

Delegation meets-up with PSA enterprise development farmers

Gawie Geyer, CHIPS



A delegation comprising of the trustees of the Potato Industry Development Trust (PIDT), Potatoes South Africa Board directors, staff members of the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) and officials from the Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural Development recently visited five potato farmers in the Limpopo Province who are participating in Potatoes South Africa's enterprise development program.

The visit offered the delegation the opportunity to see for themselves the tremendous progress made by these farmers in becoming fully-fledged commercial potato farmers through their involvement in the said program. The visit was of special interest to the PIDT trustees who are entrusted with the responsibility to ensure that trust funds earmarked for transformation in the potato industry are well spent, as well as to the staff members of the NAMC who act as representatives of

the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. It was gladdening to hear the trustees, the NAMC staff members and the departmental officials expressing their satisfaction about the level of progress made by these farmers and especially in terms of the quality and quantity of the potatoes that came from the soil. Special tribute was also paid to the mentors of the farmers for their direct involvement and continuous advice which largely contributed to the success of these farmers.

During the three days visits were paid to the farming operations of Erence Phooko, Enos Mahwai, Aldrin Lawrence, Phophi Raletjena and Aubrey Ratjomane.

Erence Phooko



Erence Phooko is on his second year on the Enterprise Development Program, but also receives assistance from NTK as a Jobs Fund beneficiary as well as from the Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The

latter is currently busy installing a centre pivot and a reservoir for him. Potatoes South Africa is supporting him with seed for the planting of ten hectares of potatoes whilst the rest comes from NTK. In addition to the ten hectares, he plants additional hectares with potatoes on his own as well as other vegetables such as cabbage and butternuts. His previous yield was not that good with an average of about 32 tons harvested per hectare. He is hoping that this season will be better as he is now assisted by a dedicated mentor, Ron Gevers, with the day to day running of his operation. Based on what has been seen during the visit he will definitely do better this year in terms of yield.

He sells most of his potatoes to the Mozambican market as he finds it to be convenient because he does not have a pack house to further add value to his potatoes. He also sells some of his potatoes to the local shops and to some feeding schemes.

Erence Phooko's goal is to expand his farming operation to ultimately become a commercial farmer. As far as potatoes are concerned he would ideally like to plant about 100 hectares of potatoes.

Enos Mahwai



Enos Mahwai joined the enterprise development program two years ago. However, he is also being supported by NTK through their Jobs Fund. He gets seed support for ten hectares from Potatoes South Africa whereas the rest is supplied by

NTK comprising of a mixed loan and grant funding.

During the previous season Enos attained an average yield of 41 tons per hectare. He supplies his product to McCain Foods and the Mozambican market. He would also like to deliver potatoes to the fresh produce markets in the future as McCain Foods cannot take-up all the sizes. However, he currently does not have a pack house which forced him to put his goal on hold for now in terms of supplying the fresh produce markets.

His farming operation is currently hampered by an inadequate water supply, but it will be resolved in the near future as another borehole will be drilled soon. He has ambitions of expanding by 20 hectares in the coming season as there is a possibility of accessing more land in Limpopo's Blouberg area.

Aldrin Lawrence



Aldrin Lawrence farms in the Mara area of the Vhembe district. He currently farms with potatoes, butternut and sugar beans which he uses as rotational crops on his seven hectares field.

This is Aldrin's second year on the Enterprise Development Program in terms of which he received seed support for the seven hectares. With the assistance of his mentor, Japie van de Goot, he managed to attain an average yield of 61 tons per hectare which was sold at an average price of R3 500 per ton. He does his marketing in collaboration with his mentor and he

markets his potatoes through the Joburg, Tshwane, Durban and Welkom Markets.

Aldrin has his fair share of challenges, especially as far as mechanisation is concerned, but is in the fortunate position that he uses his mentor's machinery at a cost. The fact that he also does not have a store room to keep his fertilisers and chemicals is a further draw-back. He has an account with NTK and they supply him with all the necessary fertilisers and chemicals.

Aldrin Lawrence has definite plans to expand his production in the future.

Phophi Raletjena



Phophi Raletjena has been farming with potatoes on a limited scale for the past eight years. He started on the Enterprise Development Program eight years ago with just five hectares. His focus is not on potatoes only, he also farms with other crops

such as butternuts, peppadews, sweetcorn and maize. He currently has 271 hectares under production. Potatoes South Africa has been gradually increasing his hectares under production and is currently receiving support for 30 hectares. He is, however, planting additional hectares of potatoes using his own funds.

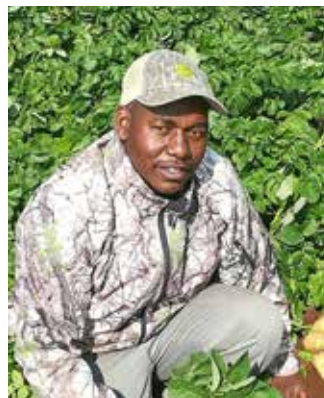
During the previous season he harvested an average of 52 tons per hectares and sold most of his produce unwashed to the Mozambican market at an average price of R3 800 per ton. He is considering marketing some of his potatoes through the Joburg and Tshwane Markets, but said that before doing so he will ensure that he is knowledgeable enough to do so.

Phophi has loan funding from the Land Bank which he used to buy his three tractors. He has also received a lot of funding for infrastructure from the Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. He has also been approved to receive loan funding from the AECl through the assistance of Potatoes South Africa that will be used in the next planting

season. Phophi has been using Freek Snyman as a mentor in the past, but as from next year Potatoes South Africa has assigned Ron Gevers as his mentor. He buys chemicals from Freek Snyman and the latter is still very much involved in terms of advising him as far as purchasing and applying the chemicals are concerned.

As a result of his commitments and the progress made with his potato business venture, Phophi Raletjena was announced as the first ever Enterprise Development Farmer of the Year at the recent Transformation Symposium that took place in Pretoria.

Aubrey Ratjomane



Aubrey Ratjomane started on the Enterprise Development program four years ago with five hectares of potatoes. He is currently planting 15 hectares of potatoes as he was identified as a candidate to participate in the

expansion program launched by Potatoes South Africa. He expressed his appreciation for the support he receives from Potatoes South Africa and believes that without this support, he would not be where he is today. He also receives some loan funding from the Land Bank and gets his chemicals and fertiliser from Novon.

Aubrey is mentored by his father, Solly Ratjomane, who is a well-known icon and commercial potato farmer from Limpopo. He believes that through his father's guidance, he was able to harvest 55 tons per hectare in the previous season. He markets his produce through the Joburg and Tshwane Markets where he received an average of R3 500 per ton. He also farms with cabbage and dry beans.

Aubrey Ratjomane has big plans for the future. He is eyeing a 330 hectare farm which is under irrigation, and if he is successful in obtaining this farm, he will definitely expand his production significantly. ©

