please contact: ChristelleCvanZyl@gmail.com

Part 10 marks the conclusion of the agri-tourism series. Another series will begin by the end of 2025, focusing on the steps to develop an agri-tourism business. So, watch this space.



PART 6: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS KEY TO DEVELOPMENT OF SMALLHOLDER MOHAIR FARMERS

By: Dineo Chiloane & Beauty Mokgwamme



* Mohair farmers

The Mohair Development Trust (MET) continues its effort to promote black economic empowerment in the mohair industry. Since 2010, the MET has helped to build black participants and entrepreneurs, commercialize black farmers, and ensure a sustainable supply of mohair. This article looks into recent triumphs and projects, emphasizing the significance of the MET's efforts, such as participation in international conferences and national honours.

The MET's objective is realized through a variety of projects aimed at strengthening formerly disadvantaged farmers. The MET now handles nine projects and intends to launch three additional initiatives in 2025, expanding its footprint in the industry. These programs include roughly 7000 goats and provide critical resources to participating farmers. One of the MET's key services is five-year interest-free loans for Angora goats. This enables farmers to expand their herds and establish a stable income source. In addition to financial help, the MET offers training and continuous support to new farmers, promoting their growth and development in the mohair business. MET producers contribute approximately $\pm 25,000$ kg of mohair every year.

Success Stories

The MET's influence is best demonstrated by the success stories of the farmers it assists. The total production from settled projects for the year was 23,952.60 kg, which is a remarkable accomplishment for MET farms. The trust evaluates project achievement using key performance indicators (KPIs) such as average mohair production per goat, kidding percentage, weaning percentage, and mortality rate. The MET's overall successes speak volumes:

- **Settled Projects:** The MET has successfully settled eight projects, demonstrating its potential to effect long-term transformation in communities.
- **Empowered Female Farmers:** In 2024, the MET prioritized empowering female farmers, acknowledging their critical role in the agricultural industry.

International Recognition and Local Industry Engagement

The MET actively engages in industry events and collaborates with important stakeholders to advance its goal, thereby broadening its reach and influence globally. Recent highlights include:



* Mrs Beauty Mokgwamme and Mr Johnson Mandlendoda

Textile Exchange Conferences: In October 2024, Simphiwe Fani represented the MET at the Textile Exchange Conference in Pasadena, California. Simphiwe took part in a panel discussion titled "The Social Side of Sustainable Agriculture," where he shared his personal experience with the MET and emphasized the importance of collaboration in attaining agricultural sustainability and growth. His story, based on his agricultural experience in the Somerset East section of the Karoo, struck a chord with the audience and highlighted his dedication to elevating others and motivating the next generation of farmers.

Mrs. Beauty Mokgwamme has been appointed as a panelist for the 2024/25 Department of Rural Development and Agrarian Reform (DRDAR) and National Employers' Association of South Africa (NEASA). The NEASA recognizes outstanding contributions in agriculture and competence in providing public services to rural communities. The awards event was held on November 21, 2024, at Mentors Kraal in Jeffreys Bay.

The MET works with a variety of stakeholders, including the Eastern Cape's Department of Rural Development and

Agrarian Reform, the FirstRand Empowerment Foundation, African Enterprise Network, Agri-SETA, and the Eastern Cape Development Corporation (ECDC). These collaborations offer critical support for training, finance, and infrastructure development. The African Enterprise Network offers approved training courses. The ECDC handed over shearing sheds and equipment in November 2024, helping farmers improve their mohair harvesting.

The MET recognizes farmers' challenges, which include heartwater, stock theft, land carrying capacity, and drought.

It is actively working to address these issues through training, support, and partnerships with key stakeholders. As such it remains dedicated to empowering communities and supporting long-term growth in South Africa's mohair industry. The MET is paving the way for a more open and prosperous future for all stakeholders by linking farmers with critical resources, specialized training, and increased market access.

Part 7 will go into the heart of the MET's influence, highlighting specific success stories.



* Mrs Beauty Mokgwamme and Mohair farmers

START SMALL, BUT THINK BIG: PAULINE MAHLARE'S JOURNEY INTO AGRIBUSINESS

By: Dineo Chiloane

In an era when many professionals seek stability within corporate structures, Pauline Mahlare bravely ventured into the realm of possibility. She transformed boardrooms and corporate meetings into soil and greenhouses, establishing a profitable agricultural enterprise from the ground up. As the founder of a thriving seedling farm, she continues to inspire many aspiring farmers and businesses, which is evident in her passion for learning and growth in farming.



Despite her academic background in information science, Mahlare has always had a strong interest in plants. She studied BSc Information Science at the University of Pretoria before realizing that farming was her passion. With an extremely capable and goal-oriented mindset, she accepted the challenge of entering an industry for which she had not received formal education.

Mahlare has cultivated a thriving seedling farm at Plot 40, Kameelfontein Road in Leeuwfontein, Pretoria, transforming over a hectare of rented land into a productive enterprise. Specializing in high-quality vegetable seedlings, her farm offers a diverse range, including spinach, cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes, peppers, onions, and butternuts.

Driven by a keen understanding of market demands, Mahlare launched her business in January 2024, capitalizing on the increased interest in home gardening and small-scale farming following the COVID-19 pandemic. Demonstrating her commitment to the business, she self-funded the construction of

essential infrastructure, including tunnels and the purchase of equipment like mixers, irrigation infrastructure, and planting machinery.

This market-focused approach ensures the demand for her seedlings is consistent, and Mahlare caters to a broad clientele, from large commercial farms to individual backyard growers. Her operation runs efficiently on a four-week cycle, yielding approximately 500,000 seedlings per cycle. Mahlare places a strong emphasis on quality, prioritizing robust root systems, which she recognizes as essential for healthy plant development.

Beyond her business success, Mahlare has also made a positive impact on her community, especially for a relatively new farmer. Her farm provides employment opportunities, engaging three permanent and four temporary workers during planting season. Additionally, she supports local agriculture by offering affordable seedlings to small-scale farmers and providing discounted bulk orders to senior citizens.

Despite her achievements, Mahlare faces typical challenges such as weather-related issues, plant diseases, and market fluctuations. A particularly pressing concern is rising electricity costs, as her water pumps currently rely on the national grid.

While Mahlare markets her business on social media platforms such as Facebook



* Mahlare's seedlings

and Instagram, she takes a more hands-on approach, regularly driving around in search of potential customers. She presently charges clients for seedling delivery, but they can also pick them up from her facility. Her long-term goal is to expand her operations and establish a larger commercial seedling business. She believes in thinking big while starting small, emphasizing the importance of research, quality production, and patience in farming.

Pauline Mahlare's path illustrates the power of resilience, adaptability, and vision. From self-funding her business to making a meaningful difference in

her community, she demonstrates that success in agriculture is achievable with the right attitude and dedication.

Her advice for aspiring farmers would be to "start small but think big. Invest in knowledge. Conduct your research. Prioritize quality over quantity. Be patient and consistent." Her journey is an inspiration to anyone interested in pursuing a career in agriculture.

This agripreneur's determination, work ethic, and commitment to greatness highlight the agricultural sector's limitless opportunities for those prepared to take the plunge.

TSHANDUKO AGRO INVESTMENT'S JOURNEY CONTINUES

By: Khathutshelo Rambau

"Aiming to lead in sustainable and innovative poultry farming to enhance food security and environmental stewardship"



* Black Brahma Rooster

This article covers the Tshanduko's new projects, which include exotic chicken breeding, vertical farming, turning chicken droppings into compost, and using chicken droppings as fish feed, as well as providing additional information about the training.

Sitholimela and Mathiloli practice diversified farming, including crop, poultry, and small stock. According to Mathiloli, exotic chicken breeds are highly productive, while indigenous breeds are resilient, cost-effective, and suited for organic and free-range farming.

The Tshandukos are increasingly focusing on breeding the following breeds: Buff Orpington rooster and hen, Golden laced Orpington, Traditional Bush Orpington, Black Brahma, Ayem cemani. Proper housing, consistent hatchery conditions, managing day-old chicks and maintaining a proper mating ratio, provide balanced nutrition and ensure health monitoring. Free-range chickens are fed on natural foraging with organic feed supplementation, and those in cages are fed measured amounts at a specific time.

The benefits of organic and free-range feeding include healthier birds, better product quality, and reduced environmental impact. Regular cleaning of the chicken houses and maintaining hygiene is vital.

They use natural remedies and vaccines to prevent diseases. Furthermore, they are practising

vertical farming and conservation agriculture. The importance of vertical farming is space efficiency, resource conservation, controlled climate, reduced transportation costs, increased crop production, employment opportunities, technological innovation, and improved food safety and quality, among others.

The conservation aspect is as important as it improves soil health and fertility, water conservation, reduces erosion, carbon sequestration, enhances biodiversity, cost efficiency, increases productivity, and climate resilience.

There is also a strong focus on record keeping, noting its benefits. Record keeping assists with following improvements:

- Tracks health, productivity, and financial management.
- Ensures compliance, aids decision making, and enhances efficiency.
- Improves market access and traceability.
- Essential for effective farm management, ensuring the health and productivity of the flock, and maintaining financial sustainability.



* Mr Sitholimela and Ms Mathiloli Tshanduko

The Tshandukos diversify with vegetables and note the opportunities in the form of high demand for fresh, nutritious vegetables; high export potential; as well as increased income when implementing sustainable farming practices, which have the potential to increase the yield and quality. However, there are challenges brought about by climate change, increasing need for proper pest and disease management, infrastructure requirements, resource constraints, and high crime levels in the Vhembe District.

Education and training.

The Agro Investment farm hosts training and workshops for farmers, educating them on:

- Best practices in feeding, health management, and egg production.
- Setup and management of vertical farming systems, crop selection, and care.
- Conservation agriculture (CA), crop rotation, organic farming, and integrated pest management.

- Efficient irrigation techniques and water management strategies.
- Managing finances, budgeting, and cost control.
- Strategic planning, marketing, human resource management, and operations management.
- Practical training sessions to apply learned skills in real-world scenarios, benefiting local and surrounding region farmers.
- They also offer online training and consulting services. These programs aim to empower the team and the farming community with essential skills and knowledge for success in the agricultural sector.

The Tshanduko Agro Investments is committed to tackling challenges in learning and development by focusing on resource allocation for training, improving access to information, and utilizing digital platforms. This calls for partnerships with training institutions and government programs to equip the staff with essential skills and knowledge, fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation.



*Pepper dew produce



* Buff Orpington Rooster

OUR ECONOMISTS HAVE BEEN AT THE CENTRE OF OFFERING INSIGHTS INTO CURRENT **AGRICULTURAL** DISCOURSE

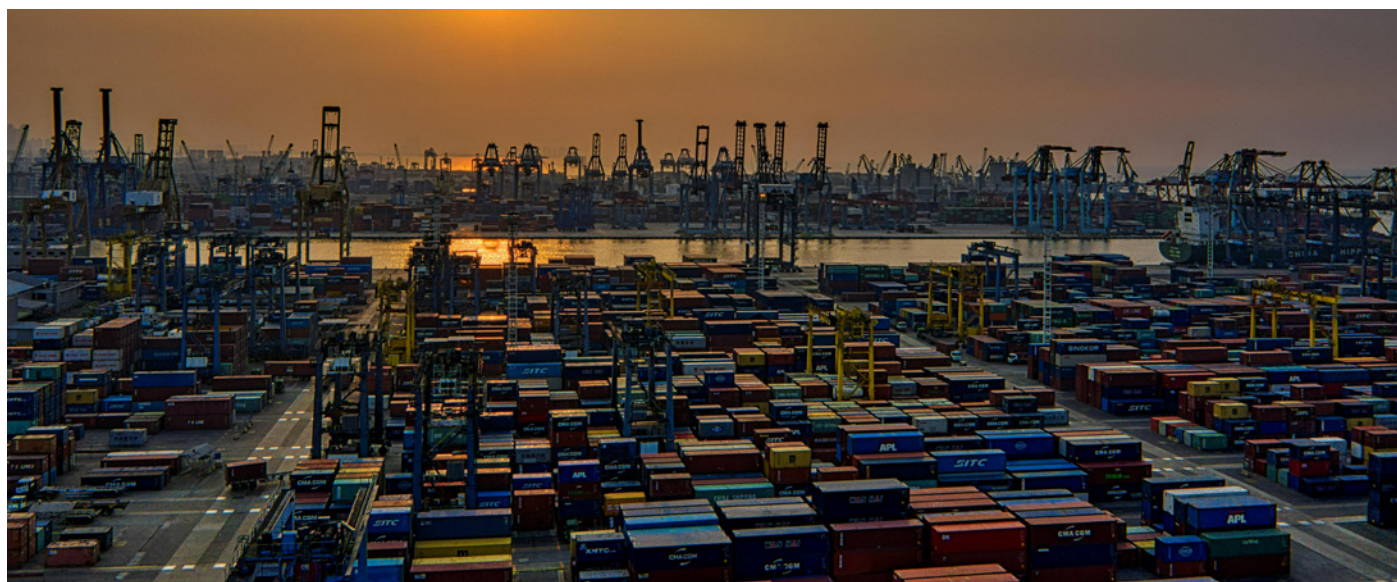


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CHINA SHOULD BE AN EXPORT PRIORITY, SAYS SIHLOBO

By: Francois Baird



China should be a priority for increased South African agricultural exports, according to agricultural economist Wandile Sihlobo.

A Sihlobo regularly advocates increasing food exports and expanding and diversifying the countries to which they are sold.

In a blog focusing on China, he pointed out the “tremendous potential” of that market and its 1.4 billion people. Despite the opportunities, South Africa has lagged other countries in gaining access to Chinese markets, and it was down at 32nd on the list of China’s agricultural suppliers.

“China’s top agricultural imports include oilseeds, meat, grains, fruits and nuts, cotton, beverages and spirits, sugar, wool, and vegetables. South Africa is already

an exporter of these products to various countries in the world and is producing surpluses for some.

“This means there is room to expand to China, especially as South Africa’s agricultural production continues to increase, with more volume expected in the coming years.”

Farmers were keen to export but needed more support from the government, Sihlobo said. South Africa should be arguing for a broad reduction in the import tariffs China imposed on some agricultural products from South Africa. Removing phytosanitary constraints in various products should be a key objective.

“There is room for more ambitious export efforts. Three government departments must lead the conversation – Trade, Industry and Competition; Agriculture; and International Relations and Cooperation.

“The South African authorities must continuously engage China to soften these barriers and encourage agricultural trade between our countries,” Sihlobo wrote.

South Africa’s agricultural exports to China dropped by 20% in the fourth quarter of last year, according to a trade brief published by the Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (BFAP).

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G20 PRESIDENCY A 'GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY' FOR SA AGRICULTURE

By: Francois Baird

South Africa's presidency of the G20 group of countries could be a defining moment for the country's agricultural sector, according to agricultural economist Thulasizwe Mkhabela.

Writing in Business Report, Mkhabela said the benefits could last long after South Africa's "year in the spotlight". The year-long leadership position started last December.

"The G20 presidency is a once-in-a-generation opportunity – not just for politicians and diplomats, but for farmers, agribusinesses, and rural communities. It's a chance to open new markets, drive sustainability, and build a more inclusive agricultural economy that leaves no farmer behind," he said.

"But opportunity alone isn't enough – it must be seized. South Africa's agricultural leaders, industry associations, and policymakers must work together to ensure agriculture is at the heart of South Africa's G20 agenda."

South Africa's agricultural success was "often a tale of two worlds", Mkhabela wrote – a highly developed, export-



oriented commercial sector, and a struggling smallholder sector on the margins of the economy. "Under its G20 presidency, South Africa should advocate for policies that foster access to markets, finance, and technology for smallholder farmers, with a particular focus on women and youth."

An inclusive agricultural sector could generate employment, alleviate rural poverty, and enhance food security, benefiting both South Africa and the continent.

Mkhabela noted the "increasingly strained relations" with the United States, and the risk of South Africa losing its trade

benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).

"But this is also where the G20 presidency offers an opportunity – to reframe South Africa not as a geopolitical pawn, but as a constructive global player. By leading on critical global issues – from climate action to food security – South Africa can demonstrate that its value to the global economy transcends politics.

"Smart, pragmatic diplomacy will be essential to balancing our non-aligned stance with the need to maintain economic ties to the world's largest economy," he said.

BIGGER IS BETTER, SAYS RAINBOW

By: Francois Baird

Rainbow CEO Marthinus Stander used the company announcement to further his argument that cheaper chicken results from the economies of scale of South Africa's large poultry producers. "Bigger is better", he told investors after the results presentation, News24reported.

Stander has argued consistently that large-scale integrated producers are essential to keeping retail chicken prices down. Integrated businesses range from feed and chick production to growing and processing chicken for the market.

This comes in response to an investigation by South Africa's Competition Commission into whether the industry's concentrated, integrated structure stifles competition. There has been speculation that the commission may recommend

the breakup of the largest poultry producers.

The poultry industry's aim should be to produce the cheapest products for local consumers, and breaking up big businesses would not serve this purpose, Stander told investors.

Speaking to News24 after the webcast, Stander said the large businesses operated on remarkably small profit margins, and it was even more difficult for small-scale poultry farmers.

He said small-scale farmers wouldn't be able to sustain themselves without large poultry players who provide day-old chicks and feed to them.

"The big players [on the other hand] will never be able to go into the really rural places and operate there, and there's the place for the smaller guys, but you need big to have small."

Stander said Rainbow was standing by to interact with the government over the competition inquiry.



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What is SMAT?

Smallholder Market Access Tracker (SMAT) is a tool that has been developed by the NAMC, with the help of a reference group, to measure the progress in the achievement of the market access goal for smallholder farmers in South Africa.

Why do we need SMAT?

Despite a number of interventions that seek to enhance market access (both locally and abroad) for farmers in the country, smallholder farmers still face barriers to entry into the mainstream marketing channels. Furthermore, there is no tool used currently to track market access for this group of farmers, hence there is a need for the SMAT tool.

Who is going to use SMAT?

The SMAT seeks to provide information to assist with policy debate and the formulation of more effective programmes towards achievement of market access. As such, the SMAT could be used (largely) by policymakers.

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