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Editor's Note

SEASON OF BEANS AND NEW BEGINNINGS

February arrives with the unmistakable rhythm of cultivation. Across Eswatini's farmlands, tractors hum with renewed purpose, seed bags are opened with optimism, and farmers turn their attention to one of the country's most dependable lifeline crops, beans. It is a season that tests preparation, rewards experience, and shapes the economic fortunes of many rural households.

Bean production has evolved from a subsistence staple into a strategic commercial crop within Eswatini's agricultural value chain. It supports household nutrition, rural incomes, and national food security at a time when global food systems remain fragile. Recognising this, the February edition of Agribusiness Media places the spotlight on the bean planting season, offering expert-driven guidance to help farmers improve yields, reduce losses, and unlock greater market value.

Agriculture, however, is never only about crops. It is about people whose resilience turns uncertainty into opportunity. This month, we profile Menzi Vilakati, whose tunnel tomato enterprise reflects the changing face of farming in Eswatini. His journey offers insight into protected cultivation and the entrepreneurial mindset shaping the country's agribusiness landscape.

Financing agriculture remains a

central national concern. This issue examines farmer expectations around the EADF, with calls for clearer governance, transparent access, and stronger stakeholder engagement to ensure funding translates into practical impact.

The sector also faces challenges beyond policy. The floods and storms in Mayiwane and Maphalaleni exposed the fragile balance between farming and climate volatility. While government intervention has provided relief, these experiences reinforce the urgency of climate-resilient production systems, improved rural infrastructure, and proactive disaster management.

Livestock producers are navigating a shifting regional biosecurity environment following South Africa's 10-year Foot-and-Mouth Disease strategy. For Eswatini's beef sector, this highlights the importance of coordinated disease surveillance, science-based animal health interventions, and strengthened livestock traceability.

Sustainability is no longer optional. This edition explores the growing relevance of organic inputs and regenerative practices that support soil health, food safety, and environmentally responsible value chains as markets increasingly reward sustainable production.

What defines February is its spirit of renewal. Fields are replanted,

strategies refined, and farmers apply lessons from both success and adversity. Despite rising input costs, unpredictable weather, and evolving market demands, Eswatini's farmers remain anchored by resilience and belief in the land.

At Agribusiness Media, our role extends beyond reporting. We seek to bridge knowledge gaps, stimulate informed dialogue, and connect farmers, policymakers, investors, and agribusiness stakeholders.

To the farmers preparing their lands, managing herds, adopting new technologies, or rebuilding after climate setbacks, this edition is dedicated to you. As another planting season unfolds, one truth remains constant: agriculture is not merely an occupation, but an enduring partnership between land, knowledge, and human determination.

Phesheya Kunene
Editor, Agribusiness Media



MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE ISSUES BEAN PRODUCTION GUIDE AS PLANTING SEASON BEGINS

By Sibusisiwe Ndzimandze | Journalist | Additional reporting by: Phesheya Kunene | Editor



MALKERNS — As the 2026 dry bean planting season begins across Eswatini, the Ministry of Agriculture is urging farmers to treat beans as a serious commercial crop—not a last-minute fallback. Speaking from the Malkerns Agricultural Research Station, Ministry researcher Nicholas Manana, a Research Officer, said the country has a clear opportunity to reduce bean imports and keep more income in local farming communities, but only if producers commit to correct agronomic practice from the start.

Eswatini consumes an estimated 7,000 to 8,000 tonnes of dry beans each year, yet local production remains below 2,000 tonnes, leaving a wide deficit that is largely filled through imports. Manana said the solution is not simply planting more land. Instead, closing the gap will depend on precision agronomy, the consistent use of certified inputs, and timely decisions throughout the season.

“Beans can be profitable, but only when farmers follow correct agronomic practices—from soil testing and seed choice to spacing and timely management,” he said.

SOIL TESTING MUST COME FIRST

Manana stressed that soil testing should be the first step in any bean enterprise and should not be treated as optional. Beans perform best in soils with a **pH range of 5.2 to 6.5**, which supports nutrient uptake and healthy root development. He noted that farmers who delay soil testing often end up planting late because laboratory results can take time to return.

“If you are a bean farmer, the first thing you must do is soil testing so that you know which fertiliser is needed,” he said.

Where soil pH falls below the recommended range, farmers are advised to follow laboratory recommendations before planting. Where soil testing has not been conducted, standard guidance includes applying **250 kg per hectare of 2:3:2 (22)** or **150 kg per hectare of 2:3:2 (37)** as basal fertiliser.

TIMING AND LAND PREPARATION CAN MAKE OR BREAK THE CROP

Because beans are sensitive to

excess moisture and temperature extremes, planting time remains a critical decision. Manana explained that beans do not require heavy rainfall and should ideally be planted once intense rains have subsided. Planting windows also vary by agro-ecological zone: Highveld farmers can begin as rainfall declines, Middleveld production typically runs from **January to March**, while Lowveld farmers are advised to delay until **February** due to high early-season temperatures, although irrigation creates additional planting opportunities.

Land preparation is equally important. Beans have weak stems and require a fine to medium soil tilth for strong establishment and uniform stands. “Rough or cloddy soil can damage young plants and reduce plant stand,” Manana said.

CERTIFIED SEED, CORRECT SPACING, AND THE RIGHT PLANT POPULATION

Manana emphasized that certified seed is central to achieving reliable yields, with locally available varieties including **AS 148**, **CAP 2000**, **AS 9216**, Camba Manga, **Kunjengenyama**, among others, each suited to specific windows and maturity periods. He noted that

Camba Manga is fast-maturing and useful when planting is delayed, though its yield potential is lower than longer-maturing varieties.

Spacing, he warned, is one of the most common mistakes that quietly reduces yields. Recommended guidelines include **45–60 centimetres between rows** and **7.5–10 centimetres between plants**, with seed rates of 70–100 kilograms per hectare, depending on seed size. Farmers were cautioned against applying maize spacing, particularly **90 centimetres**, as this can significantly reduce yield potential even when extra rows are added. Certified seed sold through registered outlets is regulated and tested for germination and quality, offering farmers dependable planting material.

FERTILISATION, WEEDS, AND REDUCING RISK

Although beans are legumes capable of fixing nitrogen, Manana said poor crop performance may still require careful supplementation. Where nitrogen is used, it should be applied before flowering, as late or incorrect application can delay pod and seed formation. Weed control is most critical in the first five weeks after planting, when beans are most vulnerable to competition for moisture, nutrients, and light.

To reduce production risk and strengthen long-term productivity, Manana encouraged farmers to practice crop rotation, particularly with maize to improve soil fertility, break pest and disease cycles, and build resilience across seasons.

FROM SUBSISTENCE CROP TO COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITY

With good management, dry beans



can yield **1.5 to 2 tonnes per hectare**, while irrigated production can reach up to **3 tonnes per hectare**. Manana noted that beans have real commercial value: the **National Maize Corporation (NMC)** currently pays farmers around **E28,000 per tonne**, with estimated production costs of about **E25,000 per hectare**.

He encouraged farmers to move beyond maize-only production systems and recognise beans as a viable cash crop with nutritional benefits and soil-improving value through rotation.

“There is money in bean farming. Beans are nutritious, they improve the soil through rotation, and the certified seed available in shops is improved,” he said.

As the planting window narrows, the Ministry of Agriculture’s message is straightforward: whether Eswatini continues to rely heavily on bean imports or begins to shift toward stronger local production, will depend on farmers’ discipline, certified inputs, and commitment to getting the basics right from day one.



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PAN 148 LEGACY CONTINUES AS AS 148 AFTER PANNAR SEEDS EXIT

AS 148, “Eswatini’s gold,” returns to EPA Agro as farmers race the February planting window

By Sibusiso Mngadi | Chief Editor

MATSAPHA — The bean seed variety many Eswatini farmers came to trust as **PAN 148** is not disappearing—despite **Pannar Seeds closing** shop. Instead, its legacy is continuing under new ownership, after **propagation rights for PAN 148** were transferred to AGT Foods, which introduced the variety under its AS series in **2025**, giving farmers a familiar performer in a new label.

AGT Foods Africa is based in **Chamdor, Krugersdorp (South Africa)** and forms part of **AGT Food and Ingredients**, a global value-added processor and supplier of pulses and specialty crops, including beans.

That transition is now playing out on the ground, with **AS 148** bean seed—the variety being positioned as the continuation of PAN 148—now available in limited quantities at the **Eswatini Procurement Agency (EPA) Agro Shop in Matsapha**.

Bongani Mamba, Executive Director at EPA Agro Shop, said **10kg packs** of AS 148 are in stock, but warned that supplies are tight and demand is climbing quickly as farmers try to plant within a narrowing seasonal window.

“We are already seeing repeat buyers coming back for it,” Mamba said, pointing to last season’s field results from farmers who purchased the seed through EPA Agro. “That

tells you the variety has performed and built trust.”

FROM PAN 148 TO AS 148: SAME PERFORMANCE, NEW CUSTODIAN

For many growers, the biggest question has been whether the “new” seed is truly the same dependable bean they planted before. EPA Agro says **AS 148** is intended to carry the same genetic performance standard farmers associated with PAN 148—now supported by **AGT**, the company responsible for propagation and quality systems behind the AS line.

The return of farmer demand, Mamba said, reflects that the seed has continued to deliver under local conditions, keeping alive what PAN 148 became known for: **Grade 1 quality potential, strong yield performance, and reliable uniformity when agronomy is done correctly.**

QUALITY CONTROLS FROM LAB TO FIELD

AS 148 is backed by AGT’s quality assurance processes, including testing through a private seed laboratory in South Africa aligned to **International Seed Testing Association (ISTA)** standards, aimed at ensuring **purity, germination, and varietal integrity** before the seed reaches farmers.



Bongani Mamba

Each pack is also treated with **AgriCOTE®** seed-coating technology, designed to help early crop establishment by providing key nutrients and protecting the seed against soil-borne **insects and fungal diseases** during germination—often the most vulnerable stage of the crop. Agronomists note that early vigour and uniform emergence can make the difference between a strong crop and a weak one, especially in seasons where rainfall patterns are uneven or taper off early.



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FROM PAN 148 TO AS 148: SAME PERFORMANCE, NEW CUSTODIAN

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TIMELY PLANTING AND NATIONAL FOOD GOALS

The availability of AS 148 comes as government continues to push for higher local production under

the **Phezumkhono** call, aimed at reducing reliance on imported staples. Beans remain strategic in that drive because they are nutrient-dense, marketable, and well-suited to local production conditions.

The broader push has also been supported through the **Hambubuye** input subsidy programme, implemented through the **National Maize Corporation (NMC)** and **EWADE**, to ease input costs and encourage timely planting, particularly for small- and medium-scale farmers.

STOCKS ARE LIMITED—AND THE CLOCK IS TICKING

With February planting underway and rainfall already tapering in some areas, EPA Agro is urging farmers not to delay. Mamba cautioned that waiting until late February increases the risk of missed planting opportunities and lower yields.

“Farmers who planted it last season are returning for it again,” he said, describing AS 148 as

“**Eswatini’s gold**” because of its production value and contribution to household and national food supply.

The EPA Agro Shop at **Frontline Complex, Matsapha Industrial Site** expects stocks to move quickly. Sales are first-come, first-served, and farmers are encouraged to secure seed early—often the difference between strong returns and avoidable losses.

EPA Agro Shop (Matsapha) location & contacts: 1st Avenue, Frontline Complex, Matsapha | 7606 8613 / 7653 1299

AGT contact: AGT Foods Africa, 8 Jacobs Street, Chamdor, Krugersdorp, 1754 (South Africa) | Tel: +27 11 762 5261



LAKE AGRICULTURE INTRODUCES CLIMATE-ADAPTED MAIZE HYBRIDS TO SUPPORT FARMERS UNDER CHANGING WEATHER CONDITIONS

By: Sibusisiwe Ndzimandze | Journalist

NTONDOZI — With climate change increasingly disrupting maize production across Eswatini, farmers are being encouraged to shift toward improved hybrids that can perform under erratic rainfall, heat stress and changing planting windows. During a field engagement at Ntondozi, Dumsani Mbingo of Lake Agriculture said the company has developed a range of climate-adapted maize hybrids aimed at helping farmers secure more reliable yields, reduce seasonal losses and protect national food security as weather patterns become less predictable.

Lake Agriculture currently offers five maize hybrids, four white maize varieties and one yellow maize variety, bred to deliver strong yield potential while maintaining grain quality and desirable eating characteristics. Mbingo said the goal is to give farmers practical options that match their planting dates, local conditions and market needs.

BUILT FOR TOUGHER SEASONS

Mbingo explained that the hybrids share key traits designed to strengthen crop performance in

challenging seasons. They are bred for climate adaptability, allowing them to cope better under variable rainfall patterns. They also offer good eating quality, producing sweet, palatable maize suitable for both green mealies and dry grain use.

A standout feature, he said, is improved cob protection. During silking and cob formation, the husks close properly at the cob tip, helping to prevent water entry, reduce poor grain fill and limit damage that often leads to lightweight or poorly formed cobs at harvest. The hybrids also show tolerance to common maize



Climate-Adapted Maize Hybrid Seeds

diseases such as maize streak virus (sifo semkhwane), leaf blight (lidvuba) and rust, diseases that frequently surge after heavy rains followed by intense sunshine.

MATCHING HYBRIDS TO MATURITY AND PLANTING TIME

To support better planning, Lake Agriculture groups its maize hybrids into early-maturing, medium-maturing and specialised categories. This allows farmers to select varieties that align with planting schedules, rainfall trends and intended end use.

Early-maturing hybrids (Lake 401 – “Udokotela”)

Lake 401, known locally as Udokotela, is positioned for farmers who want quicker results, particularly where planting is delayed. Mbingo said it tassels at around 66 days after planting, reaches physiological maturity in 115–120 days, and can produce one large cob per plant, or two

cobs under good management.

Because it develops rapidly, he stressed that farmers must keep management timely, especially around weeds and fertility. The name Udokotela, he said, reflects the satisfaction farmers experience when the hybrid performs consistently. Mbingo added that Lake 401 can also support sequential cropping, allowing farmers to harvest maize and still plant fast-maturing bean varieties within the same season where conditions allow.

RO413 – “LUSHIKISHI”

RO413, also called Lushikishi, is another early hybrid known to many farmers, having previously been marketed under Pannar. It is suitable for late planting, even into December, and has a shorter plant height, reducing lodging under strong winds. It can produce up to two cobs per plant, but has a dent grain type, which Mbingo said is softer and not ideal for samp.

He noted that RO413 is especially useful for farmers who need to harvest earlier—particularly in areas where fields must be cleared before livestock are released after the cropping season.

MEDIUM-MATURING HYBRID (LAKE 601 – “VULINDLELA”)

Lake 601, known as **Vulindlela**, sits between early and late maturity, offering farmers flexibility for both fresh and dry markets. It tassels at around **67 days**, can be harvested for green mealies at about **100 days**, and fully dries down at around **135 days**.

Mbingo said it typically produces two average-sized cobs, resulting in strong overall yield. The husks close well, protecting the cob, and the cob position is lower on the plant, reducing damage. Lake 601 produces a flint grain type, hard, durable grain suitable for mealie meal and samp. He added that the grain quality is consistent, making it easier for farmers to dry and store without heavy sorting, an advantage for commercial buyers.

Yellow maize hybrid (Lake 606 – “Njengelanga”)

Lake 606, locally called Njengelanga, is the company's yellow maize option. Mbingo explained that Lake Agriculture's numbering system uses the final digit to distinguish grain colour, even numbers indicate yellow maize, while odd numbers indicate white maize.

Lake 606 matures in about **130 days** and produces grain rich in carotene, vitamins and minerals. It is mainly suited for animal feed, though it can also be consumed by people as green mealies. Mbingo cautioned farmers about cross-pollination, which can mix grain colours and reduce market value. He advised planting white maize first, then planting yellow maize four to five weeks later to limit pollen overlap.

Specialised green mealies hybrid (Lake 711 – “Vuvulane”)

Lake 711, known as Vuvulane, is bred specifically for green mealies production. Mbingo said the hybrid was tested for six years under controlled conditions for performance in the SADC region and has shown strong results when planted. It can be harvested as green mealies in 94–104 days, producing large, attractive cobs with a sweet taste that appeals to the market.

He added that if farmers choose to leave it longer, Lake 711 can also mature into dry grain, giving producers flexibility to supply both fresh and dry maize markets depending on prices and demand.

REDUCING RISK, IMPROVING RETURNS

Mbingo urged farmers to base hybrid selection on planting date, rainfall patterns, and the intended use of the crop, whether for household consumption, green mealies sales, dry grain markets

or livestock feed. He said the availability of early, medium and specialised hybrids gives farmers practical tools to reduce climate risk and stabilise returns. “These hybrids are designed to work with farmers, even when planting is delayed or weather conditions are challenging,” he said.





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to common leaf disease such as common blight, halo blight, and common rust, ensuring healthier plants and improved yield stability. Additionally,

its resistance to BCMV provides further protection against viral infections. With a determinate growth type, LAKE 9200 offers uniform plant development and maturity. Its low susceptibility to shattering helps preserve seed quality during harvest and storage, minimizing losses. The variety

also boasts large, visually appealing seeds that are highly attractive to buyers and traders, enhancing its marketability.

MASIHAMBISANE "Let's Go Together"

YOUTH LOANS TO POWER BEAN AND MAIZE PRODUCTION

By: Sibusisiwe Ndzimandze | Journalist



MANZINI — With the bean planting window narrowing, young farmers producing beans and maize have been urged to move fast as a production financing facility offering loans of up to **E150,000** remains open for eligible applicants. The funding programme, delivered through a partnership between the **National Maize Corporation (NMC)** and the **Youth Enterprise Revolving Fund (YERF)**, is designed to ease one of agriculture's most persistent barriers: access to working capital.

The initiative provides targeted production finance to Emaswati youth farmers producing beans and maize, while linking beneficiaries to a structured market. The programme was introduced in **January 2024** to support youth farmers with seasonal funding and to strengthen commercial production through better planning, reliable offtake, and clearer accountability.

BEAN DEADLINE APPROACHING FAST

Applications for bean production loans close at the end of January, leaving farmers with limited time to prepare and submit the required documentation. Applications for maize production loans remain open until the end of July, reflecting a longer seasonal window for the crop. Officials have encouraged bean farmers to avoid last-minute submissions, warning that delays could result in missed planting opportunities and lost production potential for the season.

WHO QUALIFIES

- ◆ The facility targets youth who are actively producing for the market. Applicants must be:
- ◆ Emaswati youth aged **18 to 35**
- ◆ Producing beans or maize
- ◆ Farming commercially, not only for subsistence
- ◆ Ready to plant and actively produce in the season in which

they apply

- ◆ Loan amounts linked to registration status
- ◆ Loan size is determined by how the farmer is registered, with the programme structured to support growth from individual production into organised farming entities:
- ◆ Individuals / sole traders: up to **E50,000**
- ◆ Registered companies: up to **E100,000**
- ◆ Registered cooperatives: up to **E150,000**

The minimum loan is **E10,000**, and applicants are encouraged to apply for amounts that match their production plan and land size to reduce repayment pressure.

WHAT THE LOAN CAN BE USED FOR

- Funding is strictly reserved for production-related costs. Approved uses include:
- ◆ **Seed and fertiliser**

- ◆ **Land preparation and planting**
- ◆ **Irrigation costs**
- ◆ **Labour and basic operational expenses**

Programme guidelines emphasise that the loan is not for personal use and must align with the business plan submitted during application.

LAND SIZE REQUIREMENTS TO SUPPORT VIABILITY

To ensure production levels are commercially viable, minimum land thresholds apply:

- ◆ Beans: at least 1 hectare
- ◆ Maize: at least 3 hectares

These requirements are meant to help farmers produce enough volume to repay the loan while still generating profit.



NMC CONTRACTS PROVIDE A GUARANTEED MARKET

A key condition for participation is being contracted with NMC. This requirement provides what many small-scale producers lack: market certainty. Under the contract model, farmers benefit from a guaranteed buyer, clear delivery arrangements, and reduced risk of being stuck with unsold produce, one of the most common causes of financial losses in crop farming. Infrastructure and documentation are essential

Applicants must also demonstrate readiness to produce under practical farming conditions. This includes showing that:

- ◆ **The land is fenced**
- ◆ **An irrigation system is in place**
- ◆ **Valid land** documentation is available, such as land rights or intent-to-lease forms

The aim is to reduce reliance on rainfall and strengthen crop protection, improving the chances of successful production.

BUSINESS PLANNING IS COMPULSORY

To reinforce agriculture as a business, applicants must submit a **business plan and three-year cash-flow projections**. The requirement is intended to strengthen financial discipline, encourage realistic planning, and prevent diversion of production funds into household expenses. Farmers who need assistance are encouraged to seek support from extension officers or visit YERF offices for guidance.

HOW TO APPLY

Applications can be submitted online through the **YERF portal**, or delivered in person at **YERF offices, Tinkhundla centres, NMC depots**, and Rural Development

Areas (RDAs).

WHY THE PROGRAMME MATTERS

By combining production finance with guaranteed markets, minimum infrastructure requirements, and compulsory business planning, the NMC–YERF facility aims to move young farmers from high-risk small-scale operations into stronger, sustainable commercial farming. With bean deadlines approaching, eligible farmers have been urged to prepare documents early, apply in time, and secure inputs before the season closes.

For more information, farmers can contact **YERF on 7606 4002** or **NMC on 7809 7560**.

A LOOK AT AGRO-CHEMICALS

By Mcebo Mnisi

Rapid population growth places increasing pressure on agriculture. More people means more mouths to feed, and this forces farmers to rethink traditional farming systems. We are expected to **produce more, faster, and at lower cost**, all while operating in an economy that is far from stable.



One of the most significant innovations in modern agriculture has been the use of **pesticides, insecticides, and herbicides**. These technologies undeniably reduce labour and short-term production costs. However, their long-term effects on ecosystems, soil health, and farm sustainability are often overlooked.

For now, let us focus on **herbicides**, particularly **glyphosate-based products**.

The Glyphosate Hype

Glyphosate-based herbicides have been adopted with a level of enthusiasm similar to when social media platforms like Facebook were first introduced. The products are aggressively marketed, easy to use, and appear inexpensive. On the surface, they look like the perfect solution to weed control.

Yes, they are cheap — **but they are also very expensive**. The real cost is hidden beneath the soil.

What Happens Below the Surface

Soil is not just dirt. It is a **living ecosystem** made up of bacteria, fungi, protozoa, nematodes, earthworms, and other microorganisms. These organisms are responsible for:

- ◆ Decomposing organic matter
- ◆ Releasing and cycling nutrients
- ◆ Improving soil structure
- ◆ Supporting plant root health



When glyphosate-based herbicides are used repeatedly and extensively, this living system is disrupted. Many beneficial soil microbes are reduced or eliminated. Over time, the soil loses its biological activity — **the soil begins to “die.”**

A simple test illustrates this clearly:

Throw a banana peel onto your garden soil and observe how long it takes to decompose. The faster it breaks down, the healthier the microbial life in that soil. Slow or no decomposition is a clear sign of poor microbial activity.

The rate of decomposition is **directly correlated** with soil biological health.

How This Affects You as a Farmer

When you kill the soil biology, crops

can no longer access nutrients naturally. Even if nutrients are present in the soil, plants struggle to absorb them because the biological “middlemen” are gone. As a result:

- ◆ Crops become dependent on **synthetic fertilisers**
- ◆ Fertiliser application rates increase
- ◆ Input costs rise year after year

Think of it like a person who can no longer digest food properly. Instead of eating normally, nutrients must be delivered directly into the bloodstream. In farming terms, **Lesihlahla sesiphila nge-drip** — the crop survives only through constant artificial feeding.

This is why, while herbicides keep getting cheaper, **fertiliser prices continue to escalate**. Once soil life is destroyed, fertiliser becomes non-negotiable. From a business perspective, it makes perfect sense.

It's not personal.
It's business.

The Long-Term Trap

This creates a dangerous cycle:

1. Herbicides kill weeds and soil microbes
2. Soil fertility declines
3. Fertiliser use increases
4. Production costs rise
5. Soil becomes even more dependent on chemicals

Eventually, the farmer becomes locked into a system that is expensive, fragile, and difficult to escape.

Mcebo Emmanuel Mnisi is an impact-driven Biologist and Agricultural Development Strategist with over 15 years of experience scaling agribusiness value chains across Eswatini.





SMART TUNNELS, STRONG MARKETS

BY PHESHEYA KUNENE

How climate-smart tomato farming is redefining commercial horticulture. Tomato farming in Eswatini has long been treated as a seasonal opportunity, vulnerable to weather shocks, market volatility and uneven returns. Yet in Malkerns, one operation is quietly proving that tomatoes, when produced under climate-smart systems and guided

by disciplined management, can anchor a stable, high-value agribusiness.

At Eswatini Agri Tech Solutions, founder Mbuso Menzi Vilakati has turned protected tunnel farming into a commercially viable model that responds directly to the pressures facing modern agriculture. On his 12-hectare farm, five tunnels stand as

working evidence that productivity, market access and climate resilience are no longer competing priorities, but complementary outcomes of informed decision-making. Vilakati, who entered farming in 2015, has built his enterprise around a simple but often overlooked principle: consistency is currency. In fresh produce markets, reliability matters as much as yield.

From exposure to control

Climate volatility has steadily reshaped production realities across Eswatini. Hailstorms, heat stress and erratic rainfall patterns have made open-field tomato production increasingly risky. Tunnel farming, Vilakati argues, is not about luxury or scale, but about control.

Under tunnels, temperature, moisture and pest pressure are managed rather than endured. Tomatoes are shielded from physical damage, while drip irrigation systems ensure precise water delivery, reducing waste and supporting uniform growth. The result is a crop that meets market specifications not by chance, but by design. Vilakati says tunnel production allows farmers to plan harvests around demand rather than weather forecasts, a critical advantage in a market where timing determines price.

Precision farming as a business strategy

At Eswatini Agri Tech Solutions, tomato production begins long before transplanting. Seedlings are raised under controlled nursery conditions to ensure strength, uniformity and disease resistance. Once transferred into tunnels, spacing, staking and pruning are strictly enforced.

These practices improve airflow, reduce disease incidence and channel plant energy toward fruit development. Fertigation programmes are adjusted according to growth stage, ensuring balanced nutrition and reducing physiological disorders such as blossom-end rot.



For Vilakati, these are not agronomic preferences, but business decisions. Poor management, he notes, is expensive in a market that rewards quality and punishes inconsistency.

Supplying formal markets with confidence

The true test of commercial farming lies beyond the field. Vilakati supplies major supermarket chains across Eswatini, including SuperSpar outlets, a market segment known for uncompromising standards.

Supermarkets demand uniform size, colour, firmness and uninterrupted supply. Tunnel farming, by smoothing production cycles and limiting losses, allows Vilakati to meet these requirements consistently. This reliability has positioned his operation as a preferred supplier rather than a speculative vendor. Market access, he believes, must be built deliberately. Farmers who plant first and look for buyers later often struggle to recover costs. Those who align production with buyer expectations secure stability and bargaining power.

Beyond fresh produce, unlocking value addition

Vilakati also sees tomato production as an entry point into agro-processing. Tomatoes can be processed into sauces, pastes and other products, extending shelf life and absorbing surplus volumes during peak harvest periods.

As consumer demand for locally produced foods grows, processing offers farmers a pathway to retain value within the country while reducing post-harvest losses. It also creates opportunities for small-scale processors, cooperatives and rural enterprises to integrate into the value chain. NamBoard and the market outlook The National Agricultural Marketing



Board has repeatedly highlighted tomatoes as a priority crop with sustained year-round demand. Institutional buyers, retailers and households collectively consume large volumes, yet supply remains uneven, particularly during adverse weather periods.

NamBoard continues to encourage farmers to adopt protected cultivation and coordinated production planning to stabilise supply and reduce imports. Climate-smart tunnel farming directly supports this agenda, enabling farmers to produce consistently while maintaining quality standards demanded by formal markets.

Building resilience through smart systems

For Vilakati, tunnel farming is not merely a response to climate change, but a long-term resilience strategy. By reducing exposure to environmental shocks and improving resource efficiency, tunnels protect both crops and capital. Diversification within tunnels further strengthens resilience. Producing cucumbers, peppers, cabbage

and broccoli alongside tomatoes spreads risk and supports steady cash flow throughout the year.

Lessons for the next generation of farmers

Vilakati's journey offers a clear message to emerging and commercial farmers alike. Success in horticulture is not driven by scale alone, but by management, planning and market awareness. He advises farmers to start with manageable systems, invest in skills and infrastructure, and build relationships with buyers early. Tunnel farming, while requiring upfront investment, delivers returns when paired with discipline and a clear market strategy.

The future of tomato farming As Eswatini confronts rising food import bills and increasing climate pressure, climate-smart horticulture is emerging as a strategic pillar of agricultural growth. Tomatoes, with their strong demand and processing potential, sit at the heart of this transition.

For farmers willing to adopt smarter systems and treat agriculture as an

enterprise, the opportunity is tangible. At Eswatini Agri Tech Solutions, tomatoes are no longer just a crop. They are a carefully managed product, moving deliberately from tunnel to shelf.

In an economy searching for resilient, high-value agricultural pathways, smart tunnels may well be shaping the future of Eswatini's fresh produce sector.



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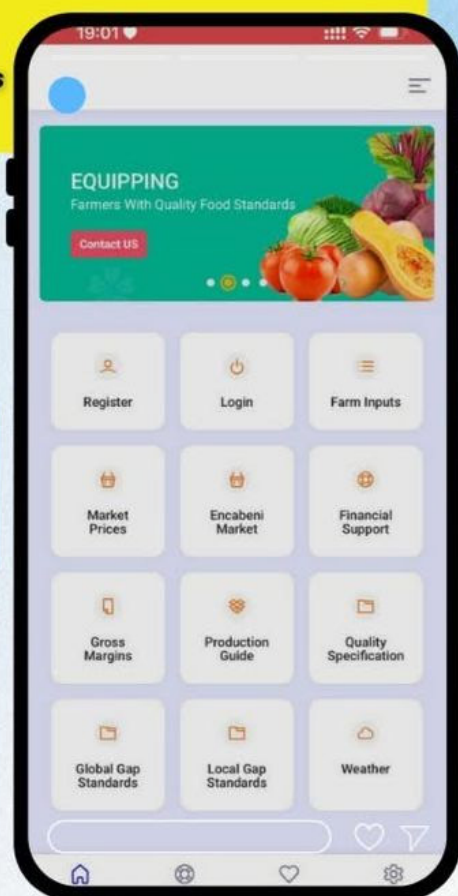
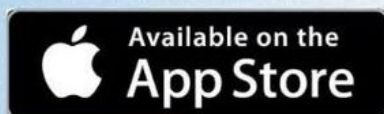
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- Priority for local supply
- Less market saturation

WHAT HAPPENS IF FARMERS DO NOT UPDATE EHIS?

- Local produce faces unfair competition
- Prices for local farmers drop

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ESNAU CALLS FOR “STRUCTURED FUNDING” AS EADF SCALES UP

■ BY SIBUSISO MNGADI

The recent rollout of capital through the Eswatini Agriculture Development Fund (EADF) has injected fresh optimism into the sector. But as more farmers begin to access financing, leaders within the farming community are cautioning that disbursement alone will not deliver long-term transformation.

Tammy Dlamini, CEO of the Eswatini National Agricultural Union (ESNAU), says the Fund is still “lacking in certain critical areas,” and has called for structured funding that goes beyond production loans. In particular, he points to gaps in input support, processing and value addition, and technology adoption—areas he believes must be strengthened if the Fund is to meaningfully lift farmers out of their current challenges over time.

Dlamini has also emphasised the need for a deliberate shift in farmer engagement, urging that producers be consulted as farmers and actively involved in shaping the very programmes meant to support them.

A TOOL FOR TRANSFORMATION

The EADF was launched on 28 November 2024 by the Ministry of Agriculture, seeded with E53 million in government capital. Its mandate is to expand access to affordable, responsive finance, especially for those commonly excluded from traditional lending—most notably smallholder farmers, who account for an estimated 70% of Eswatini’s agricultural production.

Operating through a partnership with Eswatini Bank, the Fund is designed to align public policy objectives with banking systems and discipline. Beyond lending, its broader goals include reducing risk for private-sector participation, enabling targeted government investment in strategic infrastructure, and maintaining a contingency fund to cushion the sector against shocks such as natural disasters and disease outbreaks.

RAPID MOMENTUM: THE THIRD DISBURSEMENT

Even as stakeholders debate the Fund’s structure and approach, the EADF’s footprint is expanding quickly. By July 2025—just eight months after its launch—total disbursements



had surpassed E32 million.

The most recent third disbursement saw E26 million awarded to 16 farmers and agripreneurs during a workshop in Ezulwini. Beneficiaries included:

- ◆ Poultry and piggery operators
- ◆ Horticulturalists and agribusiness leaders
- ◆ Youth- and women-led enterprises, which Eswatini Bank Managing Director Dr. Nozizwe Mulelwa has identified as a core focus under the bank's inclusive financing agenda

To date, loan approvals stand at E31.1 million, supported by E33.9 million in total guarantees, enabling the bank to extend financing deeper into under-served farming communities.

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

The need for stronger structure and engagement—echoed by ESNAU—also emerges in the lived experiences of beneficiaries. Duncan Dlamini, founder of DJD Pork, says EADF financing enabled him to commission a 486-weaner capacity unit and employ more than 35 people.

However, he also highlighted a recurring operational constraint: delays in loan approvals and disbursement timelines.

“Delayed disbursements create gaps in our operations when quotations expire or exchange rates shift,” he said—underscoring the importance of aligning administrative processes with

the real-time realities of farming, where timing often determines profitability.

THE ROAD AHEAD: LOANS, NOT GRANTS

As the EADF matures, the Ministry of Agriculture has remained firm that the disbursements are loans, not grants, and that repayment discipline is essential to keeping the Fund sustainable. The long-term vision is to build a bankable

generation of farmers capable of driving food sovereignty, job creation, and rural wealth.

In response to structural concerns raised by sector stakeholders, the Ministry has signalled plans to introduce complementary interventions, including grants, subsidies, and major infrastructure investments—such as improved roads and water systems—to strengthen the broader enabling environment for agricultural growth.





MONTEGO PET NUTRITION & FARM SERVICES ESWATINI: A TRUSTED PARTNERSHIP FOR SMARTER PET WELLNESS

BY BHEKI MHLANGA

For six years and beyond, pet owners across Eswatini have relied on Farm Services Eswatini for dependable access to premium pet nutrition through its partnership with Montego Pet Nutrition. Based in Matsapha (Sigodvweni), Farm Services remains a trusted local source for authentic Montego products, practical feeding advice, and the kind of after-sales guidance that helps pets thrive. Established in 2000 in Graaff-Reinet, South Africa, Montego has spent more than 25 years perfecting balanced, reliable nutrition that supports healthy growth, sustained energy, and overall vitality for dogs and cats.



Bheki Mhlanga

A SMARTER, TAILORED APPROACH TO FEEDING

Montego understands that feeding is not a “one-size-fits-all” process. To maximise health outcomes and reduce waste, pet owners are encouraged to match feeding choices and portions to key factors such as:

- ◆ **Animal type:** Dedicated food formulations for dogs and cats, including considerations for small and large breeds.
- ◆ **Life stage:** Nutrition designed for puppies/kittens, adults, and seniors.
- ◆ **Lifestyle and condition:** Feeding adjusted for activity level and reproductive status (Pregnant vs suckling & Hunting Vs House keeping pets).

Because high-quality feed is often more nutrient-dense, many pets can maintain excellent condition on smaller, measured portions, while also supporting easier digestion and less stools on your yard—benefits that pet owners notice quickly.

QUALITY YOU CAN TRUST

Montego is known for nutrition that delivers visible results—healthy appetite, strong condition, and a lively, well-cared-for pet. The brand’s formulations are made using natural ingredients, with no added artificial colours or flavours, and can last up to 24 months when stored correctly.

NUTRITION FOR EVERY APPETITE

Montego’s range supports both everyday feeding and variety through add-ons and rewards, including:

- ◆ Broths/soups
- ◆ Sauces
- ◆ Chewes treats
- ◆ Snack bars



These options make it easier for owners to maintain consistent nutrition while still giving pets something enjoyable.

FEEDING TIPS FOR BEST RESULTS

To help pets transition and thrive on Montego, Farm Services recommends:

- 1. Avoid mixing:** Do not mix Montego with other foods.
- 2. Transition gradually:** Introduce Montego slowly when changing from another brand.
- 3. Follow the guide:** Use the feeding instructions on the bag to match portions to your pet's weight and lifestyle.
- 4. Always provide clean water:** Ensure water is available at all times.

- 5. Store correctly:** Keep food in a cool, dry, well-ventilated place away from moisture and direct sunlight.

WHERE TO BUY MONTEGO IN ESWATINI

Main stock is available at Farm Services Shop/Crane Feeds (Matsapha)

You can also find Montego products at trusted stockists including:

- ◆ Sofique (Manzini & Mbabane) - 79722164/ 76959480
- ◆ Buycash Hardwares (Nationwide) - 78067604
- ◆ Kitale Shop & Eagles Nest (Malkerns) - 7678903/76583082
- ◆ Zanderpeer (Tshaneni) - 76555702

- ◆ Extrashine and Vilakati Farm Services (Nhlangano) - 76437669
- ◆ Multifeeds (Siphofaneni & Siteki) - 7870056/76031030
- ◆ Nsoko Trading (Nsoko) - 78340814 Matata Hardware (Big Bend) - 76556755

Get in Touch for Orders and Enquiries

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- ◆ Landline: (+268) 2518 4287

Follow Farm Services Eswatini on Facebook for product updates and practical pet wellness tips.

Bheki Mhlanga is the Technical Sales and Marketing Manager at Farm Services & Crane Feeds. He holds an Msc in Animal Science.



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JOINT RIVER BASIN AUTHORITIES – PROJECT BOARD: HOW WATER PERMITS UNLOCK PROJECT FUNDING

PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR

SIPHOFANENI — In Eswatini, many projects do not fail because the ideas are weak. They fail because the fundamentals are treated as an afterthought. And few fundamentals are as decisive as water.

Across agriculture and rural development, water is often assumed to be available simply because a river runs nearby or groundwater can be drilled. Yet in today's investment environment, water access without a permit is not access at all, it is risk. Increasingly, that risk is what stalls financing, delays implementation, or kills projects before they even break ground.

As irrigation schemes expand and agro-processing proposals multiply, financiers are asking harder questions: Is the water source legal? Is abstraction sustainable? Has basin capacity been assessed? If those answers cannot be proven, funding slows, sometimes it disappears entirely. This is where the **Joint River Basin Authorities – Project Board (JRBA-PB)** has become a quiet but powerful force shaping which projects move forward and which remain trapped at proposal stage.

WATER PERMITS: MORE THAN PAPERWORK

Water permits are often seen as administrative hurdles. In reality, they function as economic instruments. They determine who may abstract groundwater, divert surface water, or store water for commercial use, and under what conditions. More importantly, a permit signals order and accountability in a system where scarcity is rising and competition for water is tightening.

“Many projects collapse before implementation because water compliance is addressed too late,” said **Wandile Zishwili**, Public Relations and Communications Officer for JRBA-PB. “By the time financiers request proof of legal water access, the project is already exposed.”

That exposure matters. Development banks, private investors and donor agencies increasingly treat water governance as a central due-diligence test. A missing permit can signal regulatory uncertainty, environmental risk, and potential community conflict. For funders, that combination is often enough to walk away.

WHY INVESTORS FOLLOW THE WATER

Modern project finance no longer separates profit from sustainability. Environmental and



social safeguards sit at the centre of investment decisions, especially in agriculture, where climate variability and resource pressure are reshaping production risk.

A valid water permit confirms that abstraction levels are sustainable within a given basin. It shows alignment with national law and reduces the likelihood of shutdowns, fines, or disputes.

In financial terms, it lowers risk and increases predictability, two things lenders and investors value more than good intentions. “Water permits are not optional paperwork,” Zishwili said. “They are proof that a project is ready, lawful and responsibly designed.” For farmers seeking to scale, the distinction is critical. Irrigation without a permit may operate in

the short term, but it undermines long-term viability. As climate stress intensifies and enforcement tightens, unpermitted operations are often the first to face restrictions.



FROM JOB LOSS TO POULTRY ENTREPRENEUR: NOXOLO NKAMBULE'S RISE

BY: PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR



Noxolo Nkambule

KAPHUNGA — What happens when a job ends, options shrink, and a young professional is forced to choose between waiting for the next opportunity, or creating one? In Kaphunga, **Noxolo Nkambule** is answering that question with broilers, discipline, and a clear business plan that is steadily rewriting what youth-led agribusiness can look like in Eswatini.

Nkambule did not enter poultry through inheritance, privilege, or generous start-up capital. She entered through disruption. When her corporate contract ended and prospects in the formal job market dried up, she made a calculated pivot. What had once been a side pursuit became her main livelihood. She

chose broiler production because it offered what she needed most: a relatively low barrier to entry, strong demand, and a quick turnaround cycle.

"I needed something that could generate income quickly and consistently," she says. "Poultry offered exactly that."

A small unit with commercial intent

Nkambule currently produces **200 broilers per cycle**, operating from a repurposed home structure adapted for poultry. The infrastructure is simple but purposeful. Infrared lights and a wood-fired heating system support brooding, while strict daily routines, feeding, hygiene, monitoring, and record-keeping,

help keep losses manageable.

This is not a show farm. It is a working unit built for efficiency. What sets Nkambule apart is less about size and more about mindset. She treats poultry as a business system governed by timelines, input costs, and margins, not as a casual side activity.

Her academic background in **International Business Management** is visible in how she runs the enterprise. Production cycles are planned. Inputs are tracked. Sales are timed. She sells birds both **live and dressed**, allowing her to respond to different customer preferences while improving turnover.

Digital selling, local trust

Marketing remains grassroots, but effective. Nkambule uses **WhatsApp, Facebook, and word of mouth** to build a steady community-based customer base. In rural Eswatini, these informal digital channels are becoming powerful market tools, helping small producers reach customers directly, reduce reliance on intermediaries, and build repeat buyers through trust.

Poultry's promise, and pressure in Eswatini





Nkambule's enterprise sits within a wider national reality. Poultry remains one of the most accessible entry points for youth and women in agriculture, with demand driven by population growth, urbanisation, and chicken's affordability compared to red meat.

Yet the sector is not simple. Feed prices remain volatile and heavily import-linked. Day-old chicks are often sourced externally. Biosecurity risks persist. Formal markets, supermarkets, butcheries, and large buyers, demand consistency, volume, and compliance standards that many small producers struggle to meet.

In many cases, poultry projects fail not because the birds do not grow, but because the business is not organised, cash flow is unstable, supply is irregular, and planning is weak. Nkambule has studied those patterns closely. Her next step is deliberate: by 2026, she plans to scale to **2,000 broilers per cycle**, arranged in staggered batches of **500 birds per week**. The model is designed to create continuous supply, stabilise income, and build the reliability needed to enter more formal markets.

Learning as a competitive advantage

In early 2025, Nkambule joined the **Women Farmer Foundation's Innovative Climate-Smart Tunnel Training Programme**. Although the programme focuses mainly on horticulture, she says its influence has strengthened her poultry business, particularly in planning, efficiency, and sustainability thinking. It has also opened the door to diversification. Nkambule now intends to add vegetables and herbs through climate-smart tunnels, spreading risk and creating more stable year-round income.

"Sustainability is no longer just about protecting the environment," she says. "It is about protecting the business."

From survival to scale

Nkambule is clear about what stands between her and the next level: capital. Purpose-built housing, stronger biosecurity systems, cold storage, and transport all require investment. She believes strategic partners could unlock finance, mentorship, and access to higher-value

markets. With the right support, she says her operation can grow beyond survival farming into a competitive agribusiness, one that can employ young people and contribute meaningfully to food security. Her ambition is direct: she does not intend to remain small.

Lessons for aspiring farmers

Nkambule's advice to other young farmers is practical and grounded: start with what you have, secure a market early, track your costs, invest in learning, and stay patient and consistent. Her story reflects a broader shift in Eswatini, where agriculture is increasingly absorbing talent displaced from the formal economy. When approached with discipline and commercial intent, farming becomes more than a fallback, it becomes a launchpad.

In Kaphunga, under the steady hum of broiler production, Nkambule is proving that unemployment can be repurposed into opportunity. As she once told fellow graduates during a Women Farmer Foundation engagement:

"The outfit has changed, but the ambition hasn't."

LAYER FEED MASH FOR LAYER BIRDS: HIGH CALCIUM, HIGH ENERGY, HIGH PERFORMANCE

BY: MNCEDISI SIMELANE

Keeping layer chickens is a practical way to strengthen a household protein basket through a steady supply of eggs. With good management, just 10-layer birds can produce about 7 eggs per day, giving roughly 210 eggs per month, enough to improve family nutrition with high-quality protein, vitamins, and minerals. This output can reduce food costs, support children's growth, and provide extra eggs for sharing or selling. To achieve these results, daily care must be consistent, and proper nutrition cannot be ignored: balanced energy, protein, and calcium keep hens healthy and laying. Clean water and routine feeding times make the difference.

In the poultry industry, egg production section in particular, Hy-Line Brown and Hy-Line Silver are globally recognized for high egg numbers, excellent feed conversion, and strong eggshell quality. But genetics alone cannot deliver results, nutrition at Point of Lay (POL) is what unlocks that potential. The transition from pullet (layer chick) grower feed to a specialized Layer Feed Mash at 16–18 weeks of age is one of the most critical management decisions a producer makes, because it supports the bird's shift from growth into sustained egg production that can extend to over 90 weeks.

Why Layer Feed Mash Is Preferred for Layer Birds

Mash feed is a loose, un-pelletized mixture of ground grains, protein meals, vitamins, minerals, and calcium sources. For the Hy-Line layers, mash is widely preferred because it:

- ◆ Encourages natural feeding and foraging behaviour, reducing boredom and helping limit feather pecking in high-density systems.
- ◆ Promotes slower, steadier feed intake, which supports a stable metabolism and consistent nutrient absorption.
- ◆ Helps ensure the hen consumes a more uniform nutrient mix across the day (especially when mineral sources are properly blended).

This is different from broilers, where fast intake is often acceptable because the goal is rapid growth. A layer, however, must maintain a consistent nutrient and energy supply to support daily egg formation, not just short-term weight gain.

The Calcium Imperative: Why Layer Diets Have Much More Calcium Than Broiler Rations

The biggest nutritional difference between layer mash and broiler rations is **calcium (Ca)**. A typical broiler finisher feed contains about



Mncedisi Simelane

0.8–1.0% calcium, while a POL layer mash commonly contains about **3.5–4.5% calcium** (often around 3.8–4.2% depending on formulation and management). This is not a minor adjustment; it reflects a completely different biological job.

1) Eggshell chemistry drives massive calcium demand

A single eggshell contains roughly about 2 g of calcium, mainly as calcium carbonate (CaCO_3). If a hen produces an egg nearly every day, she must mobilize large amounts of calcium continuously. When the feed does not supply enough calcium, the bird draws it from her own body, particularly the medullary bone reserve, which weakens skeletal integrity over time and results in thin shells, cracks, and higher breakage.

2) Layers “export” calcium; broilers do not

Broilers are bred for rapid muscle



deposition, so their main mineral requirement is structural bone support for body weight. They do not lose calcium daily through eggs. In fact, feeding broilers a layer-level calcium concentration can be harmful and may contribute to metabolic strain, including kidney problems (e.g., visceral gout) and poor performance. For Hy-Line layers, calcium has a double duty:

- ◆ Maintenance of strong bones
- ◆ Production of shells for 250–350 eggs per year (depending on management and strain performance)

3) Calcium particle size matters (fine + coarse)

A well-designed layer mash usually includes fine limestone plus coarse limestone or oyster shell. The coarse particles stay longer in the gizzard and dissolve slowly, especially overnight, matching the period when most shell calcification occurs. This ensures calcium is available even when the hen is not actively eating, supporting stronger, more consistent shell quality.

The Importance of High Energy Feed: “Fuel for the Egg Factory”

If calcium is the building material for the shell, metabolizable energy (ME) is the fuel that runs the

entire egg-production “factory.” POL hens are under a double demand: they are finishing body development while simultaneously ramping up reproductive activity. For this reason, Hy-Line POL and early-lay mash diets are commonly formulated around ~2750–2900 kcal/kg ME (often near ~2800 kcal/kg, depending on raw materials and climate).

1) Sustaining peak production and avoiding a “lay dip”

Hy-Line hens are metabolic athletes. If energy is too low, the bird prioritizes survival and maintenance first, and egg output suffers, often seen as delayed onset, reduced egg size, or a dip in the lay curve.

2) Energy covers “living costs” and activity

Hens spend energy on body temperature control, movement, feeding activity, and immune function. Mash feeding often increases time spent eating compared to pellets, so energy needs must still be met. High-energy diets ensure that after maintenance needs are covered, there is still enough energy left for daily egg formation.

3) Birds regulate intake based on energy density

Chickens generally eat to meet

energy needs. If the diet is too low in energy, birds may over-consume feed to compensate, increasing wastage and risking metabolic problems when nutrient balance is off. Conversely, if energy is correctly set, intake stabilizes and performance becomes more predictable, improving feed efficiency and profitability.

Typical Nutritional Targets for Hy-Line Point-of-Lay Mash

A balanced POL layer mash goes beyond calcium and energy, but these are the “headline” drivers of success:

- ◆ **Crude Protein:** 15–18% (growth completion, tissue repair, albumen/egg white formation)
- ◆ **Calcium:** 3.5–4.5% (commonly ~3.8–4.2%) for shell strength and bone health
- ◆ **Metabolizable Energy:** 2750–2900 kcal/kg (often ~2800 kcal/kg) to sustain production
- ◆ **Available Phosphorus:** 0.40–0.60% (works with calcium for skeletal integrity and metabolism)
- ◆ **Linoleic Acid:** 1.5% (supports egg size development)
- ◆ **Vitamins & Trace Minerals (A, D₃, E, Zn, Mn, Se):** immunity, calcium utilization, shell quality, antioxidant defense

Practical Feeding Considerations



Courtesy Photo (For Illustration Purposes)

During the POL Transition

- ◆ Transition gradually from grower to layer mash around 16–18 weeks, aligned with body weight targets and flock uniformity.
- ◆ Maintain consistency in ingredient quality and formulation, because sudden changes can disrupt intake and delay lay.
- ◆ Monitor body weight, feed intake, and early shell quality weekly, these indicators tell you if energy and minerals are correctly balanced.
- ◆ Ensure calcium sources are properly mixed and consider particle size strategy (fine + coarse) to support overnight shell formation.

Feeding Hy-Line birds at Point of Lay is a true balancing act. A properly designed high-calcium, high-energy layer mash is not just “another feed”, it is the foundation of flock profitability and egg quality. The higher calcium level, compared with broiler rations, supports daily eggshell formation without draining skeletal reserves, while adequate dietary energy sustains peak production, stable body condition, and efficient feed conversion. When nutrition is correct at POL, Hy-Line birds deliver what they are bred for: strong shells, high persistency, and maximum lifetime egg output.

In poultry, light acts as the primary environmental cue for reproduction. The biological pathway from light perception to egg production involves a delicate hormonal balance between the brain and the reproductive organs.

1. Day length and Perception

Hens do not just see light; they “absorb” it. While light is perceived through the eyes, it also penetrates the skull to reach extra-retinal photoreceptors in the brain.

- ◆ Day length: A minimum 14 hours of light is required to trigger a response.
- ◆ Role: Sufficient light signals the brain that environmental conditions are favourable for offspring survival, stimulating the reproductive axis. Shorter day lengths can cause hens to cease laying, while overly high intensity and length may lead to stress and aggression.

2. The Pineal Gland and Melatonin

The pineal gland acts as the bird’s biological clock. It produces Melatonin almost exclusively during periods of darkness.

- ◆ Melatonin’s Role: It is often considered “anti-gonadal” in birds. High levels of melatonin (at night) suppress the reproductive system.
- ◆ The Light Link: Light exposure inhibits the pineal gland, causing melatonin levels to drop. This reduction “unlocks”

the production of stimulating hormones.

3. FSH and Egg Production

Once melatonin levels drop due to light, the hypothalamus stimulates the pituitary gland to release Follicle-Stimulating Hormone (FSH).

- ◆ FSH’s Role: It targets the ovaries, directly stimulating the growth and maturation of ovarian follicles (the yolks).
- ◆ Outcome: As these follicles mature under the influence of FSH, they eventually release an ovum (yolk) to begin the egg-forming process in the oviduct.

A graduate of the University of Eswatini and the KZN Poultry Institute, Mncedisi Simelane brings over 20 years of industry leadership. From government extension services to senior roles at Crane Feeds, National Chicks, and Futi’s Chicken Cottage/Infinite Chicken, he currently serves as Group Technical Advisor for Feedmaster. He specialises in hatchery management and animal husbandry, consistently guiding businesses toward sustainable profitability and improved livelihoods

Layer Mash

"Eggs by the dozens!"



Layers can be phase fed or alternatively if management factors dictated they can be provided with a base diet of any of the following:

- » **Phase 1:** Feed to hens from point of lay until 60 weeks of age. Each hen will consume roughly 105g of feed per day
- » **Phase 2:** Feed to hens from 60 to 70 weeks of age. Each hen will consume roughly 110g of feed per day
- » **Phase 3:** Feed to hens from 70 weeks until culling. Each hen will consume roughly 115g of feed per day

Pullets can be also raised and managed following the below feed requirements:

- » **Pullet starter:** Feed 41g per day to hens from week 1 to week 6.
- » **Pre lay:** From week 18 to week 20, feed 115g per day.
- » **Pullet grower:** Feed 51g to chicken from week 7 to week 9.
- » **Peak lay:** From 21 to 95 weeks, feed 120g per day.



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ESWATINI'S 30-YEAR ORGANIC FARMING PIONEER

...Sydney Kunene leads the charge in sustainable agriculture

BY: SIBUSISO MNGADI

MANZINI — For more than 30 years, **Sydney Kunene** has been building a quieter revolution in Eswatini's fields, one rooted in healthier food, healthier soils, and farming systems that can sustain production without heavy dependence on synthetic chemicals. Long before "organic" became a popular label, Kunene was already working to prove that agriculture can be productive and profitable while protecting people and the environment.

Through **Agric Organics**, the company he leads, Kunene has positioned organic fertilisers and pesticides not as niche alternatives, but as practical tools for long-term soil restoration, climate resilience,

and food security. His conviction is straightforward: farming must not compromise human health or degrade ecosystems in the name of short-term yields.

"Organic foods are safe for the environment and for human life," he says, pointing to the growing international shift toward safer production methods. While many developed markets now view organic practices as standard, Eswatini and much of the region still rely heavily on chemical inputs, driven by cost pressures and limited awareness. Yet Kunene believes the tide is slowly turning, particularly as a new generation of educated, entrepreneurial farmers begins to test organic approaches.

Science and business, working together

Kunene's credibility comes from a rare blend of technical training and commercial insight. He holds agricultural qualifications from certificate level through to degree, along with postgraduate studies in business, development finance, and management. That combination has allowed him to engage farmers on the science of inputs and soil, while also understanding the economics of adoption and supply.

"My passion was always agriculture," he explains, "but I wanted to commercialise it and strengthen the business side of farming inputs and services."

That thinking shaped the evolution of Agric Organics. The company's early operations included conventional chemical inputs, but over time Kunene shifted toward organic solutions, aligning his enterprise more closely with sustainability and the growing global demand for safer production.

Global lessons, local opportunity

Kunene says exposure to international markets reinforced his belief that organic farming can work in Eswatini when supported properly. He points to the European Union's expanding organic market and to examples closer to home, such as Kenya, where export crops like green beans have achieved strong market access through quality standards and disciplined production systems.

"These examples showed me that organic production can succeed here too, if farmers have the right support," he says. To Kunene, Eswatini's opportunity is twofold: strengthen domestic food systems with healthier inputs and, over time, position selected value chains for premium regional and export markets, especially as consumer demand for traceable, chemical-responsible produce increases.

The cost of being early

Pioneering organic inputs locally has not been easy. Kunene recalls years when the biggest barrier was not farmer resistance, but a lack of supporting systems: limited farmer knowledge on how to apply organic products correctly, inadequate equipment, and the absence of local testing and certification facilities.

In one period, he says, organic products sat on government shelves for nearly five years because the country lacked laboratory capacity and regulatory clarity to evaluate and approve



them properly. For an early mover, delays of that kind can stall growth and limit farmer confidence. Still, Kunene remained committed, and he says renewed efforts by authorities to test and assess organic inputs using internationally recognised benchmarks, including European reference data, are helping create a clearer path for the sector.

A long-term investment in Eswatini's future

Three decades into the journey, Kunene remains pragmatic. He acknowledges that input cost still shapes most farmer decisions, particularly for smallholders operating with thin margins. But he believes awareness is growing, driven by concerns about soil decline, health impacts, and the need for climate-resilient production.

"For me, organic farming is not a trend, it is a long-term investment in Eswatini's agricultural future," he says. *"As the economy improves, more farmers will take this road."* His story is ultimately one of



patience and positioning: aligning farm productivity with ecological realities, while building a market for inputs that restore soils rather than exhaust them. If Eswatini's organic sector expands in the years ahead, Kunene's decades of groundwork will stand as proof that sustainable agriculture is not a new idea, it is an overdue one.

Key takeaways for farmers and agribusiness

Organic farming strengthens soil health and reduces chemical exposure risks over time. Adoption grows when farmers have training, correct application guidance, and reliable inputs. Organic is both a sustainability strategy and a market opportunity, especially where standards and traceability matter. Clear testing systems and supportive regulations are essential to scale the sector confidently.



AGRICULTURE SMART AI SET TO RESHAPE FARMING SUPPORT IN ESWATINI

BY SIKHONA SIBANDZE

...Digital tools promise smarter decisions, stronger value chains, and better resilience for farmers

A digital turn in the fields Farming in Eswatini is entering a decisive moment. Rising input costs, volatile weather patterns, and persistent disease outbreaks are placing unprecedented pressure on producers across the country. Against this backdrop, digital innovation is no longer a luxury. It is becoming a necessity.

Agriculture Smart AI, known as ASA, is preparing to launch a digital platform that seeks to change how farmers plan, monitor, and manage their operations. The platform aims to bring intelligence, speed, and structure into everyday farming decisions, turning agriculture from a reactive activity into a data-driven business.

Background: from fragmented systems to one platform

For decades, many farmers have relied on notebooks, memory, phone calls, and delayed updates to run complex agricultural operations. While experience and resilience have kept farms

going, inefficiencies have quietly eroded profits and productivity. ASA was developed in response to this reality. The platform is designed to integrate crop and livestock management, supplier access, logistics, and financial records into a single digital ecosystem. It is currently awaiting launch through partnerships with agribusiness suppliers, financial institutions, and public sector stakeholders.

Founder and project manager

Celumusa Thusi said the vision behind ASA was to give farmers practical tools that move agriculture beyond survival. He explained that when farmers have access to timely information and clear records, agriculture becomes a structured business rather than a constant struggle.

How the system works on the ground

At the heart of ASA is practical decision support. Farmers will be able to upload photos of crops or livestock, ask questions, and

receive AI-supported guidance aimed at early disease detection and informed intervention. A cabbage farmer, for example, does not need to be physically present in the field to understand what is going wrong. Images and data uploaded through the platform allow the farmer to receive guidance on possible disease symptoms, treatment options, and appropriate pesticides. The result is faster response times and reduced losses.

The platform also allows farmers to track activities, inputs, and outcomes daily, building a digital farm history that supports better planning and productivity monitoring. More than technology, a farming operating system ASA is deliberately positioned as more than a marketplace or record book. Thusi described it as an operating system for agriculture, one that supports farmers throughout the entire production cycle, from land preparation to marketing.



Cel'musa Thusi – Founder and project manager of Agriculture Smart AI (ASA)

By consolidating farm records, input purchases, and advisory support, the platform helps farmers see their operations as integrated value chains rather than isolated tasks. This approach supports efficiency, accountability, and long-term sustainability.

Industry impact: records that unlock finance. Access to finance remains one of the biggest constraints facing farmers in Eswatini. Many producers struggle to secure loans due to weak or inconsistent records of production, costs, and performance.

ASA's digital record-keeping is designed to change this. By generating clear, verifiable farm histories, the platform strengthens farmers' ability to engage with financial institutions such as commercial banks, development finance institutions, and agencies like CFI, EADF, and SEDCO. In an environment where lenders increasingly demand evidence of viability and risk management, structured data becomes a powerful asset.

Government information in one place

The platform also aims to integrate verified public information through partnerships with government institutions. This includes alerts on disease outbreaks such as Foot and Mouth Disease, early warnings on emerging risks, and timely updates on subsidies and support programmes. By centralising official communication, ASA reduces farmers' dependence on scattered information channels and improves response time during crises.

Climate pressure and smarter planning

Recent storms and shifting rainfall patterns have underscored the vulnerability of farming systems to climate change. ASA seeks to use AI-supported insights to improve seasonal planning, weather awareness, and decision-making around planting and land preparation. Smarter timing, informed by data, can reduce losses and improve yields, particularly for small and medium-scale producers who operate with limited margins for error.

Market outlook and regional relevance

While ASA is being launched in Eswatini, its design reflects broader trends across Southern Africa. Digital agriculture platforms are increasingly recognised as essential tools for improving productivity, strengthening value chains, and enhancing food security. ASA's longer-term ambition is to position itself as a leading agricultural operating system in Africa, supporting data-driven farming and more resilient food systems.

Policy and development alignment

Beyond commercial farming, the platform aligns closely with

national development priorities and global frameworks such as Sustainable Development Goal 2 on Zero Hunger. Improved productivity, reduced post-planting losses, better access to services, and stronger farmer incomes all contribute to more stable food systems.

Looking ahead

As Agriculture Smart AI moves toward launch, its impact will depend on farmer adoption, the strength of partnerships with suppliers and institutions, and the reliability of its advisory support. If these elements align, ASA could mark a turning point in how farming is practised in Eswatini, connecting knowledge, markets, finance, and resilience into one intelligent system.

For a sector under pressure, smart farming may soon become the most important input of all.

FLOODS FORCE MONTIGNY TO RETHINK TIMBER OPERATIONS

BY SIKHONA SIBANDZE

MANZINI — Persistent heavy rains, increasingly associated with climate change, are forcing Montigny, one of Eswatini's largest forestry operators, to rethink how it harvests, processes and delivers timber to market. The company says the recent weather disruptions have already cost it between E3 million and E5 million, slowing production and temporarily halting exports to Mozambique as damaged road infrastructure across the border prevents trucks from reaching destination routes.

Montigny runs gum-tree plantations and timber processing operations in Bhunya and Nhlanguano, and has been among the agribusinesses hardest hit by the prolonged wet conditions. Speaking during a media briefing in Bhunya, Montigny Communications Officer Sihle Mavuso said exports have been severely affected by the situation in Mozambique.

"Since the rains started, nothing has been going to Mozambique," Mavuso said. "The heavy rains there have damaged roads, and trucks can no longer navigate those routes."

Output drops across harvesting, transport and processing

The impact on day-to-day operations has been immediate. Mavuso said Montigny's harvesting and transport activity has fallen sharply across its sites. Under normal conditions, the company produces and moves about 40 truckloads of timber per day, but current conditions have reduced that to around 20 truckloads daily.

Processing output has also declined. Where Montigny previously produced 25 to 35 truckloads of wooden planks per day, production has dropped to 20 to 25 truckloads. The Nhlanguano operation has experienced an even steeper slowdown, falling from 15–20 truckloads a day to about 10. "All these reductions are directly linked to the heavy rains that have been falling across the country," Mavuso said.

Turning disruption into a long-term strategy

While the losses have been significant, Montigny says it is treating the disruption as a turning point, using it to accelerate operational upgrades

and build resilience against increasingly unpredictable weather. A key part of this shift is the introduction of mechanical harvesting operations. Under this approach, timber can be harvested more efficiently and moved out of waterlogged plantation areas to locations with more reliable access, such as Bhunya, where processing and distribution can continue even when certain sites become difficult to reach. The aim, Mavuso explained, is to keep the supply chain moving even when extreme rainfall makes parts of the plantation network inaccessible.

Rail expansion seen as a climate-smart logistics option

In addition to mechanisation, Montigny is also looking to strengthen and expand the use of rail transport, which it already uses on a limited scale. With road networks increasingly vulnerable to washaways, flooding and damage during extreme weather events, rail is being considered a more stable option for moving large volumes of timber. "We are currently using the railway line, but we are also planning to grow and expand this transport mechanism," Mavuso said.

A signal of broader change in forestry

Montigny's response reflects a wider shift taking place in Eswatini's forestry sector: moving from reactive loss management to proactive climate adaptation. By investing in mechanised harvesting, refining logistics, and diversifying transport infrastructure, the company is positioning itself to protect production capacity, sustain export activity and remain competitive in an era where extreme weather is becoming more frequent. For Montigny, the message is clear, resilience is no longer an optional add-on. It is now a core part of doing business in a changing climate.





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EHIS REGISTRATION TO BECOME COMPULSORY FOR NAMBOARD FARMERS

BY: SIBUSISIWE NDZIMANDZE | JOURNALIST

MANZINI — Horticulture farmers producing agricultural schedule products will soon be required to register on the Eswatini Horticulture Information System (EHIS), as the National Agricultural Marketing Board (NAMBoard) moves to make the platform compulsory across the sector. NAMBoard CEO Bhekizwe Maziya says the decision is aimed at ensuring every producer is captured in a single real-time system, improving market visibility, planning, and coordination while protecting farmers from avoidable losses.

“EHIS is about making sure decisions in the sector are based on accurate, timely information,” Maziya said. “When farmers capture what they’ve planted, how much they expect to harvest, where they are, and when the produce will be ready, the market can respond in an organised way and farmers are better protected.”

Making visibility the new standard

EHIS is a digital platform that allows farmers to record key production details—crop type, location, expected volumes, and when produce will ripen

or be harvested. According to Maziya, making registration mandatory will improve the quality and completeness of data, allowing the system to operate at its full potential.

He stressed that EHIS is not intended to be a static database. Instead, it is meant to function as a working market tool that supports planning across the value chain and ensures farmers are visible and supported within the regulated market framework for scheduled products.

A direct bridge between farmers and buyers

A central advantage of EHIS is that it strengthens direct linkages between farmers and buyers. Buyers using the platform can see which farmers have specific produce, where they are located, and make contact without NAMBoard needing to mediate every transaction.

Maziya said this visibility matters because horticulture is a timing-driven business. When produce arrives in the market without prior coordination, farmers often lose bargaining power and face lower prices or unsold stock.



Why accurate records matter

Maziya emphasised that farmers who produce commercially need market certainty. With updated EHIS records, buyers can plan purchases earlier, while farmers can make stronger decisions about what to plant, when to harvest, and how to manage volumes.

The system also supports NAMBoard’s ability to understand national production patterns—who is producing what, where, and in what volumes—so regulation and sector decisions are guided by real activity on the ground.

Reducing losses from market flooding

One of the biggest risks in horticulture, Maziya said, is oversupply. When markets become flooded, prices fall and farmers are often left with produce they cannot sell.

“If the production is flooded then the market chooses where to buy and then the prices decline, affecting farmers because they are stranded with the production,” he said.

register, often because they fear increased visibility may expose them to taxation. However, he argued that staying outside the system can be more costly, as farmers miss out on the protection that comes from better market coordination and timely information.

“Some farmers fear registration because they think it exposes them for taxation,” he said. “But being outside the system can cost farmers more in the long run, because they miss out on the protection that comes with timely

producing scheduled products are captured.

Toward national integration

Looking ahead, Maziya said EHIS was designed with a broader national vision: future integration with the wider Agriculture Integrated Information System. Under this plan, EHIS registration would also feed into a national agriculture database, strengthening coordination beyond markets and supporting government planning.

“The intention is integration so that when a farmer registers, that information also supports national planning,” he said. “Government should be able to see how many farmers have planted a particular crop and respond with better support and coordination.”

The message to farmers: register early, update consistently

Maziya urged farmers to register early and keep their production information current, noting that the system becomes more effective as participation grows and updates remain real-time.

“This system works best when everyone is visible and information is updated in real time,” he said. “When we have quality, accurate data, we can protect farmers from avoidable losses and build a market that rewards production with profit, not regret.”



EHIS is intended to provide early market intelligence by showing what produce is coming, where it will come from, and when it will be ready—giving both buyers and farmers time to plan, coordinate, and reduce the likelihood of price crashes.

Addressing concerns about registration

Maziya acknowledged that some farmers have been reluctant to

market information.”

How farmers can register

Farmers can register and update their production details using a mobile phone through the EHIS website, by engaging NAMBoard directly, or during NAMBoard roadshows where farmers can be registered on the spot. Maziya said NAMBoard will continue scaling up registration drives to ensure both emerging and established farmers



LA SANTE SPA INVITES LOCAL ORGANIC PRODUCERS INTO PREMIUM WELLNESS MARKET

BY: : PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR

EZULWINI — La Sante Spa at Happy Valley Hotel, one of Eswatini's leading wellness destinations, has issued an open invitation to local organic producers to join its supply chain, creating a new pathway for Eswatini-made products to enter a premium spa and wellness market where quality, authenticity and traceable sourcing are increasingly prized.

The initiative targets farmers and manufacturers producing SWASA-certified organic products, with La Sante Spa looking to incorporate

locally made oils, creams, scrubs, herbal products and wellness formulations into both its professional treatment menu and retail offering. Beyond expanding product options for clients, the move signals a deliberate shift toward strengthening local value chains while responding to growing demand for natural, ethically produced wellness goods.

Speaking to Agribusiness Media, La Sante Spa co-founder Nicholas Gicas said the decision to engage local producers was both strategic

and intentional.

"We are committed to working with manufacturers who use Eswatini's natural resources responsibly and meet certified organic standards," Gicas said. "Our aim is not only to retail their products, but to collaborate in developing bespoke spa formulations that reflect quality, sustainability and local identity."

Gicas said the spa is particularly interested in producers who already carry SWASA certification, noting that certification offers consistency, safety and credibility in a market where trust matters as



much as performance.

“We believe Eswatini has exceptional producers who are ready for premium markets. This partnership allows them to scale, innovate and access customers they would not ordinarily reach on their own,” he added.

Producers welcome a breakthrough opportunity

The invitation has sparked excitement among local producers, particularly members of the Organisation of Women in Trade (OWIT), many of whom see the initiative as a long-awaited opening into high-value hospitality and wellness markets.

OWIT member and organic skincare producer Lindiwe Mkhonta described the move as a breakthrough for small-scale manufacturers who have struggled to enter premium spaces.

“For years, many of us have produced high-quality organic products but struggled to penetrate premium hospitality markets,” Mkhonta said. “This partnership shows that our work is being recognised and that local products can stand confidently alongside international brands.”

Another producer, Sibusiso Dlamini, who specialises in cold-pressed oils and herbal infusions, said supplying a spa of La Sante’s calibre could reshape how small producers position themselves.

“Supplying a spa of this calibre changes everything,” Dlamini said. “It pushes us to refine our branding, improve packaging and think globally, while still producing locally.”

OWIT urges producers to respond professionally

OWIT president Dududzile Nhlengetfwa welcomed the initiative, urging local manufacturers to treat the opportunity with seriousness and readiness.

“This is exactly the kind of market access we advocate for,” she said. “We encourage our producers to seize this opportunity with both hands, meet the standards required and present products they can be proud of.”

Nhlengetfwa said partnerships between established businesses and local producers are essential for building a more resilient agribusiness and manufacturing ecosystem, keeping value within the country while expanding opportunities for enterprise growth.

“When local producers are linked

to reliable, premium buyers, it strengthens confidence, creates jobs and keeps value within the country,” she said.

Building Eswatini’s premium organic value chain

La Sante Spa, located in Rooms 304–305 at Happy Valley Hotel, has built its reputation around quality treatments and curated wellness experiences. Its decision to source locally supports wider efforts to promote domestic production, reduce import dependence and encourage innovation in Eswatini’s organic and natural products sector.

Producers interested in exploring collaboration are encouraged to engage directly with La Sante Spa to discuss product suitability, certification requirements and potential co-development opportunities. The spa can be contacted at info@lasantespa.co.sz or via 7604 3101 / 7685 4275. For many local producers, the invitation represents more than a supply contract. It is a signal that Eswatini-made organic products are gaining recognition in premium markets—where quality, story and sustainability carry as much weight as price.

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AFTER HAIL AND FLOODS, HOPE TAKES ROOT

BY: SIBUSISIWE NDZIMANDZE | JOURNALIST

MANZINI – December 2025 will be remembered by many farming families in Eswatini’s Lowveld and Middleveld as a season of devastation, after violent hailstorms flattened maize fields, shredded vegetables and wiped out months of investment. However, a swift recovery response led by the Deputy Prime Minister’s Office and the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) has enabled farmers to restart production while the rainy season still allows.

The most recent storm struck Maphalaleni and Nkhaba, destroying crops across more than 500 hectares. The hardest-hit chiefdoms included Maphalaleni, Dlozini, Jubukweni and Nkhaba, with maize and cabbages suffering the greatest losses. NDMA assessments confirmed that over 500 hectares of maize were destroyed, threatening household food security and incomes.

For smallholder farmers, the damage meant more than a poor harvest. Many had already invested heavily in ploughing, fertiliser and tractor hire, often using borrowed funds. “That maize was our food and income for the year,” one farmer said. “Now the fields are gone.”

Member of Parliament Mabulala Maseko described the damage as a serious setback for families who rely entirely on farming. Similar losses were reported earlier in Mayiwane, where more than 60 farmers were affected. Long-time farmer Mciniseli Madonsela said he lost crops after spending close to E2000 on inputs, while other farmers across chiefdoms described being forced to start again with limited resources.

In response, NDMA identified beans as a key recovery crop for January planting due to their shorter growing cycle, while support for maize replanting was also considered. On 9 January 2026, Deputy Prime Minister Thulisile Dladla, alongside NDMA leadership, launched a recovery drive for farmers affected by storms across five constituencies. The initiative followed storms recorded on 2 and 26 December 2025 and was marked by a symbolic maize-planting exercise.

Government distributed maize and bean seeds to 604 households in Mhlangatane, Mayiwane, Ndzingeni, Maphalaleni and Nkhaba, with the programme valued at E642,020. Beneficiaries also received one-hour tractor hire support to speed up planting before the rainy season ends in March.

NDMA Chief Executive Officer Victor Mahlalela said the support acknowledged farmers’ prior investments and was coordinated with the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Maize Corporation input subsidy. He added that technical guidance would continue to strengthen recovery.

As climate shocks become more frequent, the storms highlighted the growing vulnerability of smallholder farmers and the need for rapid, coordinated support. Yet for many beneficiaries, the recovery programme restored more than crops. “Today, hope has been restored,” one farmer said. “We are optimistic about a good yield.”

Even after hail and floods, Eswatini’s farmers are planting again—proof that with timely intervention and community support, hope can still take root.



SA'S 10 YEAR FMD STRATEGY AND ESWATINI'S INVESTMENTS TO CURB A STUBBORN DISEASE

By: Sikhona Sibandze | Journalist

MBABANE — As South Africa rolls out a hard-line 10-year Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) control strategy, Eswatini has responded with its own major escalation, unlocking E25 million to launch a nationwide mass vaccination campaign aimed at containing a stubborn outbreak that continues to disrupt livestock markets, squeeze farmer incomes and weaken beef export confidence. Authorities say rollout will start imminently, with operations expected to intensify into February 2026 as vaccine procurement and field logistics are finalised.

The move comes after FMD spread beyond isolated detections into

a sustained national stress test. The crisis traces back to 12 May 2025, when suspicious symptoms were detected at Sikhwebezi dip tank in Mkhwakhweni (Shiselweni), triggering quarantines and emergency controls. Since then, FMD has been confirmed in both communal and commercial herds, with detections spanning Shiselweni, Lubombo and Manzini, and concern extending toward Hhohho. The economic blow deepened in June 2025, when the European Union suspended Eswatini's authorisation to export fresh beef and game meat following confirmed FMD, highlighting how quickly animal-health events can close markets.

On 9 January 2026, the Ministry confirmed a fresh detection at kaZombodze Emuva, raising urgency around vaccine readiness and the risk of further spread. Principal Secretary Sydney Simelane said testing is underway to determine the circulating SAT strain, SAT 1, SAT 2 or SAT 3, noting Eswatini is currently managing all three. This has made strain identification central to the national response: vaccinating against the wrong strain risks wasting funds, prolonging outbreaks, and extending market disruption.

To anchor the campaign in evidence, authorities have leaned on scientific guidance,

including input from Dr Tshenolo Pebe, a Botswana-based animal health specialist deployed through the Botswana Vaccine Institute (BVI). Officials say his assessment will inform vaccine selection, surveillance priorities and containment planning, a shift from reactive containment toward science-driven disease control. A senior official stressed that vaccines are critical, but their impact depends on disciplined implementation, farmer compliance and coordinated community action.

Government attributes continued to spread to uncontrolled livestock movement, uneven compliance, porous borders with South Africa and Mozambique, weak veterinary infrastructure such as non-functional dip tanks and damaged fencing, and limited capacity that slows enforcement and vaccination schedules. In communities, the impact is increasingly financial. Farmers in Shiselweni and the Lowveld have seen movement restrictions disrupt livestock sales and household income, while parts of the Highveld remain uncertain about abattoir access and post-vaccination marketing rules.

With supply chains distorted and slaughter capacity constrained, pressure has also surfaced in rising red meat prices, squeezing consumers and informal traders. To ease pressure on farmers holding unsellable cattle, the Ministry has introduced a controlled “relief valve” by permitting nationwide sales for slaughter, including from affected areas, under strict rules: animals must go only to authorised abattoirs, livestock and meat movement must be covered by valid permits, and transporting meat without official abattoir documentation is prohibited. Authorities argue this allows income generation while reducing infection pressure in communal herds, but insist red-zone controls remain essential to



*Ministry of Agriculture Official During
The FMD Press Briefing at The
Ministry's Conference Room*

prevent further spread.

The E25 million vaccination allocation forms part of a wider cost structure. Government has committed about E90 million to the response, with E38 million spent and E57 million approved, and E5 million already paid toward the first vaccine order. The Ministry estimates E62 million is required to vaccinate the national herd and complete the full operational rollout.

Alongside vaccination, the Ministry is tightening compliance systems. A stakeholder engagement meeting involving abattoir owners, cattle speculators, meat inspectors and veterinary personnel focused on strengthening adherence to FMD measures, especially movement from FMD guard areas to slaughter facilities. Stakeholders were briefed on Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), with the government indicating that operational feedback will be used to refine and close gaps that could

undermine disease control while supporting regulated trade.

Cross-border risk remains a central concern. The government has confirmed ongoing engagement with South African authorities, including the Ministry of Home Affairs, to address cross-border livestock movement, a persistent driver of reinfection risk in the region.

Regional pressure is also rising as South Africa implements a stricter posture through a 10-year FMD control strategy launched to restore its FMD-free status lost in 2019. The plan focuses on tight livestock movement controls, phased mass vaccination prioritising high-risk zones, hard-line biosecurity enforcement and stronger digital traceability through electronic animal identification. For Eswatini, the shift raises expectations around compliance, traceability and border control, with the risk that weak enforcement could keep the country exposed to repeat outbreaks and prolonged market restrictions.

With vaccines funded and rollout imminent, authorities are urging farmers to cooperate fully and follow guidelines strictly. Officials caution that vaccination alone will not end the crisis without discipline, trust and collective responsibility. For the beef sector, the coming phase is a defining moment: success could stabilise farmer incomes and rebuild credibility, while failure could prolong disruption and deepen losses across the livestock value chain.



EIPA TAKES ESWATINI BRANDS TO ASIA

BY SIKHONA SIBANDZE

As Eswatini sharpens its export ambitions beyond traditional regional markets, the Eswatini Investment Promotion Authority is opening a strategic gateway for local businesses to access Asia's fast growing consumer market. Through participation in the Designed Giftionery Expo 2026 in Taipei, Taiwan, EIPA is positioning Eswatini made products on a global stage where creativity, quality, and innovation drive trade. Scheduled for 16 to 19 April 2026, the expo offers Eswatini manufacturers and producers an opportunity to engage directly with international buyers, distributors, and retailers, while testing their competitiveness in one of the world's most dynamic markets.

Opening Doors to the Asian Market

Designed Giftionery is among Asia's leading trade exhibitions for gifting, stationery, lifestyle products, handicrafts, beauty and wellness items, and creative goods. With buyers drawn from across Asia and beyond, the platform is widely regarded as a strategic entry point for export ready enterprises seeking to diversify markets and reduce reliance on domestic and regional demand. For Eswatini businesses, participation goes beyond visibility. It offers direct exposure to buyer expectations, pricing benchmarks, packaging standards, and emerging consumer trends that increasingly shape global trade in value added products

Export Readiness Comes First

According to Sibusiso Mnisi, Executive Head of Trade Promotion at EIPA, the Taiwan opportunity builds on a year of structured export development work carried out in 2025. He said the Authority has invested heavily in preparing local businesses through tools such as the Export Guide, a 2026 Trade Show Calendar, export readiness training, Trade Map training, and the promotion of Eswatini traders through targeted storytelling. Mnisi explained that the Designed Giftionery platform aligns well with Eswatini's creative and value added products, offering a practical route into the Asian market. He noted that exporters will benefit from first hand interaction with buyers while promoting their products directly on the exhibition floor.

Strategic Support Through Partnerships

on of local participation is supported by the Taiwan External Trade Development Council, which will assist Eswatini exhibitors with flights, accommodation, and exhibition space. This



support significantly lowers the cost barrier often faced by small and medium enterprises seeking international exposure. The initiative also allows businesses to leverage the Economic Cooperation Agreement between Eswatini and Taiwan, which grants duty free access for 199 Eswatini products into the Taiwanese market. For exporters, this agreement strengthens price competitiveness and improves the prospects of securing long term supply relationships.

Standards, Branding, and Global Appeal

While the opportunity is significant, EIPA has stressed that participation will be selective and performance driven. Applicants are expected to demonstrate that their products meet international standards, have export ready pricing structures, and are supported by strong branding and packaging suitable for global consumers. Innovation, consistency, and professionalism remain central

to selection. Businesses are encouraged to clearly articulate their value propositions and show readiness to compete in a highly discerning market environment.

Building an Export Culture

The application deadline for the expo is 12 February 2026, with applications submitted online through EIPA. Beyond the event itself, the Authority views participation as part of a broader strategy to cultivate an export oriented mindset among Eswatini manufacturers. By encouraging businesses to step into new markets, learn directly from global buyers, and refine their offerings, EIPA is working to transform local innovation into sustainable trade opportunities. For Eswatini's creative and manufacturing sectors, Taiwan represents more than a destination. It is a test of readiness, ambition, and the country's growing confidence on the global trade stage.

2026 APPLICATIONS OPEN: POWERING WOMEN AND YOUTH AGRIBUSINESS

BY PHESHEYA KUNENE – EDITOR

Woman Farmer Foundation invites entries for the 2026 Woman Farmer of the Year Competition as partners rally behind climate-smart youth training.



MANZINI – The Woman Farmer Foundation (WFF) has opened applications for its 2026 Woman Farmer of the Year Competition, renewing its drive to move women farmers from subsistence to commercially viable agribusinesses while strengthening a parallel pipeline that equips youth with climate-smart production skills.

The 2026 call comes as the organisation intensifies its ecosystem approach—linking farmers not only to training, but also to finance, markets, technology, insurance and long-term productivity support. WFF says this is increasingly critical as climate variability and rising production costs continue to squeeze small and emerging producers.

From recognition to commercial growth

WFF Communications Officer Sebenele Zwane said the competition remains a practical development platform, prioritising productivity improvement, climate resilience and structured market participation. With prize packages exceeding E100,000, the awards are designed to accelerate farm investment and help winners scale with visibility and credibility.

The competition runs under Adult and Youth categories to respond

to barriers faced by women at different stages of their farming journeys. Youth applicants must be aged 18–35, while the adult category is open to all eligible women farmers.

Climate-smart youth programme gains momentum

Alongside the competition, WFF continues to expand its Innovative Climate Smart Youth Tunnel Production Training Programme, launched in 2021 to equip young farmers with practical skills in protected cultivation, irrigation, agribusiness management, entrepreneurship and sustainable production.

At a recent stakeholder engagement held at Riders Ranch in Sidvokodvo, WFF Director Sonia Paiva urged institutions across finance, insurance, research and agricultural development to invest in youth-focused agribusiness models that can withstand climate shocks and market uncertainty. She said many young people may be academically qualified, but still require hands-on production capability and structured funding pathways to build viable enterprises.

Institutions align around key gaps

The engagement brought together stakeholders including NAMBoard, the Ministry of Agriculture, University of Eswatini, Eswatini Bank, Eswatini Environmental Authority, ERS, Gateway Insurance, TAVI and EWAD. Discussions focused on constraints facing young agripreneurs—particularly access to land, tunnel infrastructure, insurance adoption, financing pathways and market entry. NAMBoard encouraged diversification into niche products such as baby vegetables, while the World Vegetable Center highlighted opportunities in traditional and organic crops to strengthen resilience and income stability. Stakeholders also flagged farmer wellbeing as an emerging priority, noting stress linked to climate losses, debt pressure and unstable markets.

What applicants should know

For the 2026 competition, WFF says applicants must be actively farming in crop or livestock production for at least one year, be women farming on Swazi Nation Land, and have a Swazi identity document.

As WFF balances youth training with women's recognition and support, the message to emerging farmers is direct: agriculture is evolving into enterprise—and 2026 opportunities are now open.

ESNAU ROLLS OUT CROP INSURANCE COVER FOR MAIZE AND BEANS FROM E315 PER FARMING CYCLE

BY PHESHEYA KUNENE – EDITOR

MANZINI – Farmers in Eswatini can now insure maize and beans against a range of weather- and disaster-related risks following the launch of a new agricultural insurance product by the Eswatini National Agricultural Union (ESNAU). Marketed under the message “Protect your harvest with crop insurance,” the cover targets smallholder farmers and starts from E315 per farming cycle for a one-hectare plot of maize or beans.

According to ESNAU, the premium is also presented as an annual cost set at 2.5% of total production costs. The product is currently being rolled out to ESNAU members as part of a membership-first approach.

The insurance provides cover against common climate and disaster-related hazards that frequently cause crop losses, including storms, hailstorms, strong winds, frost, fire and lightning, earthquakes, riots and strikes, explosions, and malicious damage resulting in physical destruction of crops. The cover also includes certain uncontrollable pests and diseases, although major outbreak events such as armyworm, fall armyworm and locusts are explicitly excluded.

Speaking to Agribusiness Media, ESNAU Chief Executive Officer Tammy Dlamini said the product

responds to the growing frequency of climate-related shocks, which have made it increasingly difficult for farmers to recover from losses without insurance protection. “It has not been easy, but it has been quite practical to put up the product,” Dlamini said.

The crop insurance was structured in partnership with Asset Wise Insurance and is underwritten by Lidwala Insurance. While the initial rollout focuses on maize and beans, ESNAU is already exploring options to extend cover to other commodities, including vegetables, and potentially livestock, as part of a broader value-chain approach.

Dlamini noted that premiums are expected to vary by commodity, particularly for vegetables, due to differences in production costs. “The pricing for vegetables will become different because of the cost of production,” she said.

ESNAU also views the insurance as a key enabler for agricultural financing. Dlamini explained that the lack of insurance has historically complicated access to loans and development funding, as financial institutions struggle to price risk in a sector exposed to unpredictable losses. The new cover is expected to improve collaboration between farmers, insurers and financial service providers.



Tammy Dlamini

For now, the product is being rolled out primarily to ESNAU members, with interested farmers encouraged to engage the union directly for registration and guidance.

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With climate-driven losses becoming more frequent, ESNAU's crop insurance initiative signals a shift toward better-protected and more resilient farming, beginning with Eswatini's two major field crops—maize and beans.



NMC REOPENS BEANS INPUT SUBSIDY WINDOW AS FARMER INTEREST SURGES

■ BY PHESHEYA KUNENE – EDITOR

The National Maize Corporation (NMC) has reopened the payment window for the 2025/26 Beans Production Input Subsidy, offering a renewed opportunity to farmers whose applications were approved but who failed to complete payment before the initial deadline.

The reopened window began on Monday, 5 January 2026, and NMC has maintained that it will remain open until the allocated budget is exhausted. Farmers can make payments at Eswatini Bank branches or use MoMo Pay at their nearest Rural Development Area (RDA) office, provided they

present a national ID and the NMC confirmation SMS linked to their approved application. Input packages are priced at E6,000 per hectare and E3,000 per half-hectare, a structure aimed at easing entry for smallholder producers who often struggle to raise full production costs upfront.

A second chance for previously approved farmers

NMC Chief Executive Officer Mavela Vilane has previously framed the reopening as a matter of fairness and continuity—an effort to ensure that farmers who

were already approved but could not meet payment timelines are not excluded from a programme designed to strengthen national food security and support smallholder production.

This is not a minor administrative adjustment. For many households, missing a payment deadline can mean losing an entire season, especially when production planning depends on subsidised inputs that are otherwise unaffordable.

Demand is rising, but supply remains the constraint

The subsidy comes at a time when Eswatini's bean sector continues to face a stubborn production deficit that has kept the country reliant on imports year after year.

NMC-linked estimates place annual bean consumption at around 7,000 tonnes, while production remains far below national needs. Sector figures illustrate how structural the gap has become: in 2023, smallholder farmers produced 582.5 tonnes, and three-year averages place annual production at roughly 1,177 tonnes, against an average annual consumption of 7,370 tonnes. That leaves a shortfall of about 6,193 tonnes, typically covered through imports.

For policymakers and producers alike, this gap is more than a statistic. It represents lost income for rural households, reduced local supply for traders and processors, and ongoing pressure on national food import costs.

January intake, February planting

Beyond reopening payments for previously approved farmers, NMC also indicated that new applicants would be accepted so the remaining subsidy budget can be fully utilised. NMC Corporate Communications Specialist Lungelo Nkambule previously stated that application forms would be available throughout January at RDA offices and through



extension officers, allowing time for vetting so that successful applicants can plant during the February 2026 window.

Minister of Agriculture Mandla Tshawuka has also previously indicated that the remaining subsidy budget could accommodate approximately 1,400 additional farmers, with applications handled on a first-come, first-served basis once priority cases are settled.

Beans remain attractive for many growers because they are a short-season crop with a relatively quick turnaround. In a climate of rising costs, access to subsidised inputs can free up farmer cash for labour, irrigation, and day-to-day crop management—often the difference between a crop that is properly managed and one that is under-resourced from the start.

Farmer interest spikes during the reopened window

What Agribusiness Monthly has noted during the reopened period is clear: farmer interest has been high, with strong demand from producers seeking to secure packages under the subsidy. The reopening has triggered renewed

urgency among growers who view beans as both a food-security crop and a reliable income option when markets are accessible.

This interest is significant, not only because it reflects demand for the subsidy itself, but because it signals that farmers are willing to expand bean production if the cost barrier is reduced and the process remains predictable.

Extension uncertainty and the need for official clarity

However, as this magazine edition was being prepared, NMC had not issued a further public notice confirming whether there would be another extension beyond the reopened window, despite an earlier indication from NMC communications that an update would be shared.

For farmers, uncertainty around timelines can disrupt planning and budgeting—especially for those trying to coordinate land preparation, labour, and planting schedules. In programmes where demand can quickly exceed available funds, clarity is not a luxury; it is part of effective delivery.

Agribusiness Monthly will

share programme outcomes, uptake figures, and any official announcements on extensions in due course, once NMC issues a formal update.

Execution will determine impact

While reopening the payment window is an important step, the real measure of success will be seen in execution and follow-through. Timely input distribution, responsive extension support, and market coordination will determine whether the subsidy translates into meaningful increases in tonnage—or remains a well-intended intervention with limited production gains.

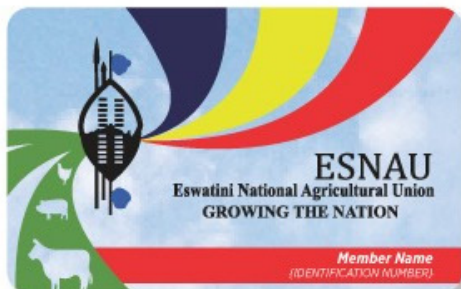
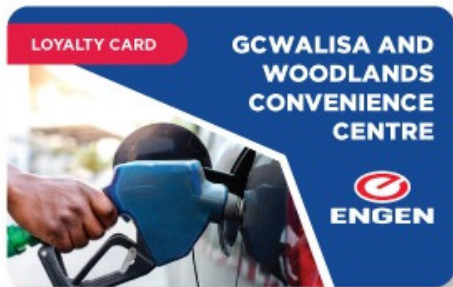
For now, the message to qualifying farmers remains straightforward: the window has been reopened, demand is strong, and those who have approvals—or who are applying under the new intake—should act quickly while funds are still available.

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