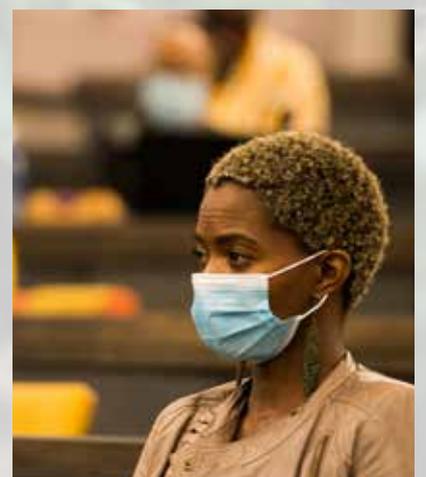


# #ALLSOIL #WFSISTAS







A photograph of a large greenhouse filled with rows of young green plants, likely seedlings, growing in a structured environment. The plants are arranged in neat rows, and the greenhouse structure is visible in the background. The lighting is soft and even, highlighting the vibrant green of the foliage.

To our Farmers, who feed the world.



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# Every Farmer Loves Her Soil



Ultimately, so does Corteva Agriscience. Our aim to provide farmers with the right tools and solutions to get the most out of their hectare. Every farmer's journey is essentially ours – we continuously strive to provide hands-on, trustworthy expertise and advice, ensuring that our crop protection and seed technologies are utilised to their full potential.

There is no doubt that women play a pivotal role in Africa's agricultural sector, growing just over 70% of the continent's food. Simply put, women are critical to feeding the world. Female farmers not only have the ability to produce and make money, but are also able to uplift their communities; ensuring that their employees and their families have access to education, healthcare and whatever else they need to enhance their livelihoods and not just survive but thrive.

## **#EmpowerHer**

While approximately 50% of the agricultural workforce in Southern Africa countries is female, the gender and economic divide between men and women farmers still prevails. This has unfortunately been exacerbated by the impacts of the pandemic, where women have been the most vulnerable to its effects, in particular, reduced economic security and an increase in unpaid care work.

In an effort to bridge this gap, Corteva is fully committed to engaging and supporting these women across the globe – from large to subsistence farms. This forms an integral part of our 2030 sustainable goals as well as the Africa Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 and United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which both aspire to achieve food security and gender equality in Africa's agricultural sector.

To say that we are honoured to be in the company of such talented, driven women through the Corteva Women Agripreneur Programme, is an understatement. We are more than confident that you will take the business, leadership and management skills you've acquired forward, as you network, engage and grow the industry, enabling inclusivity and robust food systems and security.

## **On a grassroots level...**

The concept – "it takes one to grow one" reigns true. Ensuring that girls take an active interest in agriculture from a young age is imperative to building a sustainable talent pipeline. If agriculture can form part of the curriculum from as early as primary school, the love of soil can be engrained in young minds, and a strong foundation can be built for ongoing learning and success. As exemplary role-models, we know that you will inspire others to pursue careers in the sector, and will also be well-positioned to shape industry policy and meaningful change.

What else is extraordinary about you? An entrepreneurial spirit that never falters, despite possible obstacles. The agricultural sector requires tenacity, resilience, contingency planning and a passion for the earth and environment. As we partner going forward, remember that we have learnt just as much from you, as you have from the facilitators of this programme. Fundamentally, we at Corteva are driven by our purpose to enrich the lives of those who produce and those who consume, and as such, we understand that, in order to grow, we must work together.

## ***Subbaro Koli***

*President Africa Middle East Corteva Agriscience™*

# Reaping the Rewards of Knowledge Sharing



When embarking on this programme, we knew that the aim would be to impart leadership and management skills, business competencies and the tools required to network with other farmers and key sector stakeholders. What we didn't realise, was what we would learn from you, and your experiences as dynamic, talented, agriculture entrepreneurs.

Here is some of the knowledge you have passed on to us that we will certainly be taking forward across our ongoing empowerment initiatives:

## **1. Value your support system and become someone else's**

The support and motivation from family members, colleagues and other role models can prove invaluable, especially when overcoming challenges or during times when you feel like giving up or financial constraints get the best of you. This can come in the form of advice, financial assistance or emotional support. What's imperative here, is to "pay it forward" by sharing your success with others – through capacity building and training or supply chain and employment opportunities. This way, a number of livelihoods can be positively impacted for many generations to come. The main lesson? "Lean in" by putting your best foot forward but also

"lean on" others for assistance when you need it.

## **2. Grow as you go**

Taking small systematic steps with set milestones is an effective way to reach the goals you have set out. Don't take things too fast or rush to get there. In addition, there is always an opportunity to acquire new skills or learn more about cutting-edge techniques or technologies. Never be afraid of hard work; farmers throughout history have tirelessly dedicated themselves to their fields and persevered in order to secure our future. It is critical to embrace these qualities, and learn from those before us, in order to further enrich lives.

## **3. Take risks... (calculated ones)**

The reality is that farming is a risky business. Taking a risk is ok as long as it is underpinned by scenario planning and mitigation measures. The pandemic has undoubtedly shown that certain aspects are out of our control, however, agricultural insurance, expert agronomist advice, effective hybrid seeds that are pest and drought resistant and sustainable farming measures can all assist in building long-term resilience. A robust sector also means economic stability, job creation and GDP growth. Having said this, it is also clear that some of you took a life-changing leap of faith, which certainly paid-off in the end and inspired many to do the same.

As you emerge from this programme, return to your soil and continue with your various business ventures, we would like to thank you for being a part of this informative journey and for always being authentic in who you are and what you want to achieve. Remember, Corteva will always be available to guide and advise, providing the right products and solutions that will help you to make the most of your yield, while being productive, profitable and sustainable.

### ***Tony Esmeraldo***

*Business Leader Southern Africa Corteva Agriscience™*

Dear Corteva Soil Sista

The time has come for you to Go out there and Flourish.

It has been an honour to have you participate in the inaugural Corteva Agriscience Women in Agripreneur Programme in Africa Middle East. Women around the world are having a material impact on a way of life that is largely perceived as male dominated.

Empowering women farmers and encouraging more young women to build careers in agriculture are central to our mission at Corteva Agriscience. To better understand the status of women farmers around the world and to create a baseline from which we can measure growth in the future, we commissioned a study in 2018 to look at the lives and concerns of women in agriculture in 17 countries across five regions of the world. Our 'Global Women in Agriculture' study found that while women are overwhelmingly proud to be in agriculture, they perceive widespread discrimination regardless of geography, ranging from 78 percent who feel that way in India to 52 percent in the United States.

Only half of the women farmers surveyed around the world said they are equally successful as their male counterparts, and just 42 percent expressed that women and men are given the same opportunities in general. About a third of respondents said it will take a decade or longer before women begin to reach a level of parity with male farmers. Another key finding of our study included a significant gap in salary. In fact, 40 percent of women farmers globally reported earning significantly lower income than their male counterparts.

Closely related, 36 percent of women farmers felt that they had less access to financing than male farmers, and larger numbers felt that a lack of agriculture training available to women was a major inhibitor to growth and success. In fact, the desire for training emerged as the most cited need among the respondents for removing gender inequality obstacles. The numbers significantly exceeded 50 percent for all 17 countries with Brazil, Nigeria, Kenya, Mexico, and South Africa citing the highest need for training.

It is in the spirit and in response to the survey that we launched the training program in South Africa – as on-the-ground training and assistance are needed. This is an opportunity for Corteva and you to make a difference and change the world of agriculture. One woman, one farmer, one community leader and mentor at a time.

Corteva Soil Sista ...It is Time to Shine the Spotlight



on Women in agriculture. Why? You may be wondering...Women's contributions in agribusiness have never been more needed. Women are critical not just for the success of our company but to feeding the world – as such Corteva ensures that women across the world have the tools they need to be successful. Women can produce and be profitable, but also uplift their communities with the right resources.

In fact, consider the following realities. About 7.7 billion people around the world are aspiring for sustenance from agriculture. Over the next 30 years, that number will likely jump by another 2.5 billion people. It's more than a social and economic issue, although those are extremely important in themselves. At the end of the day, it's about sustaining healthy, productive, and nutritious lives for everyone on the planet.

We are inspired by all your amazing stories and by your commitment to agriculture. Congratulations on your graduation and all the best in your businesses!

Sincerely  
**Betty Kiplagat**  
*Industry and Government Affairs Leader  
Corteva Agriscience Africa Middle East*



The Entrepreneurship Development Academy (EDA) at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) was strategically formed to grow and foster entrepreneurial thinking, to encourage and shift mindsets around entrepreneurship, and to facilitate the development of entrepreneurial skills through purpose-driven education and training. The EDA specialises in developing entrepreneurs, enabling business owners to navigate the challenges of running businesses and equipping them to grow sustainable enterprises. In addition, we partner with companies to implement their Enterprise and Supplier Development (ESD) initiatives as a means to contribute to economic development.

We firmly believe in entrepreneurs and the important work that they do in creating jobs, developing communities, building the economy, and inspiring others to follow in their brave footsteps. Many people hold the belief that entrepreneurs are born, but we believe that they are bred. Grit, resilience, and determination can be developed over time and the skills needed to successfully run a business venture can be taught. Nobody is born knowing how to balance a spreadsheet or how to create marketing campaigns to reach and engage

with their target audience. Entrepreneurship, therefore, can and should be taught.

Since its establishment in 2012, the EDA has delivered customised solutions in the areas of entrepreneurship promotion and ESD. Entrepreneurship is widely regarded as an integral component of economic development. For entrepreneurship to thrive, the right ingredients must be in place. It is critical that a robust support framework is created and maintained. A healthy entrepreneurial ecosystem requires an enabling regulatory environment and a culture that is supportive of entrepreneurial activity to flourish and generate productive entrepreneurship.

To amplify entrepreneurial growth and activity, we must also enable a shift in mindset by encouraging entrepreneurial aspiration, particularly for women and youth. It is widely acknowledged that women face more challenges than men. They must deal with the effects of social conditioning, inherent biases, and lack of access to opportunities. It is therefore critical that we must encourage and capacitate women and girls to embrace entrepreneurial ventures, in their family

environments, their education and their careers.

The National Development Plan (NDP), South Africa's blueprint for eliminating poverty and reducing inequality by 2030, positions agriculture as a key sector that has the potential to create approximately one million jobs by 2030. The NDP further emphasises the importance of commercial agriculture for job creation, noting that it has the potential to create 250 000 direct jobs and a further 130 000 indirect jobs. According to the International Finance Corporation (IFC), Africa's agriculture and agribusiness markets are expected to triple to reach \$1 trillion in value by 2030. This demonstrates the need for new investments to grow the sector and achieve desired output.

In 2017, 4 034 women actively ran farms in South Africa, which translates to one out of every 10 farmers in the country. An estimated 60–80% of smallholder farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa are women – therefore empowering and investing in women, specifically in rural areas, will significantly increase productivity while reducing hunger and malnutrition. Despite women's significant representation, it is widely acknowledged that women in the agricultural sector are not equal to their male peers in terms of economic return and employment. Women are less literate than men and they are also paid less in agricultural jobs compared to men. Transformation of the agriculture sector is critical to ensure that women-owned agribusinesses can thrive and become sustainable, thus enabling them to fully participate in this key economic sector. Furthermore, investments in the development of women-owned agricultural enterprises may yield economic benefits for the women themselves, and also for their households and communities. Research shows that women make critical contributions to agricultural and rural economies in developing countries. Women in rural areas are often responsible for managing complex households and deriving their livelihoods from a variety of sources. This means that most women farmers face more challenges than their male counterparts in growing viable agricultural enterprises.

Through its partnership with Corteva Agriscience, the EDA has designed and is implementing a comprehensive development programme aimed at capacitating a cohort of 35 women entrepreneurs in the agriculture sector with business management, leadership, and entrepreneurial skills. While the programme design allows for the content to be delivered online (the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated the ability to present the programme in a blended format), this has not impeded the facilitation of peer learning and support. Our experience with running programmes of this nature bears testament to the importance of these

elements, especially for women who own and run businesses in traditionally male-dominated sectors. While the current programme is a pilot initiative, we hope to expand its reach and extract key lessons for delivering similar development programmes in the agriculture sector in the future.

We would like to acknowledge and thank Corteva Agriscience for the role it is playing in advancing women's entrepreneurial activity in agriculture. Through its commitment to this cause, Corteva Agriscience is positively impacting the lives and businesses of these programme participants. It is our hope that this initiative will equip these women farmers with the necessary tools to grow their enterprises so that they might contribute to economic growth and create much-needed jobs.

***Miranda Hosking***

*Managing Executive: Social Education  
Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS)*

# Roundtable Speaker: Ndidi Nwuneli

Starting a new venture is not an easy feat. It is like embarking on an adventure, unclear about the path and with no guarantee of success. However, it is an extremely rewarding adventure – one that allows you to create a job for yourself and countless others – and also to transform industries and communities.

From my experiences as a social entrepreneur, who has started five ventures and helped others start over 20, I would like to suggest five critical steps to consider – which will not only ease the start-up phase, but also increase your chances of success.

**First, test your motivation:** Ensure that your motivations are aligned with and rooted in God's plan for your life and that they clearly reflect Christian values of honesty and integrity. The reality is that if God has not sent you, He will not equip you, and you will struggle. Consider a few questions:

1. What are you passionate about? What gets you excited? If you are still unclear about what you are most passionate about, make a list of the things in life that make you angry! Rank them in order of priority! What problem do you intend to solve? What value can you create? Enduring businesses must solve problems and create value in society! (In my case, the high rates of malnutrition and postharvest losses in Nigeria made me so angry that I decided to partner with my husband to start AACE Foods – [aacefoods.com](http://aacefoods.com) to produce nutritious food for Nigerians)
2. When you pray about this opportunity, do you feel at peace? Of course, you have to walk closely enough with God, that you can distinguish His voice from all others.
3. Is this the right time? Are there any signs from God that indicate that this is the right time to pursue the opportunity? Are there unexplained coincidences such as people popping into your life, open doors, and unsolicited advice that is surprising on-point
4. Do your close friends and family members think that this is a good move? (Only talk to two or three close and consistent family members and friends who have always told you the truth, even when it hurts!) If you do not have a prayer partner, it may be wise to find one. Consistent spiritual support is critical to success.
5. Are you prepared to remain committed to God and humble in spite of any success?



**Second, write down your plan:** The popular quote by Benjamin Franklin is so true – “If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail!” Take the time to outline the:

- **Mission of your venture** – your purpose (For example: AACE's Foods mission is to provide nutritious and tasty food products made from the best of West Africa's fruits, herbs, cereals and vegetables.)
- **Vision for your venture** – your desired end state (For example: AACE Foods' vision is to be the preferred provider of food in West Africa, thereby contributing significantly to the improved nutritional status of our people, and better the livelihoods of our farmers.)
- **Values** – your enduring principles (For example: AACE Foods' values are Proudly West African, Quality Products, Cost & Time Efficiency, Continuous Improvement and Accountability)

In addition, develop a high-level business plan which outlines your product/service offerings, an assessment of the marketplace and competitive

landscape, your operations, marketing and human resources strategies, your financial plan, risks and mitigation strategies and your growth strategy. This plan will not only serve as an excellent internal communication tool, but would also enable you to effectively engage Board members and investors. (Check out <http://www.myownbusiness.org/s2/> or <http://www.entrepreneur.com/businessplan/index.html> for a step-by-step guide for developing a compelling business plan)

### **Third, carefully build a dream team:**

Entrepreneurship is a very lonely journey, and there are so many hurdles, especially in challenging environments such as our own. As a result, every entrepreneur needs a committed Board, an outstanding team and a range of supporters inside and outside the industry.

Instituting a Board of Directors from inception always differentiates a one-woman-business from an enduring enterprise. A strong board enhances your credibility, provides advice and support and challenges you to aim high and achieve results. This group should consist of a respected lawyer, financing/accounting guru, branding/communications expert and a subject matter expert who understands the industry and can complement your skills. In AACE Foods' case, we are blessed with exceptional Board members who have significant food technology and quality control experience, given that my husband and I do not have this background. (Get a copy of LEAP's book – "Get on Board – A Practical Guide for Building a High Impact Board of Directors – [www.leapafrika.org](http://www.leapafrika.org))

Beyond your Board, constitute your start-up team carefully. Institute a screening process to ensure that the first set of team members share your values of hard work and integrity. Invest in on the job training. Also carefully select your suppliers, distributors, and even your customers and clients.

**Fourth, ensure financial discipline in all aspects of your operations:** Many entrepreneurs believe erroneously that money will solve all of their problems. The truth is that it is prudent to make mistakes with a little money – instead of taking a big bet with large amounts of money. Start small and grow organically. Pay yourself a salary from day 1, and separate your personal funds from your company's funds. Keep your financial records diligently, as this lays the foundation for the inflow of significant capital when you are ready to absorb it.

AACE Foods commitment to financial discipline, our regular financial audits and our clear systems and structures for financial management and controls, enabled us to raise money from friends and investors early in our history and have positioned us

to attract local and international support.

**Fifth, proactively respond to change:** As an entrepreneur operating in a dynamic environment, it is important to recognize that your market changes every day, and you have to be poised to respond appropriately. Becoming a proactive entrepreneur instead of reactive one, requires that you always have a plan A, B and C, to respond to shifts in the market dynamics.

For example, AACE Foods introduced jams as our first product line in the Nigerian retail space. We believed that Nigerians would enjoy pineapple, mango, guava and even papaya jam. Sadly, the price of sugar, which is a key ingredient in jam, doubled a few months into our venture, making our product uncompetitive relative to imports. We were compelled to swiftly shift to our plans for year 3, which consisted of producing spices sourced from local farmers for fast food chains, noodle companies, and for retail. Today, AACE Foods produces spices and seasonings for the institutional and retail markets, and we have recently introduced a range of nutritious meals for the whole family.

As you embark on this adventure – I strongly believe that you will succeed if you follow these five simple steps: 1) check that you are motivated by a desire to solve a problem and create value, that is rooted in God's plan for your life, 2) plan effectively – develop a mission, vision, values and a clear business plan 3) carefully build a dream team, composed of a strong board and committed employees 4) Institute effective financial management systems and structures and finally 5) remain proactive, developing and implementing new and exciting strategies to respond to changes in the marketplace!

I wish you tremendous success and favor as you start this critical journey!!! Enjoy the ride!!!

# Feedback from Facilitators on the Corteva Women Agripreneur Programme

"It was an absolute privilege and inspiration to be part of such a phenomenal opportunity and such an incredible group of women! So courageous, dedicated, and hard-working! Thank you for allowing me to learn with and from them too!"

**-Melanie van Biljon (Faculty)**

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"As a facilitator, what I enjoyed was observing just how well online learning worked. Having so many women listening to like-minded challenges, and coming up with joint solutions, all from the comfort of their offices, cars, and homes.

Thank you Corteva!"

**-Ian Rheeder (Faculty)**

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"My experience was positive, and I did find them quiet engaging. They did not battle with the materials online - they seemed to be able to follow it well. When we had the Mentorship briefing, I found them hungry to learn, and seemed committed to develop their businesses. Also, from the feedback I am getting from the mentors through the BDP process, I think most of them take their business seriously, despite the challenges they find themselves in as SME's"

**-Dr. Gloria Mbokota (Faculty)**

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"As a mentor, the journey with the mentees was an inspiring experience to see their determination to find their voices and occupy spaces that are mainly male dominated. It was humbling to witness their openness to embrace the economic disruptions due to covid-19 and find opportunities despite the challenges to succeed against all odds"

**-Tumi Moloto (Mentor)**

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"My experience of the women: I am inspired by how some of them started their businesses from the need when they were retrenched in 2020 and embraced every aspect of the programme to structure their businesses from scratch. This has made me realise and possibly confirm that with the correct and committed support, many people WILL succeed"

**-Queen Ramotsehoa (Mentor)**

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"It has been an absolute pleasure to have worked with such a determined, involved, confident and eager to learn group of women entrepreneurs. It's been a teaching and learning journey from both sides. I strongly believe that things can only get better for them, moving forward"

**-Dr Yonela Njisane (Coach)**

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"They thrive and are very eager to learn new things, new Agricultural vocabulary, new terminologies, new concepts and or unfamiliar concepts in Agriculture that they were not aware of. I found that very profound. For an example: During our first engagement with the farmers in May, they were intrigued by this new concept of SA-GAP. During our second presentation they asked several questions on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process as well as on the issues of Water Use Licensing - processes and procedures. This therefore made me conclude that we are dealing with very intelligent farmers who listen attentively, who are eager to learn new things in Agriculture to take their business to the next level"

**-Zodwa Phakedi (Coach)**



# Our #SoilSistas

# Alisha Kalicharan

## No regrets as couple dive headfirst into poultry farming



Alisha Kalicharan took a huge risk when she jumped into the agriculture sector. The risk is now starting to pay off.

When Alisha Kalicharan and her husband Vishaal both lost their jobs in 2018, they decided to bet all their resources on their dream venture – a farm. Three years and many obstacles later, their poultry business, ADK Poultry, is starting to thrive.

Before Kalicharan (39) became a dedicated poultry farmer, she was a chef by profession. Her career in hospitality led her out of the kitchen and into the office, where she learnt to manage budgets and sharpened her overall business skills. These are the skills she now wields to help get her Gauteng-based poultry farm off the ground.

"We combined the best of what we both know. He [Vishaal] was in chickens all his life and I can

manage the finance side of things and running the business. We took the combination of what we both knew best, used it to our advantage and decided to go into business on our own farm."

Kalicharan says that their farm was supposed to be a retirement of sorts. They rented the farm, based in Magaliesburg in Gauteng, while they were still employed. "At the time we lost our jobs, it was a case of 'do we find other jobs, or do we take the risk?' These plans were already in motion, but we wanted to start while we were both working, then build it slowly. Unfortunately, it did not work out that way."

Like all other business ventures, launching a farming operation costs money, money the Kalicharans did not have.

"At the time, neither of us had any kind of money. There were very minimal savings. We literally went in on a hope and a prayer. I thought if this is what I am meant to do, the universe and God will make a plan."

Commercial banks were not an option for her, as they only fund up to 70% of business. This pushed Kalicharan and her husband towards the Land and Agricultural Development Bank of South Africa, otherwise known as the Land Bank. Their application took over a year to be approved. In that year, she baked biscuits to help them survive.

"My husband became a biscuit assistant. He learnt how to decorate biscuits, because we were selling biscuits in bulk," she says, laughing.

### **Taken in by an unscrupulous contractor**

When she finally received the funding from the Land Bank, the Kalicharans suffered a serious setback. The contractor she hired to build the chicken houses "ducked and ran" with the deposit of R1.5 million that she paid him. "He left and we had to take legal action against him to try and get back some of that money."

They were only ever able to retrieve R25 0 000 of the amount paid to him. Luckily for her there was loads of material on site for the building of the coups. Ironically, the new contractor she hired was someone she met through the old one. He empathised with her situation and offered his help.

"When we told him what happened, he said 'Listen, I'm going to come and I'm going to help you. Let's

see what we can do'. And that started the long journey of getting the chicken houses built. We finally got into operation on the 29 July 2020, a day I would never forget."

She draws inspiration from the can-do attitude of farmers around her, and is impressed with their positive, solutions-based thinking.

Kalicharan says that, while farming is a very male-dominated sector, working as a woman in farming has not really presented any additional challenges for her. She works in tandem with her husband, and between the two of them, they keep their business fairly balanced.

"A lot of the times I count myself blessed that I have a male counterpart that I trust and that has my best interest at heart. We basically bounce off against each other. In our commercial space, there are people who would rather deal with me, and some would rather deal with him."

She lists the challenge of further funding as her biggest issue in the sector. "Commercial banks will help you, provided you have a certain percentage [of money], and that percentage is quite big. With government funding, the process is slow. I have had people who said to me that I was lucky to be approved after a year. Many people don't hear from them [Land Bank], or it takes three or four years to be approved."

### **A passion for farming**

For Kalicharan, the warmth and sense of community within her region made her love farming even more. She draws inspiration from the can-do attitude

of farmers around her, and is impressed with their positive, solutions-based thinking.

"When I moved into the farming space, that's the thing that took me most by surprise. Working in hospitality, you are exposed to the worst of people. You lose all faith in people. But we moved into a full-on farming community. There are all types of farmers, and everyone looks at you as a farmer first."

Kalicharan says that her biggest regret is not having the courage to go into farming earlier.

### **Alisha Kalicharan's advice for women who start farming:**

Always be thirsty for knowledge: "I came from a completely different space, but compared to a year and a half ago, I understand more technical things about running the business. You learn on the job."

Go for it! "As women in business and farming, we have the natural traits of patience, organisation and perseverance. Those are all the things you need for going into agriculture. You're going to need to persevere against all the adversity. I had so many things thrown at me in that first year. But life happens. It's how you deal with it that makes who you are.



# Boitumelo Modisane

## Step aside, sexist brothers. Boitumelo is here to stay!



Come hell or high water, Boitumelo Modisane was determined to become a livestock farmer. Growing up on a farm near Rustenburg in North West, she made some U-turns in fashion in marketing, but in the end she could no longer ignore the cattle's call.

Looking back, she remembers the Modisane family as very traditional. She was always aware of her expected gender role. "But growing up, seeing my dad doing what he does best as an entrepreneur and a professional, I was always so inquisitive in this boys' area of farming, wanting to drive a tractor, being hands on."

Despite this, Modisane (now 40), ended up studying both fashion and marketing. The birth of her first child, however, brought some perspective.

It was in 2005 that she gave birth to her son, spending her maternity leave at her parents' home. Around the same time, her parents went on holiday, leaving her to run their agricultural enterprise.

"So in the mornings, I would leave my newborn baby with the helper and go and open up for the

livestock.

"I would go and make sure that I drop water and feed for them. I was back in this farming world and by 2008 I had already made my decision that, whether I liked it or not, [farming] is something I would not run away from."

Modisane says at the time her father, Tim Modisane, was hesitant about her choosing agriculture. As a traditionalist, he feared for her future marriage prospects should she venture into farming. "This was in 2008. I then went back to corporate."

### Taking charge of her dream

It took another seven years of corporate life before she heeded the call to farm.

"I always knew that I would fall back into this [livestock farming]. Sometime after I got married, I said to my husband, 'You know what? It's time for us to buy livestock.'"

Modisane's husband did not understand her desire, but her passion soon won him over. She did not want to live with any regrets, and used all available cash to spend at livestock auctions with her father.

"That's the day that made me who I am today. I remember sitting with my dad on the auction grand stands. He said, 'Are you not buying too much? You need to call your husband.' I said to him, 'No. It doesn't matter.' I did not feel wrong about my actions. I felt like this is what I always needed to do."

After she bought her herd at one of the auctions, Modisane found that 11 of the heifers were pregnant. "Seven months later, those 11 [cows] gave us 12 [calves]. That is when I started to understand that this is a ministry. It's something that is connected to you in spirit. Ever since that day, my herd continued growing."

"I was motivated by the rejection; by the fact that our society does not believe that women can do this."

### Starting a company

As her herd grew, Modisane knew she wanted to go into meat processing. She told her dad about her new goal, but he was sceptical.

"He said, 'It's just too much work for a girl.' I love those challenges, because we are raised to

understand that we are only limited to [certain things]. For me, everything came with no limits."

Modisane wanted to share her passion for livestock farming with other people. She started a company.

"Green Pastures Legacy started as a crowd-farming platform. I learnt, though, that as much as the vision is yours and the objective is yours, not everyone shares the same values. That's why in 2019, I decided that the crowd-farming model no longer works. Green Pastures Legacy is now just a commercial farming business."

### **Breaking down barriers**

Of course, no farming operation is without challenges.

Modisane was just happy that she started her operation before the Covid-19 pandemic started. "Had it come at a point where I was still procrastinating, it would have been a very bad season. But it came at a point where I already started the business. So I had financial peace of mind."

When she first entered the livestock farming sector, she found that she often experienced rejection just because she is a woman. She was not deterred, however, and instead used the sexism she experienced to motivate herself even more.

"I was motivated by the rejection; by the fact that our society does not believe that women can do this. I was motivated by rejection from my fellow brothers.

"When you are a girl child, you are always shut

away. When you are a girl child asking questions [about farming], there is red tape, marking this as a man's territory. That is what drove me. Every negative opinion made me wonder. It made me ask, 'Why am I not allowed?'"

Now, as an established farmer, she is no longer experiencing that type of rejection.

"The challenges now are a lack of rain, droughts, and livestock illnesses. In winter, theft is also a challenge. And, what Covid has brought, is poverty and desperation, so people are trying to take our stock. We have had to tag our stock and increase our security."

### **Boitumelo Modisane's hard-won advice**

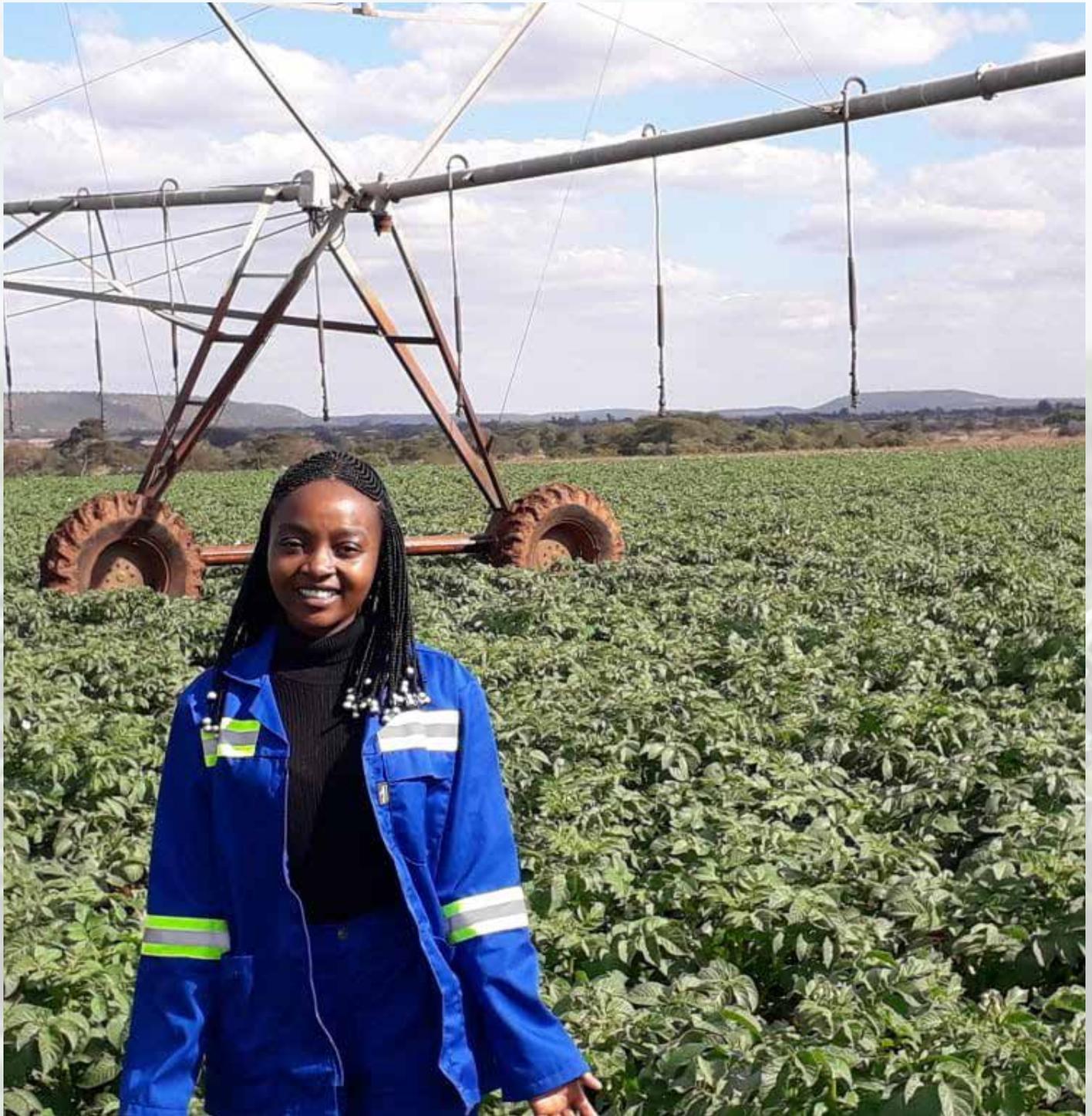
Modisane has plenty of advice for women going into the livestock farming industry, including the following:

1. Know your market and know the kind of breed you are keeping: Understanding the value of your breed and the market you are selling to, is vital to the success of your business.
2. Understand your climactic conditions: Ask yourself questions about where you are based, questions like, "Is there enough rain? What is the drought capacity of this land? And what kind of grass would you plant in your arable land?"
3. What kind of diseases could your cattle get? Livestock farmers need to know when to dip their animals, how to treat them or get help when they are ailing, etc.
4. Patience pays: There is money in this business, but do not rush the money. You need to be patient. Do not look at the money pot. If you do, you are going to feel like you aren't doing enough.



# Cleopatra Banda

Entrepreneur helps female farmers thrive



Marginalised women face a variety of challenges, including a lack of information. Cleopatra Banda is setting out to change that in agriculture.

For Cleopatra Banda (26), empowering women is at the center of everything she does as an entrepreneur in the agriculture space.

Born and raised in Zimbabwe, Banda moved to South Africa in 2017. She pitched her idea to Orange

Corners, an entrepreneurship support initiative of the Dutch government. When it was approved, she set out to expand her business idea with the support and guidance of this lean startup program.

Her business, called Dijo Seed Group, operates in Lydenburg in Mpumalanga. The company farms with seed potato and sweet potato vines, and also offers extension services and market linkages. "Our markets are in Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and

we are looking forward to opening a new market in Botswana."

Banda's decision to go into farming came from her need to help women in the agricultural sector, especially marginalised smallholder farmers. "These women are unsung heroines who feed their families and take care of them through agriculture," she says.

She finds that often what these women are missing is the knowledge they need to farm successfully, as well as the finance to grow their businesses. "The reason why these women are not successful in farming is because they do not have the right information and training, which is the gap my business came to close. They also do not have access to funding to produce on a bigger scale, [and need] help with [documentation] for banks and other commercial facilities who require formal documents."

Farming is universally acknowledged as a sector that requires passion and commitment from those wanting to succeed in it. As an entrepreneur who chose farming as her field of business, Banda is no exception. "Farming is all around us. [From] the moment you wake up, the sheets you slept on, someone farmed that cotton. Agriculture is all around us. That's what I love about it the most. It's the drive of most African economies, providing livelihoods to many households."

### **Farming as a woman entrepreneur**

Farming is known to be a difficult industry to work in. For women, it can be especially hard. Banda says that in this day and age, women are still discriminated against in the agricultural sector. "I walk into a meeting and the room is full of men who are asking me who I came with. Because it's so male-dominated, we haven't yet reached a stage where women are taken seriously."

She faces other challenges as well, like language barriers and a lack of knowledge amongst her clients. "[For example] doing business in Mozambique where the major language is Portuguese, this restricts the flow of business."

Despite the challenges, Banda still manages to draw inspiration from the sector. She cites other women agripreneurs as her inspiration. "This was once an industry exclusive to men. The only serious women you would find were just smallholder farmers. Now, we are taking over!"

### **Cleopatra Banda's advice for female agripreneurs**

The challenges Banda faced became important business lessons for her. Among those lessons are the following:

1. Planning: "Business planning is important, and

so is hiring the right people with the skills to cover the gaps," she says. In Banda's case, that gap was the language barrier for her market in Mozambique. This challenge showed her just how vital proper planning and market research is.

2. Stand fast against discrimination: "I have to stand tall for what I believe. I am a woman and I can be successful in agriculture," she says. Despite the changing landscape of agriculture, the sector is still largely male-dominated. Women moving into the sector need to be even more determined to achieve their goals, due to the discrimination they may face.
3. Her final advice to female entrepreneurs? "Go for it now. Don't doubt or second-guess yourself. Agriculture is the industry of the future and the future is now."

# Dipitseng Manamela

## Agriculture is the answer for this mixed farmer



For Dipitseng Manamela, the Covid-19 lockdown was the trigger she needed to move into agriculture.

Dipitseng Manamela grew up farming. As a young child in Limpopo, she would help her father on his subsistence farm, planting vegetables and other crops every season. "When he passed on last year in June, I thought to myself, 'Are we letting this go or is there something we can do?' And that's how I started."

Manamela started "AgriHlash", a mixed farming operation she runs the business with her sister, Mogadi. She says that, while AgriHlash is still very small scale, they are currently looking for opportunities to grow.

"When we opened [AgriHlash] to do farming, [we did it] with the intention of purchasing a farm. We did [in fact] purchase one, but later discovered that it was part of the land reclaiming process, so we cancelled the deal. For now, we [continue] farming

in the village we come from."

With both an undergraduate and honours degree in microbiology, as well as a master's degree in environmental science, Manamela's main business is environmental management. She started her career as a scientist in 2008 at the Department of Water Affairs, and worked for close to a decade in both the public and corporate sectors. In 2016, four years before she started the farming business, she put together her own consultation company called Dihlashana Consulting Corporation.

"At this moment, I can say the [environmental] business is bringing in a lot of income, which can help me invest in and grow the other [agricultural] one."

Even though the agricultural business is fairly new, Manamela does not count it as a side hustle. "[Mogadi and I] share the duties. It's not something we can say we do in our spare time, honestly because we've got two employees. There is not time when there is nothing [to do] at all."

### **The challenge of farming**

For Manamela, her father's death was not the only motivator for her to journey back into farming. The Covid-19 lockdowns changed her perspective on the work she was doing as an environmental consultant.

"When you are locked down, you start to ask questions. 'Am I in the right business if I am unable to operate?' And for us, it was [that] the business was delayed. We started working at level three, but the question was, should something like this happen again, are we going to find ourselves crying the same tears? What else can one do? And, added to that, my father also passed away. And I was like 'agriculture is the answer'."

Still, subsistence farming is somewhat different to farming commercially. Manamela, who is farming on communal land, cites access to land as one of the biggest challenges, a challenge exacerbated by gender politics.

"Very recently, I was asked for my divorce certificate because people were challenging my reasons using that farm. I just left abruptly, and I didn't respond. But I found it to be a barrier. I don't understand why I should be struggling to get land in the community that I grew up in."

She says that her great grandfather was one of the people in the region who contributed to the purchase of the communal land, and she does not see why she should continue to struggle.

"It is because I am woman. My brother is not struggling. So, by them asking for the divorce certificate, they are challenging [my right to farm here]. I cannot use the land when I am married, and I find it to be very unfair."

#### **Advice for other women**

Manamela sees piggery and poultry in the near future of her farming operation. She says, while they have farmed with chickens before, it was not something that they have the capacity to do full-time as yet.

"It's something I do in December [when] the demand is high. I always plan for eight weeks and I start on 5th December. I purchase the chicks prior to that to make sure that they are ready for the market in December. But the vegetables are continuous. That is full time."

While she would like to access a bigger market, Manamela is very practical when it comes to what her business can offer, something she says other women farmers need to think about as well. "If I have 2000 chickens and I'm say to Pick n Pay 'I want to supply you', they won't take me seriously. I need to be honest with myself."

Her advice is simple. "Acknowledge the size of your organisation. [Many] women want to do business with big corporates without understanding the quantities big corporates require. So, either collaborate with other women or look for a different market. Of course, all of us, we want to grow, we want to attract big corporates, but let's be fair to ourselves and to the corporates. [We should also] collaborate as women, so we can attract a bigger market."



# Disebo Makatsa-Soka

## Farmer Disebo Makatsa is building a legacy



Determined to leave a legacy of generational wealth, Free State farmer Disebo Makatsa is expanding her business, for herself and for her children. She is paying forward the lessons that she learned from her own mother.

When Disebo Makatsa (55) went to study at what is now Central University of Technology in Bloemfontein, she did not expect to end up in agriculture. The mother of three obtained a bachelor's degree in psychology, business management and African languages, and went on to lecture at the university for another two years.

Her journey into farming started around the year 2000, when she worked a small plot on a commonage in her community in Welkom, also in the Free State. She grew vegetables and fruit and considered starting a piggery. Those plans were cut short, however, when the local municipality decided to turn the commonage into a housing development.

Makatsa continued with her farming ambitions and applied to lease state-owned land through the department of agriculture, land reform and rural development. "I applied for a farm in 2004 and got the farm in 2009, but the farm did not have water at all. The underground water on the farm was

contaminated due to the mines," she recalls.

Instead of giving up, she submitted another application for a different farm. Her second application, approved in 2014, took an additional five years to be approved. Thus Dee-Y Trading, a dairy business that supplies at least one major retailer, was born.

### Inspired throughout her life

Makatsa cites her mother as her farming inspiration. Her mother worked at OK stores during the day but was also an informal trader on the side.

"Growing up, my mother was a very business minded person. She used to buy things like fruit and vegetables, and then we would go and sell at the bus stops."

"Back then, we used to have buses taking people from the townships to town, so we used to sell those things. We also used to go to the farm to buy maize, which we would cook at our house then go and sell at the bus stop. I think my interest in business came from there."

Makatsa has always liked doing physical work. "I like working with my hands, and I like being in nature. I like working outside, I love animals, and I really like cattle."

In 2000, when Makatsa started her journey, farming looked very different. "Back then, we used to be very few women farmers. We were not really recognised. I remember when people were getting [funding], they would only consider the men. But I really just kept on keeping on."

As a dairy farmer, the issue of cattle theft is something that is foremost on Makatsa's mind. She says she has experienced cattle theft numerous times. "I had a lot of people come in and steal the cattle. I think security is one of the major, major problems. Government can assist farmers, but also farmers themselves must do their part. But it is something that can be resolved if Government gave it attention."

### Building a legacy

At the moment, Dee-Y Trading is supplying milk to dairy processing giant Clover for the Woolworths dairy brand. Makatsa's dairy operation is made up of 66 Ayrshire cows, with nine employees. She plans on expanding her business and hopes to move from

being a milk supplier to a processor.

"We want to add more cattle to increase our volume, and then to venture into agro-processing, where we will be doing pasteurised milk, fresh milk, yoghurt and other dairy products like butter."

She says that, while she is working to improve her business, her age might prevent her from fully realising her goals. "My plan is to grow the business, but I have told you my age. Time might beat me. So, I've encouraged my children to come on board, for them to learn what I have started and to help grow the business, so that the business can be a generational kind of a business."

All three of Makatsa's children have obtained business-related qualifications, with one of her sons having a bachelor of technology in agriculture, the other a marketing qualification, and her daughter a Master's in business administration.

### **More women needed in farming**

Makatsa urges women who are interested in farming to get the relevant qualifications. "We need more women to come on board and participate in the farming fraternity. And they should also consider doing it from a school level. Maybe if I would have studied what I was venturing into, it wouldn't have taken me long to get things together."

She says that more women are needed in the

agricultural sector, at all levels.

"Farming is the way to go. It is the heartbeat of every country. Through it, people can eat and it is a mass creator of jobs. It is therefore vital that women participate in this sector. Together as women we can do wonders."



# Keabetswe Mokgatla

## From unemployed graduate to farmer – and loving it!



A supportive family might just be all the fuel you will need to start your journey as a farmer. Just ask Keabetswe Mokgatla, a 23-year-old psychology and sociology graduate from Kalbasfontein in Gauteng.

After graduating from North-West University in 2019, Mokgatla fell into a deep depression. Despite her BA degree, she was not finding employment and she desperately wanted to start earning a living.

Like many of Mzansi's graduates, Mokgatla discovered that an academic qualification is no guarantee of employment. Furthering her studies was not an option as she had fallen out of love with the study field, and she was not ready to pursue a new route.

"I told my dad I just wanted to start working and did not know which way to take," she tells Food For Mzansi.

### Back to her father's farm

When her father, Isaac Mokgatla, realised that she was having a hard time, he suggested that she should join him on his state-owned farm in Kalbasfontein.

"I never imagined myself as a farmer. It never came to my mind," says Mokgatla, reminiscent of the school holidays in which she would help her father tend to his Limousin cattle.

In the process of Mokgatla moving to the farm, her father was selected for the Sernick Emerging Farmers' programme, an initiative by Nick Serfontein, a Free State farmer who previously served on President Cyril Ramaphosa's land reform advisory panel.

This was a lucky strike as it gave the unemployed graduate an opportunity to attend monthly incubation events along with her father.

### Creating new farming networks

During the Sernick incubation period, the unemployed graduate learned loads about farming and her eyes were opened. Soon thereafter, she registered her very own agricultural enterprise.

"My father saw my interest and deregistered all of his cattle. He donated all of them to my company, along with 32 hectares of land," says Mokgatla.

This provided her with a new purpose to pursue. Through her father's mentorship and with the help of three full-time employees, she now manages the Kalbasfontein farm as a mixed farming operation.

"With a supportive family system, I was able to look forward, and I will forever be grateful to my dad," she says.

Apart from the soya beans on the farm, Mokgatla also started farming yellow maize. She was able to make a once-off profit that she used to buy much-needed farm tool. Soon she set about creating her own network in the agricultural sector to supplement the one her father introduced her to.

### Perceptions about black cattle farmers

Despite her early successes, she finds being taken seriously as a young woman in agriculture rather challenging. "Sometimes people look at you and think, 'Ah, she's young and she's still wet behind her ears.'"

Changing this perception fuels her determination. "I like to prove things with actions rather than words. You know, in this industry you have to prove yourself by what you produce. People who recognise that will support you."

When it comes to accessing new markets, Mokgatla also finds herself working against a stereotype that black cattle farmers do not manage their herds carefully enough.

"Us, people of colour, we've always had this thing where our grandparents were farmers, but they weren't doing it as a business. Owning cattle was a symbol of wealth. Now I have to transition into looking at it as a business, following the proper practices such as vaccination," she says.

Mokgatla finds that this perception impacts the prices she is able to get, even though her herd has great genetics.

"I think that is the only struggle, because the prices are not the same compared to people who were looking at farming as a business earlier than us. So, they built that reputation for themselves earlier."

While she is now focusing on building her herd, she knows she still has a long journey ahead of her despite no longer being an unemployed graduate. She believes in never giving up and that when the time is right, everything she desires will be hers.

As a believer, the former unemployed graduate holds on to her favourite scripture. This has become a blessed assurance that carries her through her farming journey. "Philippians 4:6 says, 'Do not worry about anything. Instead pray about everything and give thanks to the Lord.'"

### **Keabetswe top tips for farmers**

1. Love what you do. This will make you not work a day in your life. Be passionate about what you do, and nothing or no one will convince you otherwise.
2. Choose your network wisely. Align yourself with people who are where you want to see yourself or that have the same mindset that you have.
3. Be self-aware and self-disciplined. Know your strengths and weaknesses.
4. Start a business in any field you're in. We are a creative youth, innovative and full of ideas. We can change the state of the country. We need to have courage and take the first step.
5. Be persistent. Farming has a lot of challenges. Some are out of our control, so you need to be persistent in your craft so that these challenges do not distract you from your goals.

# Khethiwe Promise

## Maseko

### Meet the domestic worker turned chicken farmer



When Khethiwe Maseko won a local competition that led to the establishment of her agribusiness, she spared no effort to protect the new-born chicks that would give her a new lease on life. At night, she slept on the floor of her newly built shack with the chicks to help keep them warm.

The first week as a budding poultry farmer was the hardest. She made many mistakes and suffered huge losses which fuelled her future. At the time, she had no agricultural experience and also did not have access to mentorship.

"No ways! I cannot be allergic to my money; I am building a legacy here," she recalls the moment when her doctor eventually advised her to stop sleeping with the chickens. This turned out to be not only a tricky situation, but also an itchy one after it resulted in a skin allergy.

Realising that this could be a make-or-break situation, Maseko remembered the resilience instilled by her late grandmother, Emily Mtshweni. She sold sweets and snacks to a local school for a living. And, like many other times, it was this example that kept Maseko afloat through the many years of unemployment, and also in the moments when she was close to giving up.

"At least we had cents to count at the end of the day," she says.

From a young age, Maseko (now 31) was inspired by her grandmother's entrepreneurial spirit. In fact, soon she also started selling snacks and peanuts while at primary school in Bronkhorstspuit, Gauteng.

#### **Moment of breakthrough**

After matriculating in 2017 she completed several short courses on, among others, call centre management and computer skills. This, unfortunately, did not help her to get a job to provide for her family, and for a short period she also worked as a domestic worker and hairdresser.

After three years of mostly being unemployed, Maseko's life changed when Sasol's #AmlPreneur campaign and Harambe, a youth employment accelerator, came to her community. Together, they were recruiting unemployed youth for a business skills development programme.

"We were so full in the community hall, about 200 people," says Maseko.

The year-long programme was tough, and many participants dropped out as the months went by. "Imagine not having a stipend for 12 months. You're hungry. I said no (to quitting). Imagine being given a skill. This is a seed."

She saw the programme as a vital step towards

fulfilling her business ambitions, and she refused to give up, just like her grandmother did.

### **How Maseko ended up in agriculture**

It was in this time that Maseko saw a gap for herself in agriculture. Often, people in her community had to travel long distances to purchase chickens. Her business idea of starting her own poultry enterprise eventually won her the first prize in the programme and a voucher of R15 000.

Very few people knew that when she got the voucher, she did not even have a bed to sleep on and her child did not have clothes.

"I am grateful this came as a voucher because if it was hard cash, I might have spent it irresponsibly," she recalls. "I decided not to look back and to change my life. This was the end of poverty!"

Maseko used the voucher to give birth to Gugulam Poultry House in 2018, her very own poultry business. It was then that she decided to sleep on the floor with the chickens, refusing to give up on the opportunity that she prayed for.

Her worst nightmare, however, occurred when only 15 of the 50 chickens she had originally started with, survived. This was a huge loss, and she was very discouraged.

### **Another shot at victory**

Maseko managed to sell the 15 chickens. This motivated her to keep pushing. The expensive lesson introduced her to crucial steps every chicken farmer should take, including the importance of vaccinations and keeping her fowls healthy.

She networked with other farmers using social media and watched videos on how other farmers raise their chickens. She managed to get the mortality rate down to 5%, which was music to her ears.

Instead of moping, Maseko decided to "go big or go home". Buying 200 chicks, she started attending training courses for farmers and adopted the use of inexpensive home remedies such as garlic and aloe to tend to her chickens.

Soon, her business started growing and she became well-known in her community as a supplier of poultry. In 2019, this culminated in a R30 000 cash prize from the department of agriculture, land reform and rural development to invest in growing her business.

Today, she is fortunate to not only supply people from different communities with chicken, but to also receive orders via social media.

Maseko says: "I am so proud of myself. I have been a victim of domestic violence because I was unable to provide for myself."

In the end, her chicken business not only saved her from this relationship, but helped to improve conditions for her disabled sister, Fikile Maseko.

The 38-year-old damaged her spinal cord in an earlier car accident and helping to feed and take care of the chickens have been hugely therapeutic for her. "Chickens did not only bring money but health to my family," she says proudly.

### **A new dream to fulfil**

Maseko tells Food For Mzansi that she now dreams of acquiring a farm of her own, and to up her production to between 2 000 and 3 000 chickens per week. She also wants to teach the youth that agriculture holds many opportunities.

And sometimes, if you are prepared to listen carefully, you can also learn a thing or two from the very chickens you raise.

"When you love them, they will love you back. I produce happy chickens," she says with laughter.

### **Khethiwe Maseko's top tips for new farmers:**

1. Have a strong heart.
2. Know the reason why you started.
3. Remember that the road is not always smooth.
4. There are sometimes losses, but you have to pick up yourself and go.
5. Always, always soldier on.

# Lesego Morapeli

## How to crack it in rabbit farming like Lesego



Laboratory technician Lesego Morapeli was looking for a side hustle when rabbit farming caught her eye.

When a newbie thinks of going into farming, they tend to consider the time-proven commodities first. They think of crop, poultry or livestock farming, and often start off with cows, sheep, pigs or goats. This is because these industries have been explored successfully by other farmers, and the newcomer thinks that it might be easier to feed a family while making profit.

It is also exactly why Lesego Morapeli, a 39-year-old wife and mother of two daughters from Mahikeng, North West decided not to go down that path, choosing to start rabbit farming instead.

"I wanted to try something different in farming, not chicken or beef," says Morapeli. Rabbit farming is one of the few relatively unexplored forms of livestock farming in South Africa. Not so many people know that we can eat rabbit meat, that it

has great health benefits. Few farmers know how to generate income with it.

Morapeli started farming in 2016, wanting to spread her wings after a successful career in analytical chemistry. She had graduated from Tshwane University of Technology with a national diploma in analytical chemistry in 2005, which opened a door for her to work in the cement industry as a laboratory technician at AfriSam, a supplier of construction material and technical solutions. While working she also earned a B.Tech in chemistry at the Vaal University.

By 2016 she was ready for a new challenge and decided to take on a side hustle in the agriculture space. She decided to go into farming in an extraordinary way, spotting a gap in rabbit farming. "Other farmers focus on crops, sheep and cattle, but rabbit farming is not too full and not so many people are into it," she states.

She attended rabbit farming training from Daisy Moleko. This was a fuel of motivation to her as she met a church mate, Linda Mashigo, there. Mashigo would become her business partner two years later and they registered their business Linlestin Agricultural Projects and Services in 2018.

### **The advantages of rabbit farming**

Morapeli says that it was during this training that she learnt that rabbit meat is a healthy white meat, high in protein and with health benefits for people with chronic diseases.

One of the advantages of rabbit farming that Morapeli is thankful for is that rabbits are pregnant for only 31 to 33 days and they can breed up to twelve kits (baby rabbits) per litter. Morapeli says "this is why (farmers) should give rabbit meat a chance, compared to chicken which are sensitive and die easily".

Another advantage is that though the business is self-funded, they are able to support their rabbits, afford food and vaccines and pay their employees. The business is growing – from starting with 30 rabbits they now have 100. "It is easy to make an income from rabbit farming, because not only is the meat healthy and full of nutrients, but you can make money from the fur and wool," she says.

Not only is the competition in rabbit farming not as stiff as in other commodities, but it is also easy

to manage. Morapeli he has two employees that run the day to day of the farm while she continues earning her livelihood. However, she cautions with a smile, "you cannot be a farmer and not want dirt on you. You need to set an example for your employees and show them how it's done. And you cannot decide you want to be a rabbit farmer and be afraid of them because you need to be the one that nurses them when they're sick, be their mother".

The relative obscurity of rabbit farming and rabbit meat makes it hard for Morapeli's family to take her enterprise seriously. This includes her daughter, who thinks rabbit farming is just one of her mom's hobbies!

Morapeli and Mashigo are currently educating people in local shopping centres about rabbit meat. Their long-term goal is not only to grow the market but to get South Africans informed about the health benefits of this meat so that ordinary people can purchase it for their families.

Morapeli says "I am grateful that I started rabbit farming hobane e tshwere leruo la rona (because it holds our wealth)".

**Lesego Morapeli's 5 rules for livestock farmers:**

1. Believe in your product.
2. Be consistent in production.
3. Be passionate.
4. Get your hands dirty.
5. Check your animals regularly.



# M.B. Alice Radebe

## New farmer: It's never too late to follow your dream



After nearly a decade working in the corporate world, Alice Radebe decided to follow her childhood passion.

As a child growing up in Mahikeng in North West, Alice Radebe watched her parents grow food for their household while both had full-time jobs. Unbeknownst to them, their love for growing produce inspired a love for agriculture in their daughter.

"I had this passion for farming. It started while I was growing up, because I grew up in a family where my parents were farming," the 44-year-old recalls.

"They were working for the government but then they were doing the farming part-time. So, I could see while growing up that [farming] can really help someone to sustain themselves, for food in the house. And sometimes for a bit of extra cash."

Even though Radebe's love for farming manifested early, she never felt inclined to pursue the agricultural route after finishing high school. In school, she did only business subjects, which was the reason she eventually ended up obtaining a

bachelor's degree in commerce from the University of Cape Town (UCT).

"Also, growing up, my parents did not channel us to be entrepreneurs. They channelled us to get a job and maybe become a director in government. That was not what I wanted to do, but I went into corporate."

Radebe graduated in 1999 and spent over ten years working in finance for some of South Africa's biggest corporations.

### Journey into farming

In 2010, she quit her corporate job. At that point the mother of four had two very young children who she often could not see or spend time with due to the demands of her role.

"The 9-to-5 in Johannesburg, the traffic, it was too much for me. And my children were [young], in grade 1 and grade 2. Back then, I had the domestic worker at home, and I kept coming home late. Month-end, with finance, you have to come home very, very late. You take your work home, and you have to go to the office early for reporting. It just drove me crazy."

Radebe's entrepreneurial spirit shone through even while she was working in the corporate sector, though. It was this entrepreneurial spirit that would eventually push her to continue her parents' legacy. "Even when I was in corporate, I would sell odd things like Avroy Shlain. And I enjoyed it, talking to people, seeing money come in every day," she says.

Her decision to quit her job was spurred by a business venture she started with her husband, Thabo. The couple had started visiting the City Deep Fresh Produce Market in Johannesburg,





buying fresh produce then selling it to local restaurants.

"In three or four hours, we saw a return on our investment, without spending a lot. Sometimes, I would go with him to the market at 4:00 and by 7:00 he dropped me at work, then he would go and deliver the goods. And then I would keep on phoning him to ask him how it went," she laughs.

She realised then that farming is what she wanted to do. "You know, we go to Woolies and we buy [vegetables] and we don't even know where they come from. And we think some produce brands are better than others. But they come from the same point. So, I thought, 'You know, this thing (farming) really can sustain us.' Everybody, regardless of who they are, needs to eat."

### **Building community**

Radebe started farming officially in 2014, when her father expanded his farming business. They did not yet have their own farm, but he bought machinery that allowed him to work the fields of other community members that were lying fallow. "He started helping out, fixing those farms. But in 2015, he passed on. We are continuing the family business."

Radebe says that her father helped them make an impact on the community, which was another reason she returned to farming. "The leasing agreement we had with the people is that we work the land, and then at the end of the harvest, we give them a percentage of the harvest."

"We could see that people believed in us so much. It's like they had their last hope in us. So, we could not abandon them."

In 2019, Radebe was browsing through a local newspaper when she saw an advertisement from the department of agriculture, land reform, and rural development for a state farm of over 400ha in Mahikeng.

"Working with the community is a good social opportunity, for us and for the community, but it comes with challenges. So, I applied for the farm, and fortunately our application was accepted," she says.

The only downside is that the farm has water, but no facilities. "Still, it answered our prayers because we needed the land to work on. We plant sunflower and maize on the land. There's also grass for the animals that we cut on an ongoing basis and sell around the town where we live."

Radebe says that the land is in an area where people farm communally, which had led to some challenges for them.

"There's a village nearby where the people with cattle and goats would come by, especially during winter-time. You can imagine that [once the livestock came through], we couldn't cut the grass and sell it. We would struggle for six months a year with all kinds of things like stolen fences etc. But then we came to an agreement after speaking to the people and speaking to the chief."

In future, Radebe hopes to expand operations further. "At the moment, I'm dreaming about buying trucks to bring my hay to the market. To hire a truck is eating our profit, so we use a tractor. I want to see us have just two or three trucks."

Thinking back on her trajectory into farming, she says she sometimes wishes that she studied something in agriculture instead.

"Even now, I think if I had gone the agriculture way, into a college, I'd be so much better. Maybe I'd already be on a better footing or more successful. But it's never too late. Everything happens at the right time."



# Mandisa Bell

## Mandisa Bell is driven by her passion for veggie farming



There are many challenges in the agricultural sector, but those challenges are simply fuel for a passionate veggie farmer like Mandisa Bell.

Mandisa Bell's farming dream is one she has had since childhood. Like many young people in South Africa, she drew her inspiration from her grandmother, who would harvest veggies from her own garden to feed her family.

"When it was cooking time, she would normally go and pick veggies from her garden. That instilled the love of growing my own vegetables [in me]. In those days, we will [also] indulge in the guava and berry trees that she had in our backyard."

The 41-year-old vegetable farmer grew up with her grandmother, Nowam Elsie Bell in Gqeberha in the Eastern Cape and remembers the independence of their household. "For me, it was so amazing. The fact that she didn't need to go to the shop to buy veggies. She just planted and made food out of it. We didn't ever find ourselves without anything to

eat. Back in the days, it was quite nice because people would share whatever they were planting."

### Driven by passion and faith

After graduating high school, Bell went on to study accounting and graduated from Cape Peninsula University of Technology in 2005. While working full-time in the corporate world, the mother of two started her farming business in 2014. Currently, she is working full-time as a Project Cost Controller, but she hopes to become a full-time farmer as soon as she has the resources. For now, she grows and sells spinach and tomatoes.

Bell views her veggie farming through a spiritual lens. "It's therapeutic and strengthens one's faith. When you put that seed in the soil and you water it, all you think of is the day of harvesting. But there's no guarantee that you will reap what you've sowed."

She also recognises that farmers are critical to everyone's survival, which is another reason for her deep passion for the sector. "I have realised that with farming, one can combat the scourge of poverty. One can feed the community. As farmers, we use God's given gifts."

### Farming is not an easy profession

One of the challenges Bell faces is limited access to land. She is running CeeMa Services from her backyard and the backyards of some of her neighbours. She has applied for land through the department of agriculture, land reform, and rural development, but she is still waiting to hear the outcome of her application.

She says that the issue of land is only one of the many challenges in the sector, but that "the challenge of acquiring the land could make one give up on an idea of being a farmer".

Some of the other challenges, says Bell, are issues like the scarcity of rain caused by global warming and the lack of critical funding or capital to expand one's business. As a woman, she says that she has also been discriminated against because of her gender. "Farming is mainly dominated by men. And they will always look down on you as a woman and say 'you can't do ABC'."

To be a farmer is to be resilient, however, and Bell is no exception. "It's not easy. It needs time, it teaches you to be patient, it needs discipline. But if it's your

passion, it's something that you will do, and nothing can stop you from doing [it]."

**To women trying to break into the veggie farming or other agricultural sector, she has the following advice:**

"It's about trusting yourself and knowing what you want. For me, having this vision of wanting to grow and feed the nation, [the challenges] don't stop me. Whatever challenges I'm faced with, it always gives me that drive to push and to move. So, I would say, just give it your best. Yes, it's not easy, but it's doable."



# Mangaliso Mokoape

## Making a positive impact



For Mangaliso Mokoape, improving the lives of others is a calling. Born and bred in KwaZulu Natal, Mokoape tried her hand at many industries before settling in farming.

Mokoape describes herself as a social entrepreneur and philanthropist by heart. She grew up in an education-focused family and obtained a bachelor's degree in administration from the University of KwaZulu Natal. "I [also] obtained my master's degree in Media Studies from the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom."

Her career journey has been varied, with her working in the human resources, hospitality, and public relations industries, to name a few. She has, however, always worked as a skills developer. It was through skills development that she ended up in farming.

"My farming journey started in 2019 as a social intervention project at the schools at which I deliver skills development initiatives. [The project], Mangaliso AgriSolutions, plays the role of the consultancy that facilitates the farming and distribution process amongst all stakeholders. The schools and the community at large use the school grounds as shared spaces to garden and grow food. Our main crops are tomatoes, spinach and kale."

Mangaliso AgriSolutions grew out of the existing community skills development programme Mokoape was running. She taught digital skills in schools around Gauteng, and as time went on, started expanding into farming with the establishment of

the school gardens.

With this project, Mokoape could bring her passion for helping others to bear. "This project serves as a way of eradicating food insecurity, but also, [it is] as a way of promoting shared value within communities."

### A nurturing spirit

Mokoape comes from a farming family, and eventually joined the family business in 2020. "During the pandemic, I ventured into commercial farming by joining [our] existing family farming business. The Mokoape family farms [with] moringa, garlic, tomatoes, spinach, turmeric, and herbs in a plot in north of Pretoria."

After she started her school gardening project, Mokoape was firmly bit by the farming bug. A single mother of a 15-year-old daughter, she finds that her natural instinct is to nurture, which is a quality she says farming lines up with perfectly.

"I love farming because of the satisfaction one gets from seeing a seed grow from nothing to something. I think this process resonates with me as a mother who enjoys nurturing. I find farming to be an extremely rewarding process. I am also a lover of nature, so this passion aligns with two of my strong desires. [Those desires are] preserving nature and increasing productivity to eradicate food insecurity."

Her farming journey is, of course, not without challenges. Currently, the biggest obstacle she faces is limited access to resources due to her gender.

"The biggest challenge I have experienced as a woman farmer is access to resources - particularly land and financial resources. Although there are visible efforts being made, gender bias is still very prevalent in the farming sector. The industry remains male dominated," she says.

"Other challenges I have faced are the ability to attract and keep skilled labour, and maintaining security on the property."

Mokoape has three simple pieces of advice for other women wanting to start farming. "Do your research and know your business in and out. Prepare a viable business plan demonstrating profitability. Find your niche."

# Mapaseka Dlamini

## This Gauteng #SoilSista was not built to break



From just watching a television programme to discovering destiny. This is the story of Gauteng producer Mapaseka Dlamini who, in September 2012, traded an accounting job for a life on the farm.

"I decided I no longer wanted a job in an office," the 36-year-old says. She holds a post-graduate certificate in accounting, but knew instinctively that her future was intertwined with nature. "I knew someday I will own a farm..."

In the same week, after deciding to farm, Dlamini was watching the SABC2 show Living Land. It featured a number of award-winning women in agriculture, including Flora Mamotshitshiri.

Dlamini says, "I could see her passion, her resilience. I could see she's got bigger dreams and a passion for growing her layer farm."

This led to a great adventure in trying to get a hold of the very Mamotshitshiri. Eventually, after being sent back and forth, Dlamini contacted her via the Living Land team. Mamotshitshiri was pleased to hear from her, and they agreed to meet on her farm.

### Where the farming journey began

Dlamini says this was the day her journey in farming officially started. Twice every month, on weekends, she would drive more than 100km to Mamotshitshiri's farm. This is where she learnt the basics of

chicken farming while benefiting from on-the-job mentorship.

She also found a second family and the 21ha farm became her school.

"In the morning, she [Mamotshitshiri] would show me around the farm. We'd do her daily routines of maintaining the farm, and it was all awesome. I would go there with my tekkies because I didn't have boots at that time. They would be full of chicken poop."

"My car would be smelling of chicken poop, but on Mondays I would be the happiest person at the office because I did something that I love."

After a year, Dlamini felt like she was not growing and she sought two hectares of a different farm to start crop farming. "This is where I learnt there are tricks, challenges and mistakes in this agribusiness," she says.

Dlamini and the farm owner went into a verbal agreement without signing a formal contract. "I knew that we had to sign a contract but I let my sight and guard down," she explains. Soon, the risks became evident. "There was nothing binding us and if something would happen, like cows eating my crops, what would I do?"

In the process, Dlamini lost more than R100 000 and made no profit. Her major expenses were for irrigation, employing a worker, buying seedlings, and fuel to get to the farm. Eventually, the relationship turned sour and Dlamini decided to move on.

### Tough lessons learnt

She spent the next six months looking for land and started planting flowers in a friend's garden. During this time, she was still doing her day job and would come back late at night to take care of the flowers. Again, she learnt tough lessons. "Sometimes there would be too much heat or too much water, so some would die."

In 2014, she eventually found a small piece of land in Centurion which she rented for R3 000 per month. Dlamini felt this might be a stepping stone into a bigger farm. "As long as they would come and assess our work, we'd stand a better chance of getting funding or a farm."

She had two employees and started farming herbs. The land was a bit rocky and needed a tractor

to refine the soil. No one could help, including government. The result was that she could not plough the land until the end of that year.

Things started to get better in 2015 when she was allocated a farming space in Diepsloot, Gauteng by the department of social development. Dlamini grabbed this opportunity with both hands and was able to implement the many lessons she learnt over the years.

### Finally – the career she wanted

She also finally left her office job and embraced farming as her full-time career. This was the happiest time of her life because her dreams were shaping and, this time around, she was also harvesting the fruits of her labour in finances, growth and purpose.

Soon, when she needed more land, she started rooftop farming instead.

“In this agribusiness there are challenges and mistakes and people not being transparent, but we just always have to find a way to make it forward.”

This programme has opened her mind, Dlamini says. “Now I want to go into the most expensive spice in the world, saffron” she giggles.

### Top tips for farmers

Follow your passion: If farming is your passion, then go for it, but go for it with an open mind. “We always underrate the skill required to farm and

manage an agribusiness,” says Dlamini. “The first thing we think of is funding. But I can give you a million rand and you can lose all of it in farming.”

Five factors for success: Know that there are five factors that will make any farming enterprise work:

1. Land
2. Working Capital
3. Skills
4. Soil Knowledge
5. The Market



# Metsana Kojane

## This farmer smiles when she hears bees buzzing



To start producing food, all you need is seed, water and soil, even if it is just enough to fill up a pot, says Metsana Kojane, founder of Eden Roots, a North West impact-driven, eco-friendly agribusiness born in 2015.

While she focuses on horticulture, beekeeping and agro-processing, there is much more to both her and her agribusiness.

"I am a mother, community leader, environmental activist and role model to many young women and girls in my village," says Kojane.

Eden Roots is not just in the business of selling bee products, they also economically empower groups of women and girls with beekeeping skills.

Despite her success and her current passion for all things bee related, Kojane didn't initially set out on this path.

"I started off farming indigenous plants and herbs," she says. "My interest was particularly in those used for healing by our foremothers."

One day she discovered some bees in an old

borehole while busy with her herbs and was intrigued enough to learn more about them.

She set off to do some research on bees and quickly found out how vital they are to our ecosystems.

"I realised that bees facilitate an integral part of all agricultural systems, even though their importance is hardly ever acknowledged," she says. "When most people think of bees they only think about their painful stings!"

"At the heart of Eden Roots is biodiversity. All life on earth depends on it, and we love bees because they make all life possible."

### Entrepreneur with a cause

An entrepreneur at heart, Kojane knew she would have to make a business out of this new-found passion and love of bees and pollination services. She also had many other issues that she wanted to tackle. She says she knew that this could be the start of a big project that could have a major positive impact on her community.

Many entrepreneurs are driven by a passion to solve problems or address key societal issues. For Kojane, there are multiple complex issues that she sees around her.

"Entrepreneurship for me is secondary," says Kojane.

"My primary force is passion for what I do."

Her work is about results, not just in terms of profit, but seeing an improvement in another woman's life, and seeing flowers and many bees busy doing what they do best.

"Each time I hear the buzzing sound of bees, I smile knowing that they are working hard towards our much-needed biodiversity."

By putting bees at the heart of her business, Kojane produces natural honey that has not only created local agri-processing jobs for women in her community, but also a natural skincare brand using the wax, propolis and royal jelly from her raw honey hives.

"I love and enjoy my work so much that I could work around the clock without even realising it," says Kojane. "I tried a few business ideas previously but this one is more than just a business. It is my calling!"

Eden Roots is also in the business of selling and promoting honey that is raw and ethical. This is made possible by practicing natural and organic beekeeping practices.

"Our business is special because it embraces our cultural heritage passed on to us by our foremothers," Kojane explains.

"They had unique ways of keeping bees and they used indigenous herbs for healing and staying healthy."

### **Empowering rural communities and women**

Kojane has an infectious passion for empowering women and for improving the livelihoods of rural communities.

"One of our main objectives is to see sustainable economic growth in rural communities," says Kojane.

"It breaks my heart to see the effect of urbanisation on rural communities. Parents go to cities to look for employment, they don't make much and their earnings are not sustainable or enough to send money home to feed the grandparents and kids, or for themselves."

Kojane says that these are the many small things that add up and end up giving birth to other problems with health, violence and poverty.

"If rural areas prosper, urban areas prosper as well," says Kojane. "The formula does not work vice versa, though. When urban areas prosper it kills the rural communities.

"When rural areas are sustained then the people will stay in their communities, with higher quality of life and healthier families."

Kojane also deliberately empowers women and girls through Eden Roots.

"We choose to work with them for obvious reasons," she says.

"One, women have been disadvantaged for a long time. A lot of priority and preference have been given to men, as opposed to women. Yet women are the ones who take on more responsibility, they have a lot more burdens placed on them.

"Two, women have a lot of potential. They have all the traits to prosper and grow the economy. They are responsible, creative, can multitask. We've got it all."

Citing the fact that there are more women than men in the world, Kojane says we should be pushing



to see more women in positions of power, and more women participating in economic growth. Eden Roots is a business that strives to empower other woman-owned businesses when they outsource professional services. They also work with groups of women from disadvantaged rural communities and equip them with beekeeping skills to start their own beekeeping businesses.

"Our bees have enabled us to employ many women and girls, and teach them beekeeping skills," says Kojane. "By giving them work and skills, we empower them to be financially stable so that they cannot be prone to gender-based violence. This also helps to improve the economy of rural villages where our apiaries are located."

### **Food security and pollination**

"We cannot begin a dialogue on food security without talking about bees and pollination," Kojane insists.

Kojane finds it astounding that South Africa does not have beekeeping or pollination strategies.

"Our country is not focusing on sustainable solutions towards food security," she says. "You cannot

resolve hunger and poverty by giving people food. You have to deal with it at a fundamental level.

"We have been dethroned from our status as the food basket of Africa," Kojane says sadly. "So, there is a whole lot of work to be done. I feel the bees can make a big difference."

According to Kojane our government should have devised pollination strategies a long time ago. And while we cannot do anything about the past, we can make better policy decisions moving forward. Kojane recommends implementing pollination and beekeeping strategies at a national level that must also filter down to provincial strategies and to local municipalities.

"At Eden Roots we believe there is room for more jobs to be created through beekeeping in rural communities by women and for women," says Kojane.

"We would like to see a revival in our biodiversity and South Africa's rural economy through beekeeping so that we can alleviate poverty, hunger and complex problems caused by urbanisation."

**Here's some advice for aspiring agripreneurs**

Kojane's advice to other agripreneurs is to "take the Nike approach and 'just do it'".

"All you need is seed, water and land. It does not

matter how small it is, even if it is just a pot, you just start with what you have.

"Women in particular must just get out there. We must not hide ourselves in the corners, we must just get out there. We have it within us. We are born nurturers, we are born carers. These plants are life, who says a woman cannot take care of life?"



# Mokgadi Manamela

## How Mokgadi traded heels for gumboots to build a legacy



When Mokgadi Manamela traded in her heels for gumboots nearly ten years ago, leaving behind a legacy for her children was her top priority.

The 33-year-old farmer from Lissa-Gakgare village in Limpopo wanted to become one of the best organic vegetable producers in the country. She not only wanted to offer quality crops, but also to enhance the nation's food security.

"My father was a livestock and crop farmer, so I grew up farming with him part-time," she recalls.

"Even though I aspired to be like him, I wanted to do things differently. He was a small-scale farmer and I wanted to become a commercial farmer who would supply crops to our local and international market so that I could leave a name for my kids," she says.

Manamela's passion for farming was so strong that even when she tried to start a career in environmental management sciences, farming summoned her.

"After I completed my postgraduate degree in environmental management sciences at the University of Pretoria in 2012 I opened a company in environmental management, health and safety that I run with my sister. While I was doing that, farming called me back and reminded me where I come from. So I decided to incorporate the two," she says.

### **Environmental management degree is useful**

Her environmental business consults to farmers across the country, educating them about farming, environmental awareness, health, safety, sustainability and obtaining farming licenses. She also teaches farmworkers about exploitation, how to work with machinery to prevent work injuries, how to use water sparingly and which crops to plant to avoid water wastage.

The company started operating in 2012, but the official opening was in 2015. "We started in Pretoria but now we operate all over the country," she says.

Manamela uses her environmental management skills to run her ten-hectare farm called AgriHlash. She follows organic farming principals and specialises in rotational crop farming.

"At the moment I have two fields of crops; one field has mielies and the other field has cotton. I am one of the few black women in South Africa that farms with cotton and that has been with the help of Cotton SA, who have assisted me to get the right quality and the right crop," she says.

"We are currently in harvest season and since we work with Cotton SA, they have already provided us with customers who will buy the cotton from us to manufacture clothes. Once the cotton is harvested, we are going to plant potatoes."

Manamela plans to expand her farm so that she can plant enough vegetables to supply big food companies such as Simba and Knorr. She also wants to export her products to international markets.

"With enough funding I will be able to make my dream come true, because I will be able to utilise my other piece of land. It is 15 hectares big, and it is not far from where I currently farm."

Manamela also had a farm in Gauteng, but because of a land claims issue the farm had to be

sold. She says she wants to purchase another farm in Gauteng since she is primarily based there now.

“Farming needs you to be hands-on and fully present for it to be a success,” she says.

The Bakone Nkwe Secondary School matriculant currently employs three farmworkers and two directors for her environmental company.

She explains that farming is not easy. “Farming requires a person to be hands-on. Sometimes you lose in farming and sometimes you gain, because it relies on nature; it requires a lot of patience and understanding from you.”

### **Making a breakthrough**

Manamela shares that being recognised by Corteva and Cotton SA has been her biggest moments of breakthrough.

“To be recognised by corporate organisations helps you a lot because now you know who to contact when you need help. Corteva has helped me with supply development, funding, commercialisation and growth.

“Cotton SA created markets for my cotton; when I collaborated with them my product went places. You may have a product, but you would not know where to sell, how to sell it and the volumes that are required, so Cotton SA helped me with that.”

In the future she wants to venture into poultry farming and supply eggs to corporate companies

such as Tiger Brands, Woolworths and other companies that make baked goods.

### **Mokgadi Manamela's advice for aspiring young farmers**

1. Spot the opportunities. There are a lot of opportunities in agriculture for young people, they just need to look in the right places. And forget politics.
2. Start small. If you have a backyard, start there. You can get a good yield from a small garden in your back yard.
3. Be passionate. You must have the passion for working, because farming is work.
4. Get help. Ask big, established farmers such for help. They will help you a great deal.



# Motlatsi Tolo

## Optimism is a secret weapon for this poultry farmer



For poultry farmer Motlatsi Tolo, inspiration lies in constantly staying hopeful and resolving problems.

"Before you are a mother, a father, a doctor, a policeman – before any title out there – you need to eat." So says Motlatsi Tolo (30), environmental scientist, poultry farmer and managing director of Raseto Agricultural Enterprise.

Born in Zambia, the poultry farmer spent most of her life in South Africa and joined her family's business in 2016, after graduating from Midwestern State University in the United States.

Her decision to join the family business was motivated by a sense of duty, to both her family and to society. "I had a bit of a spiritual journey in varsity. I was trying to get a bit more direction as to what my purpose or calling is," she recalls.

"In the poultry industry, seeing as how we assist with job creation, upskilling people as well as alleviating poverty, it seems to fit what I was seeking best. So, that's how I jumped into the family business."

### 'Agriculture is a science'

Tolo draws her inspiration from the broiler production process. She says, while each cycle has repetitive elements, it is never exactly the same.

"We have a certain amount of days growing the chickens and then obviously they leave. But what's exciting is knowing that agriculture is a science. It is always trial and error, and we keep a lot of data so it is interesting to see how seasonal changes can actually affect your production."

Broiler farming, like most agricultural ventures, comes with a high risk factor. For Tolo, going to work every day and trying to figure out solutions for the problems that crop up is part of the excitement of the job.

"[Farming] is constant development. But it's is just about keeping one's tenacity and constantly staying hopeful."

### Farming as a woman

Tolo finds the day-to-day of her work challenging and stimulating. "If I am a day behind, or if I have not picked up on a problem, I implement a solution immediately and I may feel the effects over time or at the end of the cycle. For example, if it's a very cold season, am I making sure that my heating system is up to standard? That the chicks get enough heat but also not boil them up?"

While she acknowledges that the farming in South Africa is a male-dominated sector, other people's biases are not her concern.

"I'm quite optimistic and I feel like there will always be challenges faced. Whether it's racial, whether it's being a woman in agriculture."

"But, I take it head-on as a challenge that one as an individual needs to go past, regardless of what





the next person's opinion is. My main focus is to ensure that the company is operational to its fullest capacity."

Food security is a major theme in agriculture this year, and it is something that Tolo has thought about as well. In the agricultural future she would like to see, black and disadvantaged agribusinesses thrive to where they are able to list on the stock exchange.

"I'd also like to see [disadvantaged agricultural entities] becoming driving forces, and a lot of women as well, taking the lead and being proud of assisting a basic need, which is agriculture," says the poultry farmer.

"Remember, with agriculture you also get medication, etc. There are so many [industries] within the agricultural sector. It's really vast and interesting, so I really look forward to the future..."

#### **Motlatsi Tolo's tips for women farmers:**

1. "Keep your faith": Farming is an industry that takes a lot of time and patience. It is not something you can do if you want immediate returns.
2. "Take the time to understand your market": The best thing to do for yourself and your business is

to do your research, so you can make educated decisions.

3. "Put on your business cap and understand how your financials work": Farming is a business. You need to know more than just the production part of your operation.
4. "Be confidently bullish about what it is you want": Do not trample over people, but be assertive and confident in your decisions. Make sure to be open to advice, and walk with other people, particularly other women, who also face the same challenges.
5. "Be patient with yourself": Farming is an industry that requires plenty of patience. Do not rush yourself.



# Musa Mirriam Gamede

## How Musa went from beginner to winner in just one year



If you want a better life, do your work. Hustle your mind. Do not expect any handouts. In fact, be like the 32-year-old Musa Gamede who built a thriving vegetable enterprise while many others were waiting on government to rescue them.

As a female farmer you are not a damsel in distress, she emphasises.

"There are people who started in 2010 and say they are waiting for the perfect sponsor. It won't work. When you want to do something get up and do it. You cannot start a business and let it stay stagnant. What was the reason for opening that company?"

Musa Gamede built a thriving vegetable business alongside her husband, David Mabasa, in Benoni, Gauteng.

Gamede's no-nonsense approach has been instrumental in her farming success. With a little backing and loads of support from business partner and husband, David Mabasa, she turned Ngadeni Farms into 3.6 hectares of magic.

The farm is situated in the Benoni-suburb of

Marister.

"If a sponsor comes, I will be happy and celebrate, but they will find me going," she tells Food For Mzansi as she reminisces on her career.

"Or maybe they will find me running. Maybe I won't be needing that sponsor. I will be the one sponsoring other farmers and helping them grow their business."

Admittedly, choosing the right partner when building her enterprise was crucial to Gamede's success.

She warns that if your partner's agricultural vision does not align with yours, perhaps it's best to cut your losses – especially if their only mission is to get rich quick.

"He (David) had to be the co-founder (of Ngadeni Farms) just because I needed the finances," Gamede chuckles. "I couldn't use his money without him being involved, but I am fully in charge of the project. He will help now and then."

For her, feeding the nation is one of the noblest trades anyone could choose. Her business, founded in 2014, produces brinjals, chilli, spinach, peppers and mustard spinach. She supplies to both the informal markets in the townships of Alexandra and Tembisa, as well as the Joburg Market.

"I mostly support the township economy. On Mondays I deliver produce to Kasi vendors. I sell to those who cook at taxi ranks. I plant these vegetables that make money so that we can pay the workers. We can pay the rent and everything."





### Started from the bottom now she's here!

Gamede was born in the Free State town of Harrismith, 330 kilometres outside Bloemfontein. She was unemployed when she first planted the seedlings of her farming dream in 2011, selling tomatoes from her home in Benoni.

She says, "Being young and unemployed is not a nice thing. I decided to stick to what I know and have survived with it. I started small with a garden patch and realised that I can expand this project into a greenhouse."

"When people approached me and praised my tomatoes, I started buying boxes and started selling in my neighbourhood. Everyone wanted my tomatoes; I was surprised that my vines even grew to be taller than me."

Realising the power of agriculture for her own growth, she expanded her business and started a home-based greenhouse in 2014.

That same year, Gamede went on to win an award as best home producer from the Gauteng department of agriculture and rural development. She also formally registered her very own business.

"I started the business as a backyard project. I planted tomatoes in a greenhouse before and decided to grow it after seeing that I can make a profit from the small greenhouse that I have in my backyard."

Networking with her fellow farmers has been central to her success, Gamede reveals.

"I realised sometimes when I connect with other people who are farmers, we learn from each other."

Gamede says, "I am a self-taught farmer. I teach myself as I go through my journey, I am passionate nge farming, ngakhulu. No one forced me to this, I love what I do. I love that I can survive by following what I am most passionate about."

### Pay your workers first

Today, Ngadeni Farms employs four permanent workers and four seasonal workers. And as someone who believes in creating an enabling environment for women such as herself, she proudly creates opportunities for others.

"I mostly prefer them to be women. The main reason of the project is to create employment for myself and other women," Gamede says. "Sometimes you cannot have only women in the entire organisation. There must be balance."

"When the end of the month comes, before I can do anything for myself or my children, I make sure I pay those families. There are families who depend on this project to work. Those people working the land have families and mouths to feed."

Farming is an influential industry, she believes. "You are not just building a future for yourself; you are also building communities."



### Musa Gamede's 5 tips for new farmers

1. Feed your mind: There are always opportunities to learn in agriculture. Embrace them.
2. Timing is crucial: You need to know when and what to plant for each season. It is important to fully understand this so that you are not lost in the seasons.
3. Be a leader and not a boss: Learn to work with people, and not against them. When you treat people with respect and kindness, they will work with you to grow your business.
4. Don't wait to be rescued: Waiting for government to rescue you will only see you fail before you even start. Rescue yourself.
5. Consistency is key: Sometimes introspection is necessary when you find yourself chopping and changing workers every season. Sometimes you are the problem. Maybe you cannot work with people. Don't create havoc in your business. Treat people well and your business will flourish.

# Nobuntu Makhoa

## How Makhoa answered the call of the land



Born and raised in Aliwal North, Eastern Cape, Nobuntu Makhoa (50) had very limited opportunities growing up. Feeling constrained in her hometown, Makhoa moved to Johannesburg after matric to further her studies and look for opportunities.

"My parents didn't have money to send me to university," Makhoa shares. "So, I furthered my studies through distance learning until I acquired my Bachelor of Arts degree through UNISA."

Farming was not an option that she considered as a career.

"My career spans from being a tea girl in Randburg, a technical administrator, and an events and hospitality specialist," she lists. "And now I am a corporate social investment specialist at Cell C and Volkswagen South Africa."

### **Journey to farming**

"In 1986 my father, Sipanana John Lange, who was still working as a fulltime employee for Eskom, bought himself two pregnant cows, with a calf each," Makhoa says. "Those four animals started my family's livestock farming journey."

Makhoa's father did not own any land at that time and did not have any hope that he ever would.

"Times were different then," Makhoa says. "But he didn't allow that to stop him."

He rented space on surrounding farms until he and a group of other black farmers were allocated a communal farm after the 1994 elections.

"He continued farming and provided for our family and neighbours with milk and meat from his cattle until he passed on in October 2020," Makhoa shares.

And this is how her home became an informal dairy as she grew up. Every morning and evening people from the township would queue at their house to buy fresh and affordable milk. Those who couldn't pay were not turned away either.

"When we were young, we didn't like all the work," Makhoa says. "To us it was just an unnecessary chore."

When you sell milk, everything needs to be hygienically clean, she explains. So, there was a lot of unwelcomed work and cleaning for her to do as she grew up.

But she does realise that it was his passion and dedication to farming with these dairy cows that sustained her family as she grew up.

"His cattle sustained us for over 25 years after he retired from his formal employment," Makhoa says.





"His passion and love for farming, despite not having land of his own, inspired us."

"We committed ourselves to ensuring that his legacy lives on and we reach the heights he was not able to achieve in his lifetime."

#### **Makhoha's own farming enterprise and future plans**

In 2018 Makhoha and her husband purchased a farm, Klippan Farm, just outside Vrededorf in the Free State.

Ba ha Makhoha is a 95 ha mixed-production farming business which comprises of a piggery, a herd of Nguni Cattle and cultivatable land which is used to plough maize, lucerne, smutsvinger and some vegetables. They have four permanent employees and also get seasonal workers during maize harvest time.

According to Makhoha, the piggery is their main focus because of its quick production cycle and big litters. Pork is also one of the most popular and affordable sources of protein in South Africa. Their piggery supplies porkers, cutters and baconers to an abattoir in Viljoenskroon.

"We currently run a 24 sow, farrow to finish, unit," Makhoha says. "We are looking at upgrading to a 100-sow unit as soon as we obtain our environmental impact assessment certificate."

Makhoha's vision for Ba ha Makhoha is to grow the piggery from smallholder farm to becoming one of the profitable middle-commercial pig farmers in the next two years.

"Our plan is to expand the piggery operation starting with improving the existing infrastructure and extend it to accommodate 100 breeding sows by end of the year."

This expansion will enable Ba ha Makhoha to breed the best quality pork and send to market an average of 50 porkers or baconers per week over the next 12 months, she says. In future they want to include free range chickens as well.

Because Makhoha is working with a small farm area, they have to use the land optimally. That's why they made the decision to focus on pigs and broiler chickens.

Both chickens and pigs can be operated in intensive housing and do not require too much land like other livestock such as cattle and sheep, she says. Both have a quicker cash flow turnover cycle and quicker feed-to-meat conversion than cattle, so the farm will be generating more of its revenue from the pigs and chickens on a weekly basis.

#### **Makhoha's advice to future farmers and SoilSistas**

There are so many lessons that Makhoha wants to share with future farmers.

Every day presents a lesson in agriculture and you should be open-minded and ready to learn, she says. There are a number of exclusive considerations and routines to adhere to in each industry so, without further ado, here are Makhoha's three tips for future farmers:

1. Take time to educate yourself about the industry and field of agriculture that you are in. "Mistakes can be very costly," Makhoha warns. "Learn from other farmers who have walked the path." In most cases there is no need to re-invent the wheel – there is a lot of research and information (best practice models) which have been carefully crafted. Just give yourself time to learn from the best. If there is room for improvement or innovation, by all means do so but learn from what is there already.
2. Do not cut corners. "Cutting corners can be



very expensive," Makhoha says. Feed constitutes the biggest cost (about 70%) of Makhoha's operations and at the beginning there was some temptation to buy cheap and skimp on rations. Makhoha learnt the hard way that buying quality feed and not skimping on rations is the best thing that they could do. "Correct and adequate feeding ensures efficient reproduction, fast growth of piglets, better feed conversion ratio, and good quality pork after slaughter."

3. Secure a market for your produce or livestock before you start.

Find out what your customer wants and produce accordingly, Makhoha advises.

"When we started, we were scammed by someone who acted as an agent and promised to connect us to the agents at the abattoir to buy our pigs," Makhoha says. "We delivered the pigs at the abattoir as per arrangement, he received the money and disappeared without paying us."

"That nearly cost us our piggery," she says. "That month we didn't have any money for feed or medication."

Luckily, they were saved by Makhoha's income from her full-time employment and the other business

that her husband runs. The scammer made it seem so difficult to approach abattoirs directly that they fell for the scam because they hadn't done their own homework.

"After that I approached the abattoirs directly and found out for myself how it works," Makhoha says. "Now I supply the abattoir directly and I have learnt that there are so many other opportunities."



# Nomathamsanqa Dyonase

**Agriculture can greatly benefit from 'a woman's touch'**



Nomathamsanqa Dyonase believes the male-dominated agricultural sector is missing the magic of a woman's touch. She tells us, 'A man leads the house, but a woman drives it through her patience, drive, willingness and perseverance'

There is a lot to love about Mzansi, but there are also many problems to solve here, including unemployment and food insecurity. These are the problems the 39-year-old Nomathamsanqa Dyonase is looking to solve with her farming enterprise.

"I would like to see my company being able to employ people from the community so that the unemployment rate can decrease," Dyonase says when asked about her goals. "We can have a stronger economy through its own people in South Africa."

Though she didn't take to farming from the start, Dyonase's farming background started when she was very young.

Born and raised in Chiawelo, Soweto, Dyonase often

travelled to rural areas when she was younger.

During school holidays, her family visited Mogwaneng village near Kwamhlanga in Mpumalanga. She was inspired when she saw the good work that communities were involved in.

"Seeing communities planting and feeding families, being able to cook what you have harvested in your own yard..." she reminisces. "These sentiments are the core of my soul and that's why I went into farming."

During these trips she helped out on the farms and homesteads they visited.

"We were taught how to work with our hands especially at the farm. That place helped me shape up as a young girl and a young woman."

## **Trainer before farmer**

Growing up, Dyonase did not make use of these lessons she learned except as a trainer to help develop other farming businesses.

After finishing a certificate in plant production, she

started training others in plant production.

She established her farm training and development company, Nomady Training and Development, in 2014. It focuses on training in mixed farming, facilitation, assessment, moderation and hospitality.

"We are a small-scale business," Dyonase says. "Our clients are the surrounding community and street vendors in Mahikeng and Soweto."

Seeing how she was helping other people achieve their dreams through farming and development, Dyonase started to pursue her own passion for producing food.

She acquired land from the chief in Mahikeng, Signal Park, where she started planting vegetables at home.

"I started planting in my own yard. Then I expanded my vegetable garden into half a hectare and from there onwards I never stopped to this date."

Now Dyonase runs a lucrative farming enterprise in Mahikeng, North West with three full-time employees and four to eight seasonal workers, when needed.

Her farm supports the Mahikeng community by supplying seeds, sharing soil preparation methods and things like fertiliser. On a fortnightly basis they supply street vendors in Soweto and the community in Soweto and Mahikeng.

"My future plans are to farm commercially and also I have started learning about cattle because I want to explore and specialise in beef."

Her farm specialises in green peppers, chillies (fresh and also canned), onion, spinach and at times beetroot. "We hope to expand by another hectare soon so that we can increase supply."

Dyonase is currently busy with a course in farming management from Oxbridge College.

### **Leading as a woman in agriculture**

Dyonase feels strongly that because agriculture is male-dominated, it is missing the special ingredients of a woman's touch to make it whole.

"A man leads the house, but a woman drives it through her patience, drive, willingness and perseverance," she says.

So, from one female farmer to all woman who are going into the field of agriculture, here are some tips from Dyonase's hard-won experience:

**Persevere:** Don't give up. It gets tough before it is better.

**Start small:** Grow as you go and be teachable so that the road becomes easier. It is a tough, yet achievable, goal if only you set your mind on it.

**Work hard:** Give it your best, focus and persevere in everything you do because you are a hand that rocks the cradle from which the birth of hundreds of nations exists.

And remember, "Wathinta abafazi, wathinta imbokodo."

You strike a woman, you strike a rock.



# Nthabiseng Mathebula

## 'Start big,' advises Gauteng pig farmer



Nthabiseng Mathebula has no regrets about joining her family's pig production business after university.

Pig farmer Nthabiseng Mathebula's journey into farming was both based on a lifelong passion for animals and a desire to contribute to her family's goals. After she finished matric, she had intended on fulfilling her childhood dream of going to veterinary school. Instead, she settled on animal production.

"I generally had this love for animals growing up," recalls the 33-year-old farmer.

"My passion for animals is why I wanted to do veterinary sciences initially, but then, when my parents started the farm, it felt like it was sort of on time. I thought 'ok, maybe you should do this type of course [animal production] to assist in the farm'. It was all part of it."

Mathebula graduated from Tshwane University

of Technology (TUT) in 2009 with a Bachelor of Technology (Btech). After completing a brief stint as an intern at a research company as well as within a government department, she joined the family business in 2011.

Ten years later, she is working as the operational manager on her family's farm, Dreamland Piggery. She enjoys her role and is still passionate about the business.

"I am overseeing the pig production unit, the admin side of the business, and the abattoir side. I love what I am doing. I have a love of the pig production side [of the business]."

### **The family business**

Dreamland Piggery was started by Mathebula's parents while she was studying. The pig farming business, based in Vanderbijlpark in Gauteng, is run by her mother, herself and her two younger brothers.

"Initially, they farmed on a plot in De Deur (close to Vereeniging). There was a lot of demand back then, so we opted to get a farm here in Vanderbijlpark, which is a 380ha farm. It is a bigger production space from where my parents started."

Mathebula says that, as a woman in farming, she has definitely felt discriminated against in an



industry that is still largely male and white.

"I always feel that way, maybe 80% of the time, especially when I go to agriculture workshops, and I get to feel the 'dominance,'" she laughs. "It does sort of demotivate me a bit, but once I'm on my farm, I'm fine."

It is not all bad news, however. Mathebula says that the industry is definitely changing, albeit slowly. "It is changing. Over the years, it has been getting better."

Mathebula is deeply passionate about the farm and stays motivated by the continued success of the business. "When my team wins at the farm, when production keeps increasing, it is exciting for me. It means more money, thus bettering lives."

### **Some advice for aspiring pig farmers**

For Mathebula, going big when you start out is better. "Whatever you do, if you're a black woman and you want to go into pig farming, its best to go big, to start big, and start the right way. Also have your pig production houses intact."

She says that the bigger your pig production is,

the quicker you will see returns. "And with a big production, people will take you more seriously. [Considering] my experience, I would say start as big as you can, as long as you have a solid market for your pigs."

Mathebula says that she is in farming for the long haul. "Farming is the future. That is what I like about it. There's no uncertainty and there's always a demand for food. People must all eat to live."



# Nthakheni Portia Netshirembe

## Former banker bitten by the farming bug



Growing up, Nthakheni Portia Netshirembe knew that she would end up working for herself. What she did not expect was for the ideal business opportunity to become her passion.

For Nthakheni Portia Netshirembe, farming was the vehicle she needed to reach her self-employment goals. At the suggestion of her parents, she started farming ten years ago as a side hustle. She did not foresee the deep passion she now has for the sector to develop. "The bug bit, and it bit deep. It bit really, really deep and I fell in love with it. I've never been in love with anything the way I am in love with farming."

Born and raised in Limpopo, Netshirembe moved to Johannesburg after high school to continue her studies. She started studying human resources and graduated with a bachelor's degree in technology in 2001.

"I started a corporate job when I was about 20. And, in 2009, I did a management advancement

programme with WITS business school. [After that], I went to work for a bank for about ten years, up until 2019."

### **The co-operative that changed it all**

It is only in the last two years that Netshirembe has been focusing on farming full time. Her business, called Tshanduko Agricultural Enterprise, is a co-operative where they farm with both livestock and vegetables. "Tshanduko" means "change" in Tshivenda, which is exactly what happened when the co-operative obtained land from the government on a long-term lease.

"There was some intensive farming that was taking place before we got there but when we got involved, we had to reset. There is really nothing that we inherited, in terms of what the previous owner was doing. We had to start from scratch with our own livestock and crops."

Netshirembe changed her focus in the business from part-time to full-time when she realised that it will not really succeed the way she needs it to succeed while she was not giving it her full attention.

"It's very difficult to grow a business when you are one foot in and one foot out. And I really wanted to see the business grow and seriously expand. I had goals that I had set down for myself and I thought something is going to have to happen here otherwise this business will continue on this plateau."

A farming business is one that generally requires painstaking planning and high levels of patience. It also thrives through connections with others in the industry. Netshirembe knows the value of networking, which is why she started building connections as soon as she started.

"I started building networks. I started contacting people I know in the business, who have been doing it and who have been successful. [I contacted] particularly women because I was quite keen to understand how, in this business that has been stereotyped as being male, women are succeeding."



### **Farming from a woman's perspective**

Netshirembe's network of women stakeholders is not much of a shield against the discrimination she experiences in the industry. She says that succeeding as a woman is not as easy as it would be had she been a man. This is due to the community's inherent biases based on gender.

"There are just some inherent biases and some hurdles that you know you have to jump through as a woman. They kind of masquerade themselves as different things, you know, because sexism is one, but there are many other nuances that [you must deal with] being a woman," she says.

"For instance, it's not as easy to command respect from your team if you're a woman, especially if you're a young woman. But for a man, the respect is given before it is earned. For a woman, you actually have to earn it."

Despite this challenge, Netshirembe is excited by the change she can make as a farmer.

She says that, as long as people need to eat, farming will be a sustainable business on which to take a risk. "It's one business where one can really make a difference, not just in their own lives but in the life of the community at large.

"And you can contribute significantly to the GDP. When I started finding out what the business of agriculture contributes to GDP in the country, I gained even more respect for the [sector]. I immersed myself [in it] more and more."

### **Tips for aspiring farmers**

Netshirembe says that anyone who wants to make a meaningful investment needs to consider agriculture. "In your repertoire of investments, you definitely need farming as one of them, or something in agriculture because in my mind, that is one business that will never die for as long as human beings are around."

Netshirembe is highly entrepreneurial. She says that aspiring farmers need to research things like critical success factors, which is something about which she wishes she had known more before starting her business. "There are so many critical success factors that I probably should have paid more attention to; that kind of hamstrung me as I moved along."

She also says that aspiring farmers need to know how much capital is involved in the business. "I wish I had an in-depth understanding of how much capital is involved in this business. It's a very capital-intensive business.

"But, it's a learning process", she says. "You will not succeed with your first [attempt]. I wish I knew then what I know now, but I'm not regretting [getting into farming.]. It was very good learning for me."



# Ntwampe Maureen Pudikabekwa

## Poultry farming #SoilSista stands on shoulders of giants



Tired of the corporate space, Maureen Pudikabekwa decided to go back to her farming roots. She joined her mother's poultry business.

As a child growing up in Verniet Moeglik in rural Limpopo, poultry farmer Maureen Pudikabekwa had no real ambitions to be a farmer. The eldest of three daughters, she grew up working the land with her grandmother.

Back then, her grandmother, Mmabagwe Rosina Machaba, was a crop farmer who specialised in growing various types of maize. The farming operation was 20km away from her childhood home, a distance Pudikabekwa would have to walk

when helping with the farming.

"Farming was a way of generating money and to take care of the family. At that time, I was not that much into it because I felt forced to do it," she recalls

Her indifference towards farming softened when she started understanding just how hard her grandmother was working. A single mother, her grandmother worked relentlessly in order to take care of her nine children. "My mother was three days old when my grandfather left, so [my grandmother] had to take care of all nine children on her own. She managed to do that through farming."

After matriculating from Nkobo High School in the Mogalakwena Local District in Limpopo, Pudikabekwa went on to study industrial and organisational psychology at the University of Pretoria. She completed her studies in 1998, and started a career in corporate human resource management that spanned sixteen years.

By 2017, she had grown tired of working in corporate spaces. She moved back to her family's home in Lephalale municipality and now works as the operations manager in the family farming business.

### **Moving into the family business**

As poultry farmers, Pudikabekwa and her family operate under the name Ntwalebohade Trading Services. The business was started by her mother, who combined the names of her three daughters to come up with the business moniker.

A teacher by profession, Pudikabekwa's mother, Sefularo Paulina Makgae, became a broiler farmer to supplement her income. "The local chief approached my mother and gave her five hectares of land. The chief said 'I can see that you are an active woman. Just think of a business that can improve the life of the community.' So my mother thought of poultry farming. She started with one chicken house. Today, she has about 14 houses. She employs five people permanently and I am one of them."

Based in Mokuruanyane Village in Lephalale, Ntwalebohade Trading Services buys day-old chickens and grows them up to six weeks. "On a

weekly basis, we put in about 2500 chicks. We then sell them to the community. We have a very good customer base around Lephallale."

### **Being a woman in farming can be hard**

As someone who inherited her farming knowledge from the women in her family, Pudikabekwa says that women farmers still experience discrimination in the farming industry. "It is difficult to secure funds from financial institutions just because I am a woman. They don't trust that I will be able to run a farm. I don't know if it is because they don't believe that a woman can do the hard, manual work required on a farm."

She has also found that securing markets is difficult because people do not take her seriously. "I find that you are not given big contracts just because you are a woman. I have gone to big companies or canteens where I will say 'I will be able to supply you with chickens'. They did not take me seriously. Just because I am a woman, they do not believe that I can pull it off."

### **Inspired by farming**

Pudikabekwa has not let these challenges stand in her way. For her, there is inspiration in every aspect of the farming journey, whether it is the daily operation of the poultry business, seeing the satisfaction of her customers, or simply the growth of the chickens.

"Seeing the growth and progress of the farm, knowing that you are an integral part of that growth, that's inspiring. Also knowing that you have the potential to feed the nation at a larger scale, that is so satisfying."

She also takes heart from making an impact on her community. "The fact that my decision to farm and the way I grow my products, has an impact on the daily lives of the community, that is very much inspiring and motivating."

### **Maureen Pudikabekwa's tips for women who want to get into farming**

1. Do your research: "Conduct research regarding what you want to farm and put a plan in place as a guideline," says Pudikabekwa. Like with any other business, starting a farming venture requires careful planning and attention to detail.
2. Do not be discouraged easily: Experiencing difficulties is inevitable, despite your planning, says Pudikabekwa. "You will experience some setbacks. That is part of business. You may lose lots of money but don't give up. Don't ever give up. Just work hard."
3. Start with what you have: "Don't wait for anyone to give you money because that doesn't really happen. Do not wait to have loads of funds, because you will never have enough funds to

start. Just start with what you have," advises Pudikabekwa.

4. Connect with other farmers: After you have decided where and with what you are going to farm, make sure that you have contacts. "Make sure that you create networks with other farmers, for help, for inspiration, for motivation, for information sharing, for knowledge."
5. Keep yourself in the know: "Don't ever stop learning about what you are farming or what you want to farm," says Pudikabekwa. "Things change on a daily basis and it's very important for you to know the industry that you are in."

# Pertunia Bothhole

## For this poultry farmer, her side hustle is a true passion



Human resources practitioner Pertunia Bothhole (43) credits her husband for his role in getting her to fall in love with poultry farming, which has since become her true love.

In 2016 she got involved in a broiler production business in Limpopo that her husband, Otladisa John Bothhole, had originally started. This unexpected passion has since become central to her life.

In 2018 she took over Tladisa Farming and Projects, which is based near Driekop in Limpopo. She has developed a passion for being the best broiler producer in her area. "I am the director of the farm

and everything – management, administration and all the controlling of inventory, the planning, the strategies – it is upon me."

Bothhole credits her husband for his continuous support in the poultry farming business. "My husband played the most important role in this, for making me love poultry farming."

Of all the things she foresaw herself doing with her life, farming was never one of them. Her background is in human resources in the mining sector, a field she worked in for many years and is still has a full-time job in. The couple now live on the farm full-time.

"I started working with my husband on this farming [venture], and then he encouraged me to go deep into it. I then fell in love with it. I love poultry farming more than any other work that I'm doing."

### **Seasonal challenges**

Bothhole says that winter is her biggest challenge every year. She finds that, in the cold, the chickens do not grow very well, and that she has to spend more money buying heaters and paying for electricity to keep them warm.

"At the time when they should be ready to be slaughtered or sold, they cannot be because they are still not grown. When you check on their ages, they are supposed to be at the age where they need to be sold but because of the winter season, they are not growing well."

Despite this seasonal challenge and her production slowing down, she finds that customers are still keen to purchase from her. "There is a high demand for chickens, especially in this area. People prefer white meat here more than red meat. And, apart from that, they don't prefer the braai packs that they can get from the shop. They prefer live chickens. They need to slaughter them for themselves."

She says that she has always had a higher demand than she could keep up with, which is why she does not feel as if she loses out. "When they are ready to be sold, I'm getting the customer. I already have a programme where I know, every second week, I must put in so many chicks so that at this period, they are ready."

To please her customers, Bothhole focuses on delivering service in a manner that is effective and efficient. She says she puts in a lot of time to make

sure that she does what is needed to deliver an excellent product and service.

"Customers like quality products, so when they check with my other competitors and compare the products we are selling, they find that mine are at a higher standard than my competitors'. That is where the trust is."

She also says that, when customers buy chickens from her, she makes sure that she sets their expectations and gives them exactly what they require.

"I maintain the contact numbers of my customers so that I can keep them posted about when the chickens are ready to be sold."

"When they come, they find exactly what they were expecting to get. Even now, when it is winter, because they know during wintertime, they won't get the same products as they get in summer. But again, it's still better than my competitors.

#### **Some advice for aspiring women farmers**

Bothhole says that there are government-funded programmes women can join to get started in the sector. She encourages women who want to do it eventually to take the leap. "They will be getting support surely, directly or indirectly."

She also encourages women to never give up

despite the challenges inherent in farming. "There is no business that doesn't have challenges. So, what they need to do is just have some dedication and prepare for the risk.

"When you look at it, an entrepreneur is actually a risk taker. And when they are taking a risk, they must know that it can hinder them, but when you lose, don't give up. You must just keep on trying until you get to where you want to go."

Perseverance is a trait that any farmer requires. Bothhole says that, while she finds women have the ability to persevere through most things, farming seems to be where women often give up.

"Farming is commitment," she says. "In most cases, I know women don't give up easily. But in farming, most of them think that they won't make it, but I know women can make it more, even more than what men can."



# Renate Griessel

## Composting entrepreneur on mission to feed the soil



Agriculture plays perhaps the most important role of any sector in the lives of South Africans, believes Renate Griessel.

Like most people, 26-year-old Renate Griessel wanted her life's work to have a purpose. After studying industrial engineering and entering the corporate world, the purpose she was looking for still eluded her. So, in 2018, she decided to go into agriculture.

"I had experienced a bit of difficulty in the corporate world, and I wanted to get away from that. And on the other hand, I wanted to work for something that gave me more of a purpose, which I couldn't really find in the corporate world."

She joined Polyorganics, the Gauteng-based

composting business started by her brother Francois in 2014. "There are horse stables in our area and horse bedding is a great source of composting material. We started by collecting [the] manure in stables from [around] our area and making compost from it."

Griessel is passionate about the farming industry. She says that it really embodies the spirit of community. "It's where we all have a common need, the need to eat. It's also where we are bridging the gap between ourselves and the environment. I think it's often easy to forget how important the environment is to us, when we are able to change everything. But in farming, you can't forget that."

### **Working with purpose and passion**

Her love for farming keeps her motivated and inspired. She emphasises that all life is linked to the soil, whether directly or indirectly.

"What inspires me the most, and what helps me get up every day in the morning, is that I am working for a greater cause. With composting, you start feeding the soil and all food comes from the soil at some point. If it's greens or plant-based food, it comes from the soil [directly], and if it's meat-based food, your animals that you use to create the meat products had to eat something that came from the soil."

Like all life on Earth, the soil needs to be fed as well, which is why composting is so important for the food system. Griessel says that, without it, there will not be any life.

"I think what's amazing is, with composting, you are at the start of what's known as the food web. And, without feeding the soil with composting microbes and really rich nutrients that plants need to grow, there can be no life on Earth. And so, it is important to look after the environment, and to do that you need to look after the soil. Making food for the soil is what motivates me and inspires me to make sure that we carry on, no matter how difficult it gets."

### **Working as a young woman in farming**

Griessel says that, as a woman, she sometimes struggles to get people to take her seriously. "With some clients, I have to send my brother in to face them because they won't necessarily do business with a young woman, because I don't really have

the experience they have.”

“It’s sad, but sometimes being a man makes you more credible.”

She prefers not to make generalisations, because she finds that each person is different. “There are a lot of people who do respect women, but there are also a lot of people who don’t.”

For Griessel, the problem of not being taken seriously is something she views as an obstacle that she can overcome. She cites an episode of *House*, an American TV Series, to explain her feelings. In the show, a female doctor has her work stolen by a male doctor, who then ends up getting all the credit for it.

“So, she’s very upset and she goes to the head of the hospital, and she explains what happened. The head of the hospital, who is a very successful

lady, says ‘so what? Just write another article’. So, as sad as it is that you have to work double as hard, it’s not impossible.”

**Her tip for other young women who may want to get into the agriculture industry?**

“Do your best. Don’t let other people get you down, because sometimes it’s going to be other women, and other times it’s going to be men who don’t take you seriously. But, as long as you are doing your best, and as long as you are staying professional, you can still overcome.”



# Thabang Precious Mathibe

## This pecan nut farmer is building her dream



Precious Mathibe, captured by the magic of farming from a young age, now owns her own 21ha farm.

Precious Mathibe dreamed of farming for the longest time. Inspired by her aunt, Mathibe learnt a lot about farming and the challenges farmers are facing today.

"Every time I was thrown into a farming space, [there was] peace that came with it. Not the money. The money is a bit tricky!" she laughs.

"That's [also] why I try to be environmentally sustainable, after hearing what their problems were. You know, the high cost of water, the high cost of electricity. [I was] learning from what they were already doing."

Mathibe was born and bred in Pretoria in Gauteng. She spent her entire schooling career in the city, and obtained a master's degree in international business from the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). After university, she moved to Germany for over a year as part of a management skills transfer programme.



"The point of the leadership management skills transfer was for me to come back to South Africa and transfer it to my peers," she says. She did so by working in the corporate sector, pondering her next move in the back of her mind.

### **Making her farming dreams come true**

Mathibe was determined to realise her dream, so she saved up. "I saved up, I think for almost five years and recently, last year, I was able to purchase my farm, which is a 21-hectare farm."

Her business, based in Pretoria, is called Huckleberry Farm. When she first pictured herself farming, she thought about opening a wine farm or a fish farm. "But [if] you try to get any of those, you realise how poor you are!"



Mathibe farms pecan nuts, and after just a year, is already growing her business. She is expanding her pecan production from 40 trees to 300 trees.

Very soon into pecan farming, Mathibe realised that she would need to diversify her farming operations. "Pecan nuts fall once, and people don't realise that. There is one harvest a year and then it's quiet. So, I had to start thinking of a diversification plan, or something that would keep operations running."

She opted for aquaponics, which is a combination of both aquaculture and hydroponics. "Because I'm [conscious of the] environment and sustainability, and in South Africa we are currently going through water shortages and droughts, etc., I wanted a system that is sustainable and that is moving with the times.

"So, that's why I ended up with aquaponics. I currently farm trout fish on the side of the aquaculture and on the side of the hydroponics, I farm niche crops like parsley, coriander, sugar snaps and mint."

### From far-fetched to real

The pecan nut farm was initially something Mathibe considered to be far-fetched. When she did her research on the location where she wanted to farm, she found that pecan nuts can actually grow there.

"It started off as a dream, a big dream and far-fetched. And to be honest with you, what actually even drew me closer was to find out how women were not in this field. It has its own close grouping and I think that's when I actually even started fighting to get into it."

Much to Mathibe's surprise, the resistance she was expecting from the other, mostly male, farmers did not materialise. "Quite frankly, I thought it was going to be hard with males, you know, and trying to get advice because I tried to look for mentors and people who would guide me in this journey. I was fortunate enough that it's been smooth sailing. They've been really pouring all they have out to help me."

### Staying the course

Mathibe says that one of the more challenging aspects of farming has been doing the human resources part of the job.

"I think that distinction of saying 'OK Precious, the business is moving or expanding to this level, you should start doing this and that and start allocating or start having more people'; I think I found that part a bit tricky because who do I trust?"

She also finds the physical labour of planting trees challenging, trying to do everything on her own. "But so far, I have to say, it's been smooth. The challenges are not as expected, initially."

The farm takes up most of Mathibe's time, but she still works within the corporate space as well. "I have to have different streams of income, but I'm fully managing the farm. I'm also still in international relations."

Her biggest piece of advice for other women who

are aspiring to be farmers is just to start. "Whether small, whether just producing two tomatoes a week, just start. There are many innovative ways now, so if [you] are afraid of risk, there's backyard farming. Just start and you'll deal with the rest on the way."



# Tsholo Penyenye

## How Tsholo found purpose through tragedy



Shortly after the death of her father, Tsholo Penyenye had a difficult decision to make. She could either live in grief, consumed with sadness and anger after losing her father who toiled his land passionately. Or she could take on the most daunting task of her life and run the family farming business.

She chose the latter and today counts among the finest of North West female farmers. However, not only did the life-changing decision bring her success, but the farmer also says agriculture revealed a side of her that she never knew existed.

"You think you know yourself, but you really don't. I didn't know how resilient I was until I became a farmer," Penyenye states.

Her farm lies on 400 hectares in the Ramatlabama village where she runs a mixed farming operation

producing cattle, feed and crops. This is all managed by the Penyenye Family Primary Cooperative which her father established many years ago.

### **Generational success weighs on her shoulders**

Growing up in Mahikeng in North West, Penyenye had always harboured feelings of restlessness to escape the confines of her small town. So, she dropped out of varsity, where she studied marketing, to pursue a career as a flight attendant.

Having always wanted to travel, but never being able to afford it, Penyenye decided that the best way to do this would be by applying for a flight crew position.

"I was blessed," she admits. "Our parents always encouraged us to explore. They allowed us to be exposed to various experiences and cultures. I've travelled the world, which was quite a great experience for me.

"I was blessed," she admits. "Our parents always encouraged us to explore. They allowed us to be exposed to various experiences and cultures. I've travelled the world, which was quite a great experience for me.

"I must be honest I really didn't miss home. I was too busy having the time of my life," she chuckles. "I would make it a point to come home every now and then to see my family, but that was about it."

Penyenye soon grew tired of the air travel industry. So, while working for South African Airways, she decided to finally obtain her marketing qualification, this time through UNISA.

At the time, she and her sister were discussing plans to start a company in which they would facilitate marketing and research for clients. They eventually did and Penyenye ended up travelling even more than before.

But this came to an abrupt end on the day her father passed away. Suddenly, the weight of a first-generation black farming family fell on her shoulders.

### **No time to settle in slowly**

Her father had been cultivating the land since 1987. It was through the practice of agriculture that he was able to sustain his family and see Penyenye and her siblings through school and university.

Although her father spent his days toiling away as a farmer, Penyenye had no appetite for the sector and its intense and tiring days. But there was no one else.

"Please don't make a mistake, it was a scary and daunting decision. Farming from a distance and the real deal where you are actually planting are two completely different things. I was so intimidated, I had the shock of my life," she says.

When Penyenye took over in 2016, She did not have the luxury of slowly finding her feet and coming to terms with her new life as a farmer.

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When Penyenye took over in 2016, She did not have the luxury of slowly finding her feet and coming to terms with her new life as a farmer.

"Until I took time to be aware and introspect, I didn't think that I could do it. Now I always tell myself that failure is not an option. No matter how scary or daunting it is, I will take it on because of the support I have," Penyenye says.

Before her father passed, he had created a cooperative which allows the family to enjoy the fruits of his labour. Penyenye explains that if her father did not do it, they would have lost the farm after his passing because it is leased from Government.

"Just thinking about it gives me chills," she states. "My mother would have been devastated knowing how hard dad worked on this land. She was there with him through all the highs and lows of farming."

Her father she describes as a great farmer. It would have been a shame if his legacy had gone to waste.

"As black farmers, they went through so many struggles. My father is my drive, lifeline and motivation. I think about him a lot and I have to live up to his expectations. Because of him I am very focused."

### **Multiplying a small farming empire**

Currently, she focusses on creating multiple projects within the farming business, to help ensure its financial sustainability.

Since taking over from her father, Penyenye has managed to grow their cattle herd from 17 cattle to close to 120. One of her biggest income streams is the feed she sells, grown on her farm.

They now also farm with small stock. She has incorporated sheep and has plans to immerse herself in broiler farming. Right now, Penyenye is building the chicken houses and establishing markets.

What she loves about agriculture is the evolution of the industry.

"I love seeing something grow from nothing to something and agriculture is about that. Seeing your product harvested and then taken by trucks and getting the money out of it, oh it's addictive," she exclaims.

Her goal, she says, is simple, "I want to take my small empire from a R2 million annual business to a R10 million annual business. I really do, and it's not even impossible."

# Keseabetswe Jane Alexander



# Mbali Tshabalala



# Mojabeng Mashale



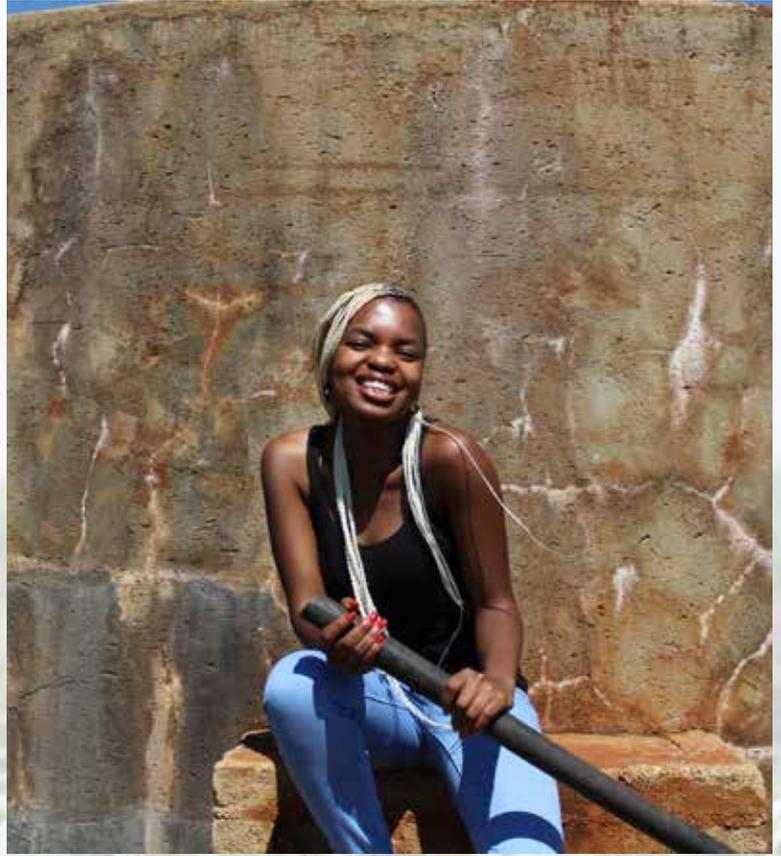
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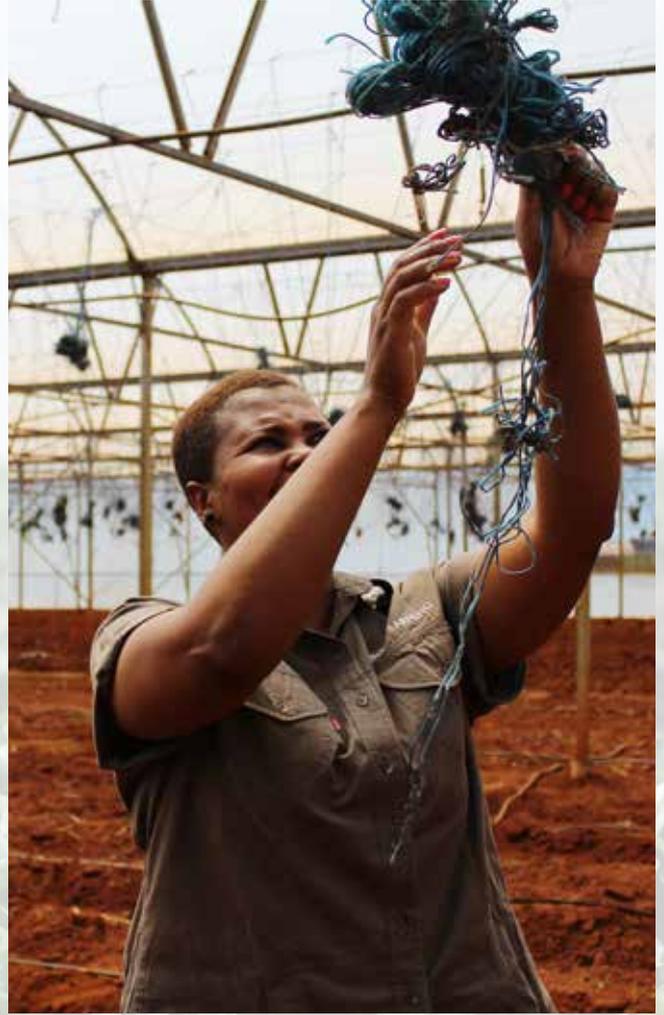
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