

FISHING GOLD

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HISTORY AT THE 2026 WORLD
RUM AWARDS

GO BIG OR GO HOME

ENTREPRENEUR OF THE
YEAR CHALLENGES
YOUTH PIG FARMERS AS
MOZAMBIQUE OPENS



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Editor's Note



WHEN E9 MILLION WORTH OF BEANS CANNOT FIND A PLATE

Winter has a way of exposing uncomfortable truths.

Drive past Eswatini's fields this season and you will still see signs of hard work etched into the land; harvested plots, empty maize stalks, drying grass and farmers already thinking anxiously about the next planting window. Yet somewhere between those fields and the nation's dinner tables, something has gone badly wrong. More than E9 million worth of locally produced beans are sitting unsold in storage facilities.

Not because farmers failed to produce.

Not because the country does not eat beans.

But because the system meant to support local agriculture appears unable, or unwilling, to connect production with the market.

That contradiction should disturb all of us.

For years, Eswatini has spoken confidently about food security, import substitution and grain sovereignty. Farmers were encouraged to plant more. Institutions urged producers to believe in local agriculture again. Policymakers spoke of reducing dependency on imports and building resilience against climate shocks and volatile global food prices. Farmers listened. They invested. They planted. They harvested.

Now many of them are watching their produce sit in storage while imported beans continue to occupy retail shelves.

The question is no longer whether Eswatini can produce food. The question is whether the country has the political discipline, market coordination and institutional courage to protect its own producers once they do.

This month's cover story is not merely about beans. It is about confidence. Confidence in policy. Confidence in procurement systems. Confidence in whether local production genuinely matters beyond speeches, conferences and strategy documents.

If farmers begin to believe that producing more only leads to financial paralysis, storage uncertainty and market exclusion, the consequences will stretch far beyond one season. Agriculture runs on trust almost as much as rainfall. Once that trust weakens, production follows.

The frustration within the sector is understandable. Farmers are asking difficult but legitimate questions. Why were import restrictions introduced and then suddenly lifted? Why are public feeding programmes not absorbing more local produce? Why does imported food still appear more commercially protected than the people expected to feed the nation? And perhaps most importantly: who takes responsibility when national agricultural ambitions collide with market realities on the ground?

These are uncomfortable questions. But serious agricultural economies do not grow by avoiding uncomfortable conversations.

Across this issue of Agribusiness Monthly, another picture also emerges, one of an industry standing at a crossroads.

At the IDCE Solar Indaba, farmers were warned against blindly rushing into solar investments without understanding energy economics, system design or long-term returns. In the livestock sector, government signalled a harder line against stock theft syndicates threatening rural livelihoods, even as the E51.5 million

Goat Industry Enhancement Project attempts to commercialise one of the country's most promising value chains. In Big Bend, discussions between government and ABF Sugar reflected a sugar industry under pressure to modernise, diversify and remain globally competitive in a changing market environment.

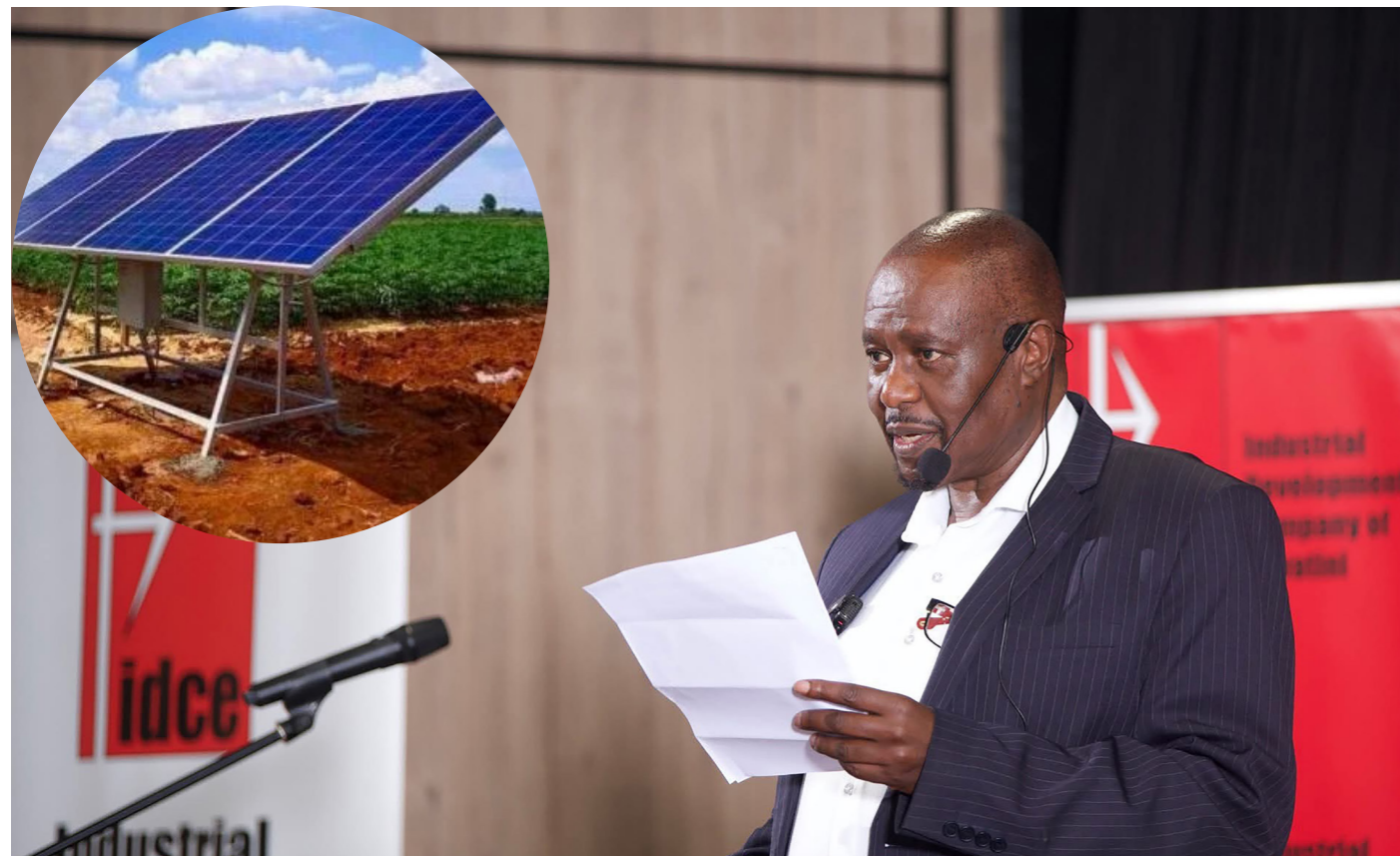
And in Ngculwini, a small-scale fish farmer quietly demonstrated something powerful: that opportunity still exists in sectors many have overlooked. While national debates focus heavily on traditional commodities, aquaculture may yet become one of Eswatini's most underestimated agricultural frontiers.

Together, these stories reveal an agricultural sector wrestling with a larger reality: production alone is no longer enough. Modern agriculture demands functioning ecosystems, energy planning, market coordination, logistics, policy certainty, investment protection, innovation and trust between institutions and producers.

Without those foundations, even a successful harvest can become a crisis.

This publication has always believed that agriculture is not merely about crops or livestock. It is about national stability. It is about whether rural families remain economically active. It is about whether young people see farming as a future or a burden. It is about whether a country can maintain dignity in feeding itself.

Pshesheya Kunene
Editor, Agribusiness Media



IDCE MD Farlie Mabuza speaking at the Solar Indaba in May 2026

FARM SOLAR: SMART INVESTMENT OR EXPENSIVE MISTAKE?

BY SIBUSISIWE NDZIMANDZE | JOURNALIST

Experts warn farmers to understand their energy needs, licensing rules and financial returns before rushing into solar installations.

As electricity costs continue to rise, more farmers are looking to solar energy as a possible solution to reduce power bills, support irrigation and improve energy reliability. But experts have warned that solar is not a quick fix — and poor planning could leave farmers with costly systems that fail to deliver real savings.

This was the central message at the Industrial Development Company of Eswatini (IDCE) Solar Indaba, held at Happy Valley Hotel in Ezulwini. The event brought together

farmers, IDCE clients, the Eswatini Energy Regulatory Authority (ESERA), Eswatini Electricity Company (EEC), Tambankulu Estates and Dalcrue Agricultural Holdings to discuss how farmers and businesses can invest in solar energy more responsibly.

The message was clear: farmers should not install solar simply because it appears attractive. They must first understand their electricity bills, energy demand, system design, licensing requirements and expected financial returns.

IDCE Chief Executive Officer Fairlie Mabuza said the institution

hosted the Indaba because many solar projects fail to deliver value due to poor information, weak planning and systems that are not properly matched to actual energy needs.

“We don’t just provide capital. We invest in your success,” Mabuza said.

He warned that some project owners are exposed to costly solar systems that do not reflect the real energy profile of their farms or businesses. This creates a gap between what farmers actually need and what some contractors may propose.

For many farmers, the appeal of solar is easy to understand. Irrigation,

cold storage, milling, lighting, pumping and processing all depend on reliable energy. When electricity costs increase, farm margins come under pressure. Solar therefore appears to offer both relief and long-term stability. However, experts stressed that the decision must be based on facts, not emotion.

ESERA Regulation Engineer Ncamiso Nkambule said solar can work well for farmers, but only when they begin by understanding their consumption patterns.

“Solar works, but you must understand the dynamics of it, understand your bill and avoid emotional decisions,” Nkambule said.

He noted that Eswatini imports about 70 percent of its electricity, making renewable energy an important part of the country’s future energy mix. However, he urged farmers to first reduce wastage, study their bills and seek proper technical advice before investing in solar systems.

Nkambule also reminded farmers that solar generation is regulated. Farmers generating above 100kW require a licence under the Electricity Act of 2007. Applicants must pay an E10,000 application fee and provide environmental approvals, proof of property ownership, technical assessments, system sizing details and information on on-site infrastructure. The licence is renewable every two years.

He further explained that under net billing, approved customers may export excess electricity to EEC, but this does not mean they receive direct cash payments. Instead, the exported electricity is credited against their power use, reducing the amount payable.

EEC Research and Renewables Engineer Nosipho Simelane said registration protects both the customer and the national grid.

“An authorised embedded generator helps minimise risks, gives customers an opportunity to export surplus energy to the grid and avoids disconnection when a system is

found to be unregistered,” Simelane said.

For farmers, this means solar adoption cannot be treated as a private installation exercise only. Once a system is connected to the grid or generates beyond certain thresholds, compliance becomes essential. Failure to follow the correct process can expose farmers to technical risks, legal challenges and possible disconnection.

Dalcrue Agricultural Holdings’ Sibusiso Mahlalela, whose company uses solar PV across three active sites for maize, sugarcane and a rice mill, said farmers must approach solar as a business investment rather than a quick fix.

“Before installing solar, a farmer needs to look at the demand, calculate the Net Present Value, do background checks, do homework and use available experts such as ESERA and EEC,” Mahlalela said.

His message reflected one of the strongest themes of the Indaba: solar must make financial sense. Farmers must know how much electricity they consume, when they consume it, what the system will cost, how long it will take to recover the investment, and whether the project improves the long-term viability of the farm.

Tambankulu Estates’ Malangeni Dlamini also urged farmers to be clear about what they want solar to achieve before spending money.

“Know what you want to achieve before installing solar,” Dlamini said.

He said successful solar projects depend on proper procurement, technical skills, commissioning and continuous monitoring after installation.

The Indaba highlighted that solar can offer real benefits to agriculture. It can reduce electricity bills, support irrigation, improve energy security and help farmers build resilience against rising costs. However, speakers repeatedly warned that solar is not a one-size-fits-all solution.

Farmers were encouraged to begin with energy efficiency before investing in generation. This includes understanding monthly bills, identifying waste, assessing peak demand, checking whether equipment is operating efficiently and determining whether energy use patterns justify solar investment.

For Eswatini farmers, the lesson from the IDCE Solar Indaba was practical and immediate: solar can power production and reduce costs, but only when it is properly planned, legally compliant, correctly sized and financially viable.

Through the Indaba, IDCE positioned itself not only as a financier, but as a growth partner helping farmers and businesses build sustainable, bankable energy projects. As agriculture becomes more energy-intensive, the future of farm competitiveness may depend not only on what farmers grow, but also on how wisely they power their operations.



A section of farmers at the IDCE Solar Indaba at Happy Valley Hotel



GOAT INDUSTRY GETS E51.5M BOOST AMID STOCK THEFT CRACKDOWN

As Eswatini launches a five-year goat commercialisation project, government warns that criminal syndicates, smuggling and animal disease remain serious threats to farmer confidence and rural livelihoods.

BY PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR

Eswatini's goat industry has received a major vote of confidence through a new E51.5 million Goat Industry Enhancement Project, but government has warned that the sector's growth will depend not

only on better genetics and market access, but also on defeating the stock theft syndicates threatening rural farmers.

Speaking during the official launch of the project at The George Hotel, Minister of Agriculture Mandla Tshawuka issued a stern warning to

criminals targeting livestock farmers, saying government was finalising amendments to strengthen the country's stock theft legislation

"Once this legislation is complete, it will be war against stock thieves," Tshawuka declared. "We cannot allow

criminals to destroy the livelihoods of emaSwati farmers and weaken the agricultural economy."

His warning comes as livestock theft continues to place heavy pressure on farmers. Police statistics show that livestock worth more than E20.5 million was stolen between January and October 2025, with over 4,000 animals reported missing across the country. Goats accounted for a significant share of the thefts, confirming both the growing value of the industry and its vulnerability to organised crime.

Over the past three years, stock theft has shifted from isolated rural incidents into a more organised threat involving syndicates operating within communities and across borders. Security operations along Eswatini's borderlines have also recovered stolen animals and intercepted suspected smuggling networks, highlighting the scale of the problem.

For rural households, the loss is not only financial. Livestock remains a store of wealth, a source of food security and a safety net during difficult times. When animals are stolen, families lose breeding stock, future income and confidence in farming as a livelihood.

It is against this difficult backdrop that government and development partners have launched the Goat Industry Enhancement Project, a five-year initiative running from 2026 to 2030. The project is being implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture in partnership with the Republic of China (Taiwan) through the International Cooperation and Development Fund. Taiwan has committed E51.5 million, while the European Union is supporting the establishment of a Goat Artificial Insemination Centre.

Tshawuka said the project was designed to move goat farming from a largely subsistence activity into a commercially competitive livestock industry.

"This project is about creating resilient farmers, improving incomes and building a stronger livestock economy," he said.



The programme will focus on improving goat genetics, strengthening breeding systems, enhancing animal nutrition, supporting farmer training and expanding market access. Tshawuka stressed that the investment must reach ordinary farmers and produce visible results in households, communities and local economies.

Goat farming is increasingly viewed as one of Eswatini's most promising livestock opportunities, especially as climate pressures make cattle production more difficult for some smallholder farmers. Goats are generally more adaptable to dry conditions, require fewer inputs and remain accessible to rural producers operating in challenging environments.

Taiwan Ambassador to Eswatini Jeremy Liang said the project marked a new chapter in agricultural cooperation between the two countries. He said improved genetics, artificial insemination technologies and farmer training would help strengthen the entire goat value chain.

"Ultimately, we hope to see farmers achieve higher incomes,



Minister of Agriculture, Hon. Mandla Tshawuka speaking at goats industry enhancement project workshop in Manzini

improved herd quality and stronger market opportunities," Liang said.

Speaking on behalf of goat farmers, Nondumiso Matsebula welcomed the initiative, describing it as a long-awaited intervention for producers who want to move beyond subsistence farming.

"This project gives hope to farmers who want to grow commercially and improve the quality of their herds," she said.

The launch comes while the livestock sector is still battling the effects of Foot and Mouth Disease, which has disrupted movement, affected trade flows and placed further strain on farmers. Tshawuka said government remained committed to controlling the outbreak through vaccination, surveillance, movement controls and rehabilitation of sanitary cordon fences.

Authorities have also uncovered illegal slaughter operations and cross-border smuggling networks, raising concerns that stock theft is not only a criminal matter, but also a livestock health, trade and food security risk.

For Eswatini's goat farmers, the new project offers an opportunity to improve herd quality, access better breeding technologies and participate more meaningfully in commercial markets. But its success will depend on whether government can protect farmers from the criminal networks undermining rural production.

As Tshawuka's warning made clear, the future of the goat industry rests on two battles: modernising production and defending farmers from stock thieves.



BEYOND SUGAR

ESWATINI'S E7.7BN INDUSTRY EYES ENERGY AND TRADE GROWTH

BY PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR

Eswatini's sugar industry is preparing for a new phase of growth as regional leaders push for stronger trade, ethanol production, renewable energy investment and climate-resilient farming to protect one of the country's most important agricultural sectors.

This was the central message at the inaugural Standard Bank Regional Sugar Summit, held at Simunye Country Club, where policymakers, financiers, millers, growers and technical experts gathered to examine the future of the sugar value chain in Eswatini and the wider region.

The summit came at a critical time for the industry. Sugar remains

one of Eswatini's strongest economic pillars, but the sector is under pressure from low global sugar prices, rising production costs, climate change and increasing competition in export markets.

Eswatini Sugar Association Chief Executive Officer Banele Nyamane said the country currently produces about 640 000 tonnes of sugar annually, generating approximately E7.7 billion in revenue. He said the sector contributes 6.3 percent of Eswatini's Gross Domestic Product, supports nearly 30 percent of the national workforce and accounts for about a quarter of export earnings.

However, Nyamane warned that the industry could no longer rely on

traditional sugar production alone. With global prices under pressure and surplus stocks projected to reach nearly two million tonnes in the coming season, he said the sector must urgently invest in efficiency, regional trade, value addition and diversification.

"The long-term sustainability of the industry will depend on how quickly we improve productivity, strengthen regional markets and support both commercial and smallholder growers," he said.

Trade emerged as one of the strongest themes of the summit. Eswatini Sugar's Head of Advocacy and Stakeholder Engagement, Nontobeko Mabuza, said more than

90 percent of sugar produced in Eswatini is traded across borders, making market access and regional cooperation critical to the industry's survival.

"Over 90 percent of the sugar produced in Eswatini is traded across borders, which highlights the importance of collaboration between industry and government in facilitating the movement of sugar into regional and global markets," Mabuza said.

She said removing tariff barriers, improving trade policy consistency and strengthening regional corridors would help protect export markets while unlocking new opportunities for growers, millers and downstream industries.

A major focus of the summit was the need to move beyond raw sugar and accelerate investment in ethanol, bio-energy, packaging, electricity generation and other downstream opportunities.

Royal Eswatini Sugar Corporation Managing Director Nick Jackson said Simunye Mill is currently ranked the top sugar mill in Sub-Saharan Africa, while Mhlume Mill is ranked second out of 29 mills assessed in the region. Despite this performance, he said climate change was affecting cane quality, extraction efficiency and transport operations.

Jackson said RES Corporation was now accelerating diversification into ethanol production, downstream packaging and large-scale power generation projects to reduce dependence on sugar alone.

"We are currently the biggest client of EEC, but once we establish our own energy source, we intend to contribute about 50 percent of that power back into the national grid," he said.

Ubombo Sugar Limited Managing Director Muzi Siyaya said the company injected between E2 billion and E3 billion into the local economy during the past financial year through grower payments, procurement, transport and infrastructure development.

He revealed that Ubombo Sugar was implementing a E1.5 billion energy investment aimed at increasing

electricity generation capacity from 17 megawatts to 40 megawatts, while also positioning the company for ethanol production. Siyaya said the investment would strengthen energy security and support Eswatini's broader industrialisation and renewable energy agenda.

Water security also featured prominently. EWADE Chief Executive Officer Dr Samson Sithole said climate-smart irrigation systems, regional cooperation and smart investment in water infrastructure would remain central to the competitiveness of the sugar industry.

"When we work together as a region and differentiate ourselves through what we do well, we position ourselves strongly to remain competitive globally," Sithole said.

The Eswatini Cane Growers Association raised concern over declining yields, which have fallen to around 90 tonnes per hectare, citing rising input costs, climate shocks, pest pressure and governance challenges.

Standard Bank Eswatini used the summit to outline financing models designed to support the sugar value chain, including invoice discounting, asset financing, unsecured lending and digital credit solutions aimed at improving production capacity and business sustainability.

Delivering remarks on behalf of Minister of Agriculture Mandla Tshawuka, Principal Secretary Sydney Simelane described Eswatini as one of Africa's leading sugar producers relative to its size. He said opportunities in ethanol, bio-energy, speciality sugar and downstream manufacturing could position the industry as a broader catalyst for industrialisation.

For Eswatini, the message from the summit was clear: sugar remains a powerful economic pillar, but its next chapter will depend on how boldly the industry can diversify, trade smarter and turn existing strengths into new industrial opportunities.



Eswatini Sugar Association CEO, Banele Nyamane speaking the Summit



Standard Bank CE, Mvuselelo Fakudze



EWADE CEO, Dr. Samson Sithole



FARMER WHO THINKS LIKE A CEO

BY PHESHEYA KUNENE – EDITOR

“Farming is not just about production anymore. It is about understanding the full value chain.”

While many young people still look to offices, cities and formal employment for their future, Mcebo Simelane is looking to markets, margins, production cycles and harvest yields.

As founder and director of SheFarms, Simelane has emerged as one of Eswatini’s rising agribusiness voices. Her model blends academic research, corporate discipline and practical farming experience into an enterprise built on diversification, sustainability and market access. Today, her produce supplies major retailers including Pick n Pay, Shoprite and SPAR, while her growing influence in youth mentorship continues to attract attention across the sector.

For Simelane, farming stopped being a subsistence activity the moment she began to understand the economics behind it.

“Growing up in Hlathikhulu, I saw families with land and labour but still struggling financially,” she said. “The turning point came when I realised the difference between farmgate prices and retail prices.”

After supplying vegetables to a supermarket for the first time and seeing the margins involved, she understood that agriculture could operate as a serious business.

That realisation changed everything. At SheFarms, production decisions are guided by planning, financial discipline, operational systems and market intelligence. Simelane believes farmers who want to survive in today’s economy must

move away from guesswork and manage their farms with the same seriousness expected in any other business.

“As farmers, we cannot operate on assumptions,” she said. “You need systems, data, planning and proper financial management. Farming is not just about production anymore. It is about understanding the full value chain.”

For Simelane, part of the answer lies in diversification. SheFarms combines vegetable production with piggery operations, creating what she describes as a circular farming model in which each enterprise supports the other. When vegetable prices fall, income from the piggery helps stabilise the business. Crop residues are recycled into livestock feed, while manure is returned to the soil

to improve fertility and reduce input costs.

“Diversification is our safety net,” she explained. “If one enterprise struggles, another stabilises the operation.”

Climate change is another challenge shaping her farming decisions. Erratic rainfall, droughts, pest outbreaks and extreme weather events continue to disrupt production cycles and squeeze already thin profit margins. At SheFarms, climate adaptation is built into everyday operations through irrigation, mulching, rainwater harvesting, minimum tillage, drought-tolerant crop varieties, staggered planting and integrated pest management.

“These changing weather conditions force farmers to become more strategic,” said Simelane. “You cannot rely on old methods and expect different results.”

She is also vocal about agricultural insurance, which she believes many farmers still overlook despite growing climate risks.

“A single hailstorm or disease outbreak can wipe out an entire season,” she warned. “Insurance should not be viewed as an unnecessary cost. It is protection for business continuity.”

Beyond production, Simelane believes Eswatini’s farmers must position themselves more seriously for regional and continental markets, particularly under the African Continental Free Trade Area. But she warns that such opportunities will not reward farmers who are unprepared.

“The opportunity is there, but farmers need to focus on quality, consistency and compliance,” she said.

She argues that export success will depend on farmer organisation, recognised certifications and greater investment in value addition instead of relying only on raw commodity sales.

“Eswatini must build a reputation for clean, traceable and ethical produce,” she said. “The strongest margins are no longer in raw products. They are in processing, branding and packaging.”



SheFarms CEO, Mcebo Simelane playing with her pigs.

For emerging farmers, she says one of the biggest mistakes is producing before understanding the market.

“Many people grow crops because they are easy to produce, not because there is demand,” she said. “You must first understand who will buy, what they want and what standards they expect.”

She also warns against poor financial management, especially the failure to separate household expenses from farm operations. Without proper records, she says, farmers cannot measure profitability, plan properly or access financing. Her advice is simple but firm: “Scale systems before scaling land.”

Despite the challenges, Simelane remains optimistic about agriculture’s potential to create opportunities for young people. She continues to mentor aspiring farmers, encouraging them to see agriculture not as hardship, but as a platform for entrepreneurship, innovation and wealth creation.

“The mindset must change from farming to agribusiness,” she said. “Young people must see opportunities beyond production, in logistics, branding, technology, processing and marketing.”

For Simelane, agriculture is



Butternut produce, packed and ready for the market.

not merely about survival. It is about building enterprises that are productive, resilient and capable of creating long-term value.

“What makes SheFarms different is that we farm with purpose,” she said. “My goal is to leave a legacy of empowerment, food security and opportunity for others.”



THE SCIENCE BEHIND BABY MARROW FARMING

Young farmer Samkeliso Mlotsa is proving that successful horticulture is not guesswork, but a disciplined process of seed trials, climate awareness, daily monitoring and careful market handling.

BY SIBUSISISWE NDZIMANDZE | JOURNALIST

For many young people, farming is still seen as a fallback option, something to consider only when other opportunities fail. But for young farmer Samkeliso Mlotsa, agriculture has become a field of precision, patience, observation and constant experimentation.

Mlotsa is steadily building a name for himself in vegetable production, particularly in baby marrow farming, where timing, quality, handling and technical management can determine

whether a farmer makes profit or suffers losses.

What sets him apart is his analytical approach. Instead of relying only on routine farming practices, he treats the field like a testing ground, carefully studying seed performance, crop behaviour and the effect of weather conditions on productivity.

This season, driven by curiosity and a desire to understand the crop better, Mlotsa planted three baby marrow varieties at the same time: Amanda F1 from Alliance Seeds, Okxo from

Sakata Seeds and Respect from Harris Moran Seed Company. The trial allowed him to compare germination rates, growth patterns, fruit quality and overall field performance under the same conditions.

His findings confirmed one of the most important realities in horticulture: farming is highly sensitive to climate. Baby marrow performs best under warm temperatures and, under good management, can take about five weeks from germination to first harvest. Cold weather, however, slows



Samkeliso Mlotsa spraying his fields

growth and reduces productivity, making seasonal planning one of the most important decisions a farmer must get right.

“The harvesting stage is the most demanding part of production because it requires daily monitoring,” Mlotsa explained.

Unlike some crops that can remain in the field for a few extra days, baby marrow demands constant attention. During harvest, Mlotsa says farmers must inspect the field plant by plant every day for almost six weeks. Missing even one day can result in overgrown produce that no longer meets market standards.

Under NAMBoard grading requirements, Grade A baby marrow measures between 10 and 12 centimetres, while Grade B ranges from 13 to 15 centimetres. Anything larger is rejected.

“It becomes like treasure hunting every morning,” he said, describing the careful process of walking through the field and searching beneath the leaves for market-ready produce.

But the work does not end once the crop is picked. Mlotsa says baby marrow must be handled with care

from harvesting to transport because bruises, scratches and poor handling can easily lead to rejects. Even transport conditions matter. Speeding on gravel roads, he noted, can damage the produce before it reaches the market.

Despite its potential profitability, Mlotsa admits that baby marrow is not an easy crop for young farmers to enter. Production costs remain high, with a packet of 1,000 seeds costing around R1,250. For a farmer to operate at a more commercially viable level, at least 5,000 seeds may be required to generate meaningful returns.

“It is a high-risk crop,” he said. “If management goes wrong or market conditions change, losses can come very quickly.”

His experience reflects wider challenges facing Eswatini’s horticulture sector, where farmers continue to deal with rising input costs, changing weather patterns, pest pressure and strict quality requirements from formal markets.

Mlotsa is especially concerned about pest and disease management. He points to fruit flies, whiteflies and Tobacco Mosaic Virus as some

HORTICULTURE

of the major threats facing vegetable farmers. In his view, many farmers still underestimate the importance of integrated pest management, crop hygiene and preventative field practices.

For him, successful baby marrow farming starts long before the first seed goes into the soil. He encourages farmers to use certified treated seed, prepare land properly, establish raised beds, apply correct spacing, rotate crops and manage weeds aggressively to reduce pest breeding areas.

He also urges farmers to rotate pesticides instead of repeatedly using the same chemical, warning that pests can build resistance when chemicals are not managed properly.

His approach reflects a growing shift among young farmers in Eswatini who are combining hands-on experience with technical agricultural knowledge. For Mlotsa, farming is not guesswork. It is a system that requires planning, measurement and discipline.

Beyond his own production, Mlotsa is passionate about sharing knowledge. Through conversations with other farmers and social media engagement, he regularly shares practical lessons on fertiliser application, irrigation management, pest control and crop performance.

At a time when Eswatini is working to strengthen food security and encourage youth participation in agriculture, farmers like Samkeliso Mlotsa represent a new generation entering the sector with curiosity, technical discipline and business-minded thinking.

His journey shows that success in horticulture does not come from luck alone. It comes from watching the crop closely, understanding the science behind production and respecting every stage of the farming process — from seed selection to the final trip to market.



TRADITIONAL VEGETABLES, MODERN MARKETS

TAVI Phase II is moving African vegetables from school gardens into feeding programmes, restaurants and commercial supply chains, creating new income opportunities for smallholder farmers.

BY PHESHEYA KUNENE | SIBUSISIWE NDZIMANDZE

Traditional African vegetables are moving from household gardens into the centre of Eswatini’s school feeding, nutrition and agribusiness agenda, as the Taiwan-Africa Vegetable Initiative (TAVI) Phase II expands its work with schools, farmers, teachers, cooks and restaurants.

The programme, implemented with support from the Government of Taiwan, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Education and Training and the World Vegetable Center, is now active in 42 schools across the country. More than 59,400 pupils

are benefiting from nutrient-rich traditional African vegetables, while at least 84 smallholder farmers are supplying produce through structured school feeding arrangements.

At Malkerns Research Station, school cooks and focal teachers from all four regions received specialised training in nutrition, food safety, hygiene and meal preparation. The training forms part of TAVI’s wider effort to improve the quality of school meals while creating reliable markets for local farmers.

TAVI Project Manager Dr Sophia Chan said healthy school meals can improve children’s growth,

concentration and learning ability. She explained that the programme is not only improving nutrition, but also creating direct income opportunities for farmers who supply vegetables to participating schools several times a week.

The initiative is also expanding beyond schools into the hospitality sector. During a culinary training and certification workshop at Mphophoma Conference and Training Center, representatives from five restaurants were trained on how to prepare, present and add value to traditional African vegetables for modern consumers.

According to Chan, restaurants and chefs have an important role to play in changing how consumers view indigenous foods. By presenting these vegetables in attractive and professional ways, restaurants can help reposition them as desirable, healthy and commercially valuable food choices.

This shift reflects the broader ambition of TAVI Phase II: to move beyond revival and into commercialisation. With significant support from Taiwan, the programme is working to turn school gardens into productive spaces, link learners to markets and encourage young people to view agriculture as a modern, income-generating sector.

For Eswatini, the message is clear: traditional vegetables are no longer just a heritage crop. They are becoming part of a wider conversation about nutrition, school feeding, youth agribusiness and local market development.

TAVI Phase II at a Glance



Schools reached: 42



Pupils benefiting: More than 59,400



Smallholder farmers linked: At least 84



Key partners: Taiwan, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Education and Training, World Vegetable Center



Training focus: Nutrition, food safety, hygiene and meal preparation



Hospitality link: Five restaurants trained



Main goal: Move traditional vegetables from revival into commercialisation





FMD FIGHT GOES VIRAL

Eswatini, South Africa and Mozambique are tightening cooperation against Foot and Mouth Disease as porous borders, livestock movement and vaccine shortages expose the limits of national responses.

BY: PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR

Foot and Mouth Disease is forcing Southern Africa to confront a hard truth: livestock diseases do not recognise national borders.

Eswatini's Minister of Agriculture, Mandla Tshawuka, joined South Africa's Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen, and Mozambique's Director of Veterinary Services, Dr Abel Gonçalo Chilundo, in Mpumalanga as the three neighbouring countries intensified a coordinated response to Foot and Mouth Disease and other transboundary animal diseases threatening livestock production across the region.

The engagement formed part of a mass vaccination outreach programme led by South Africa in Mpumalanga, one of the provinces affected by recurring FMD outbreaks.

For Eswatini, the meeting came at a critical stage in its own response. Tshawuka revealed that the country had vaccinated more than 317,000 cattle since February this year, out of a national herd estimated at about 550,000. This represents more than 60 percent vaccination coverage in less than three months, a milestone authorities believe could signal movement towards the declining phase of the outbreak.

"We have realised that it is important

for us to work together in order to win this battle; otherwise, we cannot succeed individually," Tshawuka said.

The minister said poor cordon fences along border areas remain one of the biggest challenges facing the region, allowing uncontrolled livestock movement between Eswatini, South Africa and Mozambique. This, he warned, increases the risk of disease transmission and weakens isolated national responses.

Tshawuka said cooperation must go beyond emergency vaccination campaigns. He called for stronger regional systems in disease surveillance, veterinary coordination, sanitary control, stock theft prevention and vaccine security.

"As we move forward, we need to identify areas where we can collaborate, including the vaccination programme and vaccine production, so that we can produce enough vaccines within the region," he said.

The regional intervention comes as Southern Africa continues to battle FMD outbreaks that have disrupted livestock movement, strained veterinary services, affected meat trade and raised concern among farmers, processors and export markets.

In Eswatini, authorities have implemented vaccination campaigns,

movement restrictions and surveillance measures following outbreaks linked to the SAT1 and SAT2 virus serotypes. The Ministry of Agriculture recently announced a partial relaxation of livestock movement restrictions after reporting progress through its phased national vaccination programme.

Agricultural experts warn that porous borders, illegal livestock movement, ageing veterinary infrastructure and limited vaccine availability are making livestock disease management more complex. Although FMD does not directly threaten human health, it remains one of the most economically damaging livestock diseases because of its impact on trade, animal movement and farm income.

For smallholder farmers, the impact is immediate: movement bans, delayed sales, restricted access to markets and reduced income.

The growing cooperation between Eswatini, South Africa and Mozambique marks an important shift towards coordinated regional disease management. As FMD continues to test national systems, the message is clear: the future of livestock protection will depend not only on vaccines, but also on stronger borders, shared surveillance and joint investment in animal health.



LAKE 401 UDOKOTELA

High yielding early-maturity white hybrid maize known for its excellent drought tolerance. UDOKOTELA flowers in just 65 days, green-mealie harvest in 100-110 days, and grain harvest at 125-130 days.

It features large cobs with big grain and fast grain fill, excellent for short rainy seasons. UDOKOTELA also displays excellent disease resistance resulting in reliable and consistent yields every season.

Muzi Masango
Mashayekhatsi

UDOKOTELA filled up my maize crib even after this unfortunate season that we had. It had great cobs, and my kids enjoyed grilling it due to its sweet taste it's so nice.

Sindisile Matsenjwa
Maphungwane

It was my first time planting UDOKOTELA. I am impressed with its drought tolerance, early maturity, big cobs and great grain size. I am a bean farmer, but after attending a local maize and beans seminar where I heard I can plant Lake 401 and harvest early, then plant my beans after harvesting. It is possible!! I managed to harvest both crops on the same field in the same season.



Mandla Zikalala +268 7638 9561 • Dumsani Mbingo +268 7853 8911
www.lake-agri.co.za



FUTURE FARMERS TAKE ROOT IN SCHOOL GARDENS

The Lake Agriculture National Maize and Beans Schools Competition is turning classrooms into crop fields, giving learners practical farming skills while confronting Eswatini's maize and beans production gap.

BY SIBUSISIWE NDZIMANDZE | PHESHEYA KUNENE

Inside Mfanyana Hall at Manzini Central High School, the future of Eswatini's agriculture was not being discussed in theory. It was being displayed in maize cobs, dry beans, production diaries, poetry, quizzes and the confident voices of learners beginning to see farming as more than a school subject.

The Lake Agriculture National Maize and Beans Schools Competition brought together primary, junior secondary and senior secondary schools from across the country in a lively showcase of practical agricultural education. More than a competition, it was a reminder that Eswatini's future food



Lake Agriculture Eswatini, Dumisane Mbingo

security may depend on how early young people are exposed to farming

as a skill, a business and a national responsibility.

The initiative began in 2013 at Emvembili Central Primary School, after learners visited Lake Agriculture in Malkerns to learn about seed production and crop varieties. At the time, agriculture in many schools was still taught largely in theory, with limited practical exposure to maize and bean production.

Lake Agriculture Agricultural Expert Dumsani Mbingo said the competition was created to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real farming experience.

"We realised there was a need to expose learners to practical

agriculture at an early stage so that they can appreciate farming not only as a school subject, but as an important livelihood and economic activity," Mbingo said.

What began as a maize production project for a Grade 6 agriculture class gradually grew into a national schools competition. Lake Agriculture supported the initiative by providing seed varieties, including LAKE 601-Vulindlela white maize seed, while schools used demonstration plots to teach learners planting, crop monitoring, variety comparison and field performance.

"Through this competition, learners are now able to plant, monitor crops, compare varieties and understand which seed performs better in their areas," Mbingo said.

The competition was deliberately designed to make agriculture practical and engaging. Learners were not only expected to grow crops. They also presented maize cobs, dry bean samples, agricultural diaries, poetry and technical quizzes focused on maize and bean production.

"We wanted learners to enjoy agriculture and express themselves beyond the field," Mbingo said. "Agriculture must also inspire creativity and confidence among young people."

In 2025, the programme entered a national phase through the support of the Eswatini Agriculture Teachers Association, which helped expand participation to schools across the country. By the time learners gathered at Manzini Central High School, the competition had become a national showcase of crop knowledge, learner confidence and practical agricultural learning.

At high school level, Sigangeni High School emerged as the overall winner, followed by Masibekela High School. Esigangeni High School also delivered strong performances, particularly in maize cob quality assessment and quiz sections.

At primary school level, Enhlanhleni Methodist Primary School was crowned overall winner after demonstrating consistency



Sigangeni high school who excelled in maize cob evaluation

across production output, knowledge-based tasks and presentation components. Winning schools received Lake Agriculture seed inputs, trophies, medals, branded merchandise and, in some cases, farming equipment to strengthen future production.

Beyond the excitement of prizes, the event carried a serious national message: Eswatini must produce more of its own food.

National Maize Corporation Farmer Development Officer Zakhele Nkonyane warned that the country remains heavily dependent on imports for staple crops such as maize and beans. He said Eswatini requires about 142,673 metric tonnes of maize per year, but currently produces approximately 77,000 metric tonnes, leaving a deficit of around 65,673 metric tonnes valued at about E394 million.

For beans, national demand stands at about 7,000 metric tonnes, while local production remains just above 1,000 metric tonnes, creating a shortfall valued at approximately E143 million.

"These figures show that Eswatini is still heavily dependent on imports for basic staples. We are importing food that we can produce locally if production is scaled and modernised," Nkonyane said.

His message to learners was clear: agriculture should not be treated as a fallback option, but as a viable business opportunity. He said maize production can generate gross margins of about E13,640 per hectare, while beans can yield up to E19,400 per hectare, depending

on management practices and input efficiency.

"Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work," he said, urging learners to approach farming with discipline, planning and business thinking.

Lake Agriculture Export Marketing Officer Robert Mathews said the company has invested approximately E300,000 into the programme and supplied nearly three tonnes of maize and bean seed to participating schools. He said the initiative now reaches more than 100 schools across Eswatini, with the long-term goal of strengthening practical agricultural education and building a pipeline of future commercial farmers.

For Lake Agriculture, the competition has become more than a corporate social investment project. It is a long-term contribution to building a generation that understands seed, soil, climate, markets and food security from an early age.

For schools, it has transformed gardens into practical learning spaces. For learners, it has made agriculture visible, competitive and meaningful.

As the winning schools celebrated their achievements, one message stood above the rest: the future of Eswatini's food security will not be built in boardrooms alone. It will also be grown in school gardens, nurtured by teachers, supported by industry and carried forward by learners already proving that they can farm with purpose.



BY SIBUSISIWE NDZIMANDZE | JOURNALIST

NGCULWINI FARMER TAPS INTO ESWATINI'S FISH DEMAND

Sibusiso Malaza's tilapia ponds show how training, water management and reliable fingerlings could help small farmers enter aquaculture.

In the Middleveld community of Ngculwini, fish farmer Sibusiso Malaza is proving that Eswatini's growing appetite for fish could become one of the country's most promising agribusiness opportunities.

What began in 2019 as a small experiment with a 1,000-litre tank has gradually developed into a structured small-scale aquaculture operation producing tilapia for local community markets.

Malaza entered fish farming without formal technical training, but with a clear observation: people wanted fish, yet very few local farmers were producing enough to meet demand.

"I saw that there was demand for fish, but very few small farmers were producing it locally," he said.

That demand remains significant. Eswatini's fish

requirement is estimated at about 5,025 metric tonnes per year, while local production remains far below national consumption needs. According to the Taiwan International Cooperation and Development Fund, nearly 90 percent of aquatic products consumed in Eswatini are imported, with local aquaculture still largely dominated by small family operations.

For Malaza, this gap represents a major opportunity. He believes that with proper training, reliable water, quality fingerlings and affordable feed, more local farmers can participate in fish production and help reduce the country's dependence on imports.

His journey gained momentum in 2021 after he approached Ministry of Agriculture extension officers at Malkerns Research Station. The officers provided technical guidance

on aquaculture development, including pond construction, stocking and basic production management.

In 2023, Malaza shifted from tank-based production to earthen ponds. After inspection and approval, he received 800 tilapia fingerlings. Six months later, he harvested and sold the fish to local community buyers.

Further support came in 2024 when he participated in aquaculture training involving the Ministry of Agriculture, Malkerns Research Station and the Taiwan International Cooperation and Development Fund.

Through the Taiwan Technical Mission and the Ministry of Agriculture, the ICDF has been supporting aquaculture development in Eswatini through tilapia fry breeding, farmer training, technical guidance and the establishment of improved aquaculture systems.

The programme also focuses on strengthening local fingerling supply, developing low-cost alternative feed formulas and improving farmer capacity through practical technical training.

For farmers like Malaza, this support has helped move fish farming from trial-and-error production towards more structured and better-managed aquaculture.

In 2025, Malaza received another batch of 1,000 improved tilapia fingerlings. This time, production performance improved significantly.

"Within four months, some of the fish had reached about 400 grams and were ready for the market," he said.

Malaza currently produces up to 2,000 tilapia and operates three ponds, including two at Nkhamba and one at Ngculwini. From his experience, tilapia performs best when water temperatures are favourable, making water management and site conditions critical parts of production.

"Fish farming does well where it is warm. When the temperature is favourable, the fish grow faster," he said.

At Ngculwini, he uses borehole water and plans to install a solar-powered pumping system to reduce electricity costs and improve water supply reliability.

He says water quality management is one of the most important aspects of fish farming because poor water conditions affect feeding, growth and survival. To maintain a healthier production environment, he changes pond water every two to three weeks.

Feed remains one of the biggest cost drivers in aquaculture. Malaza uses commercial starter, grower and finisher pellets, but says supply can be limited and costly.

To reduce costs, he has introduced duckweed, an aquatic plant used as an organic feed supplement. Duckweed is rich in protein and can help support fish growth when properly combined with commercial feed.

For Malaza, this is one of the



advantages of fish farming: farmers can produce part of the feed on-farm, reduce dependence on expensive pellets and lower production costs.

"At the starter stage, we grind the pellets into powder. The fish do not eat much when they are still small, so one 25kg bag can last up to two months," he said.

He also monitors feeding response closely. If the fish finish their feed within about 30 minutes, he takes that as a sign of growth and adjusts feeding levels accordingly.

Malaza has also introduced a small number of catfish in a separate pond to assess their performance. He says tilapia can breed quickly, sometimes within two to three months, which can lead to overcrowding and competition if ponds are not properly managed.

Despite the technical demands of aquaculture, Malaza says selling fish has not been difficult.

"The local community buys all the stock. The challenge is not the market. The challenge is producing enough fish consistently," he said.

His ambition is to scale production beyond 10,000 fish and eventually supply retail stores. However, lack of funding remains one of his biggest barriers.

For him, aquaculture is not a shortcut enterprise. It requires water, training, good management, reliable fingerlings, proper feeding and consistent technical support.

"There is potential, but farmers must do it properly. Once the

ponds are well built, approved and managed, fish farming can produce good results," he said.

Malaza now hopes to receive further training in fish breeding so he can eventually produce his own fingerlings instead of relying entirely on external suppliers. Fingerlings currently cost about 80 cents each, a cost that can increase quickly as a farmer scales production.

His story reflects both the opportunity and the constraints facing Eswatini's aquaculture sector. The demand is clear. The market exists. Farmers are showing interest. But for fish farming to grow into a stronger commercial value chain, producers will need improved access to finance, quality fingerlings, affordable feed, technical training and reliable water infrastructure.

For now, Malaza's ponds in Ngculwini are a small but powerful sign of what could be possible. In a country still importing most of its fish, farmers like him are showing that Eswatini's aquaculture opportunity may be closer than many realise.



SPOTTED HORSE RUM MAKES HISTORY AT THE 2026 WORLD RUM AWARDS



David Pearce, Operations Manager at Simunye Beverages, Matsapha premises

Less than a year after its launch, Simunye Beverages' Spotted Horse Gold Rum has claimed both a Gold Medal and Category Winner title at one of the spirits world's most respected competitions — and now brings that global recognition home to the stage of MTN Bushfire 2026.

BY SIBUSISO MNGADI | EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

There is a bottle of rum sitting on shelves across Eswatini that, as of this year, bears the formal endorsement of the world's most discerning rum judges. Spotted Horse Gold Rum, produced by Simunye Beverages — a subsidiary of the Royal Eswatini Sugar Corporation (RES) — has been awarded both a Gold Medal and Category Winner at the 2026 World Rum Awards, placing it in the company of celebrated spirits from the Caribbean, Latin America, and beyond.

It is a remarkable achievement for any spirit. For one produced in the Kingdom of Eswatini and launched less than twelve months ago, it is historic.

A Gold Medal in Record Time

The World Rum Awards is widely regarded as the global benchmark for rum excellence, drawing entries from



the most established rum-producing nations in the world. To win Gold, and to also claim a Category title, in the same competition is the kind of double recognition that typically takes distilleries years — sometimes decades — to attain.

For David Pearce, Operations Manager at Simunye Beverages, the result is both a personal and professional landmark:

“Spotted Horse Rum is incredibly



proud to have been awarded both a Gold Medal and Category Winner at the 2026 World Rum Awards — one of the most respected spirits competitions globally. This achievement is a strong recognition of the quality, craftsmanship, and consistency behind our rum, and places an Eswatini-produced spirit among the very best rums in the world. It is not only a proud moment for our brand, but also for the growth

and potential of African premium spirits on the global stage.”

What makes the win all the more striking is the speed at which it has been achieved. Spotted Horse Gold Rum was officially launched in August 2025 at Dwaleni Farm Lodge — an event that marked RES's bold pivot from bulk commodity production into the premium consumer spirits market. To arrive at a World Rum Awards podium within the same production year is, by any measure, an extraordinary leap. It signals not just the quality of the liquid in the bottle, but the calibre of the team and infrastructure behind it.

The Power Behind the Pour

Simunye Beverages draws on the industrial muscle of RES — one of southern Africa's foremost sugar and ethanol producers, operating a distillery that yields approximately 32 million litres over a 36-week production period. This is not a craft operation finding its feet; it is a serious production platform applying precision, scale, and decades of fermentation expertise to the craft of premium rum.

RES Managing Director Nick Jackson set out the vision plainly at the brand's launch:

“If we can move 3% of our output into retail, we can double profitability. Rum is the new gin. This is it.”

Inspired by the majestic giraffe — a symbol of grace, height, and an unmatched view of the horizon — Spotted Horse is crafted to deliver a harmonious medley of dried fruits, smooth vanilla, and rich oak. The brand draws deeply on Eswatini's royal heritage and natural landscape, positioning the rum not merely as a local product but as an ambassador for what this country can produce when ambition meets capability.

Bringing the Fire: The MTN Bushfire Partnership

The World Rum Awards recognition arrives at a particularly charged moment for Spotted Horse. The brand has been announced as the Official Rum Sponsor of MTN



RES Corporation team at the launch of the Spotted Horse Rum at Dwaleni Lodge in August 2025 - Zakhele Zulu, Nonhlanhla Simelane and Muhawu Maziya

Bushfire 2026 — Eswatini's iconic international music and arts festival, which draws visitors from across Africa and the globe to the hills of Malkerns every May.

“Spotted Horse Rum is proud to be the Official Rum Sponsor of the 2026 edition of MTN Bushfire. This partnership is a reflection of the strong relationship we have built with the Bushfire team over the years, as well as our shared passion for celebrating creativity, culture, and local excellence. As a proudly local brand, we believe it is important to have Eswatini products represented on one of the country's biggest international stages. Bushfire brings together people from across the world, and we are excited for Spotted Horse to be part of that experience — showcasing world-class rum crafted right here at home.”

The Bushfire partnership is a strategic fit in every sense. The festival is precisely the kind of international platform where a brand like Spotted Horse can tell its story to the widest possible audience — festival-goers from across the

continent and beyond, gathered in the very country where this rum is made. It is brand storytelling at its most authentic: not an import showcasing itself in Eswatini, but an Eswatini product taking its rightful place on an international stage.

Africa's Moment in the Glass

The broader significance of Spotted Horse's rise should not be understated. African premium spirits have long been an afterthought in global industry conversations dominated by Scotch whisky, Caribbean rum, and Latin American tequila. What Simunye Beverages has demonstrated — in record time — is that the continent has both the raw material and the production sophistication to compete at the highest level.

A Gold Medal and Category Win at the 2026 World Rum Awards. An official partnership with MTN Bushfire. All within the brand's first year of life.

Every sip, it turns out, really does tell a story.



FARMERS EYE GREEN MARKETS

EITF 2026 is positioning farmers and agro-processors for branding, training, buyers and new opportunities in sustainable trade.

BY: PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR

A bag of honey, a crate of vegetables or a bottle of chilli sauce may soon mean far more than a simple market-day sale for Eswatini’s farmers.

At the launch of the 58th edition of the Eswatini International Trade Fair (EITF) 2026, agriculture emerged as one of the key sectors set to benefit from the country’s flagship trade and investment showcase. Beneath the speeches on green economies, sustainable trade and business development was a clear message: Eswatini is increasingly positioning farmers, agro-processors and rural producers as serious players in formal, regional and international markets.

This year’s trade fair is scheduled to run from August 28 to September 6 at the Mavuso Trade and Exhibition Centre under the theme: “Unlocking



EIPA CEO, Sibani Mngomezulu

Green Economy Opportunities for Sustainable Trade Promotion.”

Beyond the polished exhibition stands and business presentations, the EITF is evolving into a practical platform for the agricultural sector. Farmers are being encouraged to move beyond subsistence production

into branding, processing, export readiness, digital marketing and commercial networking. For many local producers, the fair is no longer simply about visibility. It is about survival, growth and market access.

Speaking during the EITF 2026 rollout presentation, EITF Projects Manager Sibusiso Mnisi said organisers were expanding opportunities for exhibitors through free seminars, innovation platforms and regional activations aimed at attracting stronger participation from SMEs, farmers and entrepreneurs.

Mnisi said organisers were targeting 280 exhibitors this year, with subscriptions already exceeding expectations months before the event. He also announced that seminar venues would once again be offered free of charge, giving farmers, agribusiness experts, innovators

and development partners room to host practical training sessions and industry discussions during the fair.

“Last year we hosted 15 seminars and attracted over 1,000 participants. This year the target is to reach 2,000 people through these knowledge-sharing platforms,” Mnisi said.

The free seminar model is expected to be one of the major attractions for the agricultural sector, especially for emerging farmers seeking knowledge on climate-smart agriculture, agribusiness financing, food processing, digital marketing and sustainable production systems.

Among those preparing for the 2026 edition is Lujilo Honey, a local agribusiness specialising in honey production and value-added honey products. The company won an award during the previous trade fair, a milestone its leadership says helped open doors to new opportunities, networks and partnerships.

Speaking on behalf of the company, farmer and entrepreneur Vusi Nkambule said the EITF had helped position the business before larger markets and commercial buyers.

“We are looking forward to this year’s event because it gives us a chance to market ourselves better, strengthen our brand and connect with new networks and markets,” Nkambule said. “There is a lot we have gained from being part of the EITF.”

His remarks reflect a broader shift within Eswatini’s agricultural economy, where farmers are increasingly being encouraged to think beyond raw production and enter value chains that include packaging, processing, branding and export marketing.

Agriculture remains one of Eswatini’s most important sectors, supporting rural livelihoods, employment and food security. Yet many smallholder farmers still face limited market access, climate shocks, high input costs and low levels of value addition. The trade fair is now being positioned as one platform that can help address these gaps by connecting producers

with buyers, financiers, technology providers, policymakers and new markets.

In remarks delivered on behalf of the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Trade, Principal Secretary Ambassador Melusi Masuku said EITF 2026 would place stronger emphasis on sustainability, digitalisation and inclusive participation.

“We urge all exhibitors, from SMEs and large corporations to government bodies, to showcase their Environmental, Social and Governance frameworks,” the Minister said.

The Minister further noted that seminars and media platforms at the fair would focus on green economy opportunities, including recycling, circular economy systems, green finance and sustainable production. For farmers, this could open fresh opportunities in organic farming, renewable energy technologies, climate-smart irrigation, waste recycling and environmentally sustainable food production.

The Eswatini Investment Promotion Authority (EIPA) also confirmed that exhibition rates would not increase for a second consecutive year, a move aimed at keeping the platform accessible to MSMEs and small local businesses.

EIPA Chief Executive Officer Sibani Mngomezulu said the trade fair remained one of Eswatini’s most important engines for enterprise development.



Prime Minister, Rt Hon. Russell Dlamini at 2025 EITF

“What began decades ago has evolved into one of the most significant economic and business gatherings in our Kingdom,” he said.

Mngomezulu said the 2025 edition attracted 282 exhibitors, including more than 22 foreign participants, while visitor numbers exceeded 70,000. For agriculture, those numbers matter. They show how the trade fair can serve as a bridge between rural producers and urban consumers, wholesalers, retailers, financiers, development agencies and potential export buyers.

Manzini City Mayor Councillor Xolani Masuku said the trade fair must also serve as a catalyst for inclusive economic growth.

“This trade fair must also serve as a catalyst for inclusivity. It must empower small and medium enterprises, open doors for youth and women entrepreneurs, and ensure that the benefits of economic growth are widely shared,” Masuku said.

For farmers, that inclusivity may prove more valuable than trophies, banners or exhibition certificates. It means access to buyers, training, finance, ideas and commercial networks.

By the time the gates of the 58th EITF open in August, Eswatini’s agricultural sector may arrive carrying more than produce. It may arrive carrying ambition.

MAYINDISA FARM PLANTS A COMMERCIAL FUTURE

In Gege, Mayibongwe Mavuso is turning vegetable production into a disciplined enterprise built on market planning, irrigation, labour, learning and patient growth.

BY: NOSIPHO MKHIZE | JOURNALIST



For Mayibongwe Mavuso, farming is not merely about placing seed into the soil and waiting for harvest. It is a business that demands planning, discipline, market intelligence, patience and the courage to keep learning.

At 43, Mavuso is steadily transforming Mayindisa Farm into a serious commercial vegetable enterprise, one that supports his family, creates jobs and positions itself for bigger market opportunities. Based in Gege, the farm operates under Mayindisa Investments (Pty) Ltd, with Mavuso serving as Managing Director.

Originally from Bhunya KaZondwako, Mavuso has built an agricultural business that now supports seven dependants, employs four full-time workers and brings in an additional four seasonal employees during labour-intensive periods such as weeding and harvesting.

His fields reflect the mindset of a farmer who is thinking beyond subsistence. Mayindisa Farm

produces red and white onions, lettuce, spinach and habanero peppers, while recent harvests have included beetroot, carrots, butternut and baby marrow. The farm has also recorded strong yields of green peppers. Mavuso says the choice of crops is guided by the natural advantage of the area. “The climate at our farm is suitable for growing these crops,” he says.

A Farming Seed Planted at Home Although Mayindisa Farm is now taking shape as a commercial enterprise, the roots of Mavuso’s agricultural journey go back to his childhood. His first lessons came from home, through the influence of his mother, Marjorie Mavuso, who introduced him to farming while he was still in school. “My mother inspired me. She introduced me to farming while I was still in Form 2 by giving me responsibilities in her poultry business,” Mavuso says.

That early exposure planted a seed that would later grow into Mayindisa Farm. Mavuso describes his mother as a strong farmer whose example continues to guide him.

She was recently recognised as a runner-up in the Woman Farmer of the Year Competition, a distinction that reflects the strong agricultural foundation from which he emerged.

While he does not hold a tertiary qualification in agriculture, Mavuso has built his knowledge through experience, short courses, workshops and continuous engagement with experts. He has received training from organisations such as NAMBOARD, the National Maize Corporation and the Ministry of Agriculture.

He also believes strongly in farmer-to-farmer learning. “I build relationships with experienced farmers and learn from them. Extension officers are also on my speed dial,” he says.

Treating Farming as an Enterprise That practical learning has helped Mavuso approach farming as an enterprise rather than a gamble. Before planting, he and his team study market trends, consider projected crop prices, assess weather patterns, select quality seedlings, prepare the land and install the most

suitable irrigation system for each field.

Mayindisa Farm currently uses a blended irrigation system made up of 80 percent drip irrigation and 20 percent sprinkler irrigation. This allows the farm to use water efficiently while maintaining flexibility across different crops.

Production begins with choosing the right seed varieties and sourcing seedlings from trusted nurseries. After planting, mulch is applied to retain soil moisture, followed by regular watering and close crop monitoring. Mavuso says pest management is taken seriously, with the farm responding quickly whenever infestations appear. “We deal with pests as soon as they appear by applying the appropriate pesticides where necessary,” he says.

The farm uses both organic and chemical fertilisers, although Mavuso’s long-term goal is to transition fully into organic production. “We are gradually embracing organic fertilisers, and our long-term plan is to go fully organic in the future,” he explains.

However, organic compost also comes with challenges. Mavuso notes that it can introduce large volumes of weeds, which then require labour-intensive removal. Instead of relying on herbicides, Mayindisa Farm employs seasonal workers to weed the fields manually. “We do not use chemicals for weed control. We remove weeds manually,” he says.

Harvesting With the Market in Mind

At Mayindisa Farm, harvesting is not determined by routine alone. It is guided by the market. Mavuso says different buyers have different preferences. Some prefer lettuce while it is still young and tender, while others want it fully mature.

This means the farm must remain responsive to customer demand, especially when dealing with highly perishable vegetables. Lettuce, for example, can quickly lose value if it stays in the field for too long. Once overgrown, it can lose its fresh, sweet taste and become less attractive to buyers.



Mayibongwe Mavuso at his farm in Gege, Shiselweni Region.

For Mavuso, this is why market planning must begin before planting. “Farmers need to secure a reliable market before planting so that, when the crop is ready, it can be harvested and sold quickly while it is still fresh and of good quality,” he says.

This market-first approach is central to the future of Mayindisa Farm. The business already has a contract with NAMBOARD, giving it an important route to market. Mavuso says the company is also in discussions with several major supermarkets as it prepares for expanded supply opportunities, although those buyers cannot yet be publicly named.

Challenges on the Road to Growth Despite the progress, the road to commercial growth has not been easy. Mavuso identifies limited access to finance, unpredictable weather patterns, low market prices and high labour costs as some of the

major pressures facing the business.

Yet he remains focused on expansion, convinced that agriculture rewards those who remain patient, organised and committed. “Patience and passion are key. Once you have those, the rest will gradually fall into place,” he says. His advice to young people is clear: do not romanticise farming, professionalise it. “Start small, but treat agriculture as a business. Build your brand and invest in it,” he says.

In Mayindisa Farm, that philosophy is already taking shape. It is visible in the irrigation lines, the market planning, the labour structure, the brand ambitions and the careful balance between productivity and sustainability. For Mavuso, the future of farming lies beyond planting. It lies in building enterprises that can compete, create jobs, supply markets and grow with purpose.



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FREE LIVESTOCK EXTENSION SUPPORT

BY: MNCEDISI SIMELANE | FEEDMASTER TECHNICAL ADVISER

Mncedisi Simelane is an Animal Scientist with over 2 decades experience in animal husbandry, and serves as the Technical Adviser at Feedmaster Eswatini



Agriculture continues to play a major role in supporting livelihoods, food security, and economic development in Eswatini, particularly within rural communities where many households depend on livestock production for income and nutrition. Recognizing the importance of the livestock sector, the Government of Eswatini, through the Ministry of Agriculture and the Department of Veterinary and Livestock Services, established a nationwide livestock extension support system aimed at assisting farmers free of charge. This initiative is particularly beneficial to subsistence and emerging farmers who often face challenges related to technical knowledge, production management, infrastructure planning, and access to markets.

Across the country, Regional Livestock Extension Officers are

stationed in various regions and Tinkhundla centres to provide technical support and advisory services to farmers involved in different livestock enterprises. These officers assist farmers engaged in layer production, broiler farming, pig production, rabbit farming, cattle production, and indigenous chicken farming. Their role is to ensure that farmers receive practical and professional guidance that improves productivity, enhances animal health and welfare, and strengthens the sustainability of rural farming systems.

The livestock extension officers consist of trained specialists with expertise in different livestock enterprises. Some specialize in poultry production, while others focus on piggery management, beef production, or small stock enterprises. Their collective responsibility is to promote improved

livestock production systems that contribute toward sustainable food production, improved employability, poverty reduction, and stronger rural livelihoods. Through regular farm visits, training workshops, demonstrations, and farmers' trainings, these officers empower communities with the practical knowledge necessary to transform subsistence farming into sustainable household enterprises.

One of the major areas where these officers provide support is in livestock project planning and development. Many rural farmers often struggle with determining the most suitable location for their livestock structures at the homestead. Improper siting can lead to disease outbreaks, poor ventilation, environmental pollution, and operational inefficiencies. To address this challenge, extension officers assist farmers with livestock



DATE: 17th and 18th June 2026



TIME: 0900hrs – 1400hrs



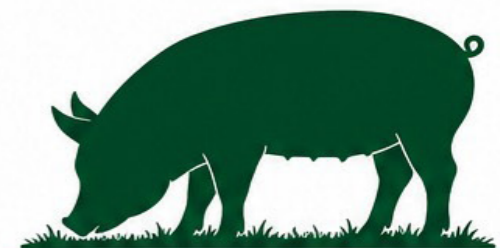
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project positioning, commonly referred to as "siting." This process involves evaluating the homestead environment and advising farmers on the best location for poultry houses, piggery units, cattle kraals, rabbit structures, and other livestock facilities.

In addition to siting support, the extension officers also provide building plan drawings for livestock structures free of charge. These building plans are designed to ensure proper ventilation, drainage, biosecurity, waste management, and animal comfort. This service greatly assists rural farmers who may not have the financial capacity to hire professional consultants or engineers. Through this initiative, farmers are able to construct livestock structures that meet acceptable production standards while minimizing operational risks and improving productivity.

The Government's livestock extension support system has become an important pillar in promoting household food security. In many rural households, livestock farming provides meat, eggs, milk, manure, and income generation opportunities. Poultry and pig production have increasingly become important livelihood enterprises for youth and women. By equipping farmers with production knowledge and practical skills, the extension support programme contributes significantly toward empowering communities and reducing dependency on external food sources.

Under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) framework, Feedmaster has also joined hands with government to strengthen livestock farmer support services. Through collaboration with government livestock extension teams, Feedmaster technical support personnel regularly conduct Farmers' Days and livestock training programmes within different Tinkhundla and constituencies across the country.

These Farmers' Days provide practical and enterprise-specific

training covering areas such as livestock housing, chick brooding, feeding and nutrition, disease prevention, biosecurity, breeding management, record keeping, grading and marketing of livestock products, and financial management. Farmers are given the opportunity to interact directly with technical specialists and ask practical questions relating to their farming operations. This collaborative approach has greatly improved farmer awareness and adoption of modern livestock production practices.

Importantly, these training programmes are formally documented to benefit participating farmers. Farmers who attend the training sessions are often provided with attendance registers, certificates, or other forms of training confirmation that serve as proof that they have received technical training on the specific enterprise they intend to pursue. This documentation has become increasingly valuable because most agricultural funders and development financing institutions require proof of training before approving livestock project funding applications.

Financial institutions and development support programmes generally seek assurance that applicants possess the necessary business and technical knowledge to manage livestock enterprises successfully. As a result, documented training from recognized livestock extension programmes and Farmers' Days by qualified experts serves as valid proof of competency and preparedness. This strengthens farmers' chances of securing financial support for their projects while also reducing the risk of enterprise failure due to poor management practices.

The collaboration

TECHNICAL FEATURE

between government livestock extension officers and private sector technical teams demonstrates the importance of integrated approaches in agricultural development. By combining government outreach systems with private sector expertise, rural farmers are able to access a broader range of technical services, practical demonstrations, and production support. This partnership continues to play a meaningful role in advancing sustainable agrarian livelihoods in Eswatini.

As livestock production continues to grow in importance within rural communities, farmers are encouraged to fully utilize these free livestock extension services available within their regions and constituencies. Through proper technical guidance, continuous training, and collaborative support systems, livestock farming can become a powerful driver of food security, employment creation, youth empowerment, and poverty reduction in Eswatini.

Trusted Livestock Experts



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E1 BILLION FOOD BILL EXPOSES ESWATINI'S FARMING FAILURE

Eswatini is spending more than E1 billion annually importing maize and beans while local farmers battle weak support systems, poor mechanisation and shrinking production.

BY: PHESHEYA KUNENE

Eswatini is losing more than E500 million every farming season importing maize and beans, pushing the country's annual food import bill beyond E1 billion while thousands of local farmers struggle with weak support systems, limited mechanisation and shrinking production.

The revelations emerged during the ESATA National Maize and Beans Schools Competition in Manzini, hosted under the Eswatini Agriculture Teachers Association and sponsored by Lake Agriculture.

While the event celebrated school agriculture projects and youth participation in farming, it also exposed a deeper national crisis: Eswatini's growing dependence on imported food despite having the land and climate to produce much of its own staple crops.

National Maize Corporation Farmer Development Officer Zakhele Nkonyane revealed that Eswatini requires about 142,673 metric tonnes of maize annually, yet local production stands at only around 77,000 metric tonnes.

The resulting shortfall of more than 65,000 metric tonnes costs the country approximately E394 million every season.

The bean sector faces a similar challenge.

National demand is estimated at 7,000 metric tonnes annually, while local production remains slightly above 1,000 metric tonnes, forcing the country to spend another E143 million on imports.

Combined, Eswatini spends more than E537 million per season importing maize and beans — translating to over E1 billion annually flowing out of the local economy.

"We are exporting jobs, income and opportunities," Nkonyane said.

"Money that should remain within Eswatini is benefiting farmers outside the country while our own farmers continue struggling."

Nkonyane warned that heavy dependence on imports leaves Eswatini vulnerable to regional droughts, international price shocks and supply chain disruptions, particularly from South Africa, where most grain imports originate.

He said food insecurity remains a harsh reality for many households despite the country possessing the capacity to produce much of its own staple food.

The NMC official urged young people to stop viewing farming as mere hard labour and instead recognise it as a viable commercial enterprise.

According to NMC figures, one hectare of maize can generate revenue exceeding E34,000, with

profits of more than E13,000 after production costs. Beans offer even stronger returns, with potential gross margins nearing E20,000 per hectare.

Farmers, however, say production remains constrained by weak infrastructure and limited government support.

Wilber Mdluli pointed to poor access to irrigation systems and mechanised farming equipment as major barriers.

"If government had stronger machinery hire programmes for serious farmers, things would improve," he said. "Even irrigation systems for maize remain a major challenge."

The criticism reflects wider frustrations within Eswatini's agricultural sector, where farmers frequently complain about inconsistent support, delayed payments and policy uncertainty.

Responding to the concerns, ESNAU Chief Executive Officer Tammy Dlamini said local producers were fully capable of increasing production if government created a more enabling environment.

"We cannot continue importing food that local farmers are capable of producing," Dlamini said.



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THE VELOCITY OF VALUE

Why Turnover Trumps Price in Commercial Agribusiness

BY: MCEBO EMMANUEL MNISI

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



In the world of commercial agriculture, there is a persistent psychological trap: the obsession with the unit price. Farmers often measure their success by the peak price they achieved at the market gate. However, in the high-stakes environment of modern agribusiness, the “ceiling price” is often a distraction from the metric that actually builds wealth: Return on Investment (ROI) through Cycle Velocity.

To build a sustainable enterprise, one must choose between being a price seeker or a cycle pusher. While the price seeker waits for the market to tip in their favor, the cycle pusher understands that in a biological factory, time is a non-renewable input. Whether in horticulture or livestock, the farmer who clears their inventory the fastest is the one who wins the race of cumulative returns.

1. The Horticulture Perspective: The Cost of “Land-Lock.”

Consider two vegetable producers. One refuses to sell below a premium retail price, while the other signs an offtake agreement at a “cheap” wholesale rate to move the entire harvest the day it hits readiness.

The farmer who holds onto ripe stock to chase a better price suffers

from Land-Lock. While they are busy hawking crates of vegetables to maintain a high margin, their most valuable asset, the soil, is sitting idle or, worse, hosting over-mature crops that are depleting nutrients without adding value.

The invisible drains on profit include:

Management Overheads: Every extra day a ripe crop stays in the field, it requires water, labor for scouting, and protection from pests and diseases.

Quality Degradation: Vegetables have a narrow window of peak vitality. “Holding” stock often leads to fiber development, loss of sweetness, or wilting, which eventually forces a distress sale anyway.

The Opportunity Cost: If a quick-turnover farmer can squeeze four cycles of short-season crops (like leafy greens or certain brassicas) into a year, while the “price seeker” only manages three, the quick-turnover farmer has a 33% advantage in production volume. That volume almost always compensates for the lower farm-gate price.

2. The Livestock Parallel: The Maintenance Margin

The principle of velocity is even more pronounced in livestock production, particularly in beef,

pork, and poultry. In these sectors, the “inventory” is a living, breathing entity that consumes capital every single hour.

The Finishing Trap

Take a beef finisher or a pig farmer. There is a biological “sweet spot” where the Animal’s Feed Conversion Ratio (FCR) is most efficient. Once an animal reaches its ideal slaughter weight, its growth slows, but its maintenance requirements remain high.

The Price Seeker: Holds the animals for an extra month, hoping for a seasonal price spike. During this month, the animal continues to eat. Because the animal is already “finished”, that extra feed isn’t going toward high-quality muscle growth; it’s simply keeping the animal alive or adding inefficient fat.

The Cycle Pusher: Sells at the target weight, even if the current market price is average. By emptying the pens, they immediately bring in a new batch of young, highly efficient animals.

In livestock, profit is found in the gap between the cost of feed and the value of weight gain. When you hold an animal past its prime, your FCR worsens. You are effectively burning your previous profits just to stand still. The farmer who pushes more batches through their infrastructure



per year spreads their fixed costs (housing, staff, insurance) across more kilograms of meat, significantly lowering their cost per unit.

Selling “cheap” all at once to a single offtaker is often viewed as a weakness by traditional farmers. In reality, it is a sophisticated financial move. By offloading the entire stock, the farmer transfers the market risk and logistics burden to the buyer.

Key Strategic Benefits:

Instant Liquidity: Moving 100% of stock in 48 hours provides a massive cash injection. This allows for bulk-buying of inputs (seeds, fertilizer, weaners, or day-old chicks) for the next cycle, often at a discount that further improves margins.

Risk Mitigation: The longer a

crop or animal is on your farm, the higher the chance of a “Black Swan” event, an outbreak of disease, a freak storm, or theft. Selling early is a form of insurance.

Predictability: A turnover-based model allows for a “factory-style” schedule. You know exactly when your land or pens will be empty, allowing for precise planning of the next production phase.

Moving from “Farmer” to “Agribusiness Manager”

The transition from a subsistence mindset to a commercial one requires a shift in focus from price-per-kg to annualized ROI. The farmer who sells “cheap” but moves fast understands that the real engine of wealth is the production cycle. By the time the price-seeking farmer has

finally cleared their field or kraal at a “good” price, the cycle-pusher is already halfway through their next crop or batch.

In the final reckoning, the market doesn’t reward the patient; it rewards the efficient. To win the race of returns, stop looking at the ceiling price and start looking at your stopwatch. Clear the field, clear the pens, and get back to work. Velocity is the ultimate competitive advantage.

WHEN THE FARMING SEASON MOVES FASTER THAN SUPPORT

LaMgabhi farmers' complaints about late inputs, tractor delays and weak irrigation expose a wider national challenge: Eswatini cannot commercialise smallholder agriculture if support systems arrive after the planting window has closed.

BY: SIBUSISIWE NDZIMANDZE



Most people see retirement as a finish line, a moment to slow down after decades of work. But for 91-year-old Lucas Shongwe, retirement was never an ending. It was a carefully calculated beginning.

From the quiet fields near the Inyoni Yami Swaziland Irrigation Scheme, Shongwe has built a thriving mango enterprise that has sustained him, educated his children, and shielded him from the harsh realities of post-retirement poverty.

A LIFE ROOTED IN NUMBERS AND NATURE

Born with a sharp mind for numbers, Shongwe studied accounting during his high school years at Mbombela High School. He did his primary education at Mashobeni Primary. His professional journey led him to the Inyoni Yami Swaziland Irrigation Scheme, where he worked in accounts but found himself increasingly drawn to agriculture, particularly mango trees.

That dual exposure to finance

and farming would later define his success.

“I realised that numbers alone were not enough; I needed something that could grow beyond my working years,” he reflects.

Even as he worked behind a desk, he began to observe, learn, and plan. A short six-month agriculture course at Mbombela sharpened his practical understanding, while his accounting background helped him think long-term.

PLANNING BEFORE THE PAYCHEME STOPS

Unlike many who wait until retirement to figure things out, Shongwe began preparing years in advance. Before his official retirement on 30 November 1990, he had already taken decisive steps, buying mango seedlings, installing irrigation pipes, and securing access to water from a nearby river, called the Mlumati River.

This foresight ensured that when he transitioned into retirement in 1991, he was not starting from zero.

“Before I left work, I had already planted trees and installed irrigation

because I did not want to experience poverty,” he says.

Today, his orchard boasts approximately 800 mango trees at the location of Msahweni, Matsamo, a testament to decades of patience, discipline, and strategic thinking.

THE BUSINESS OF MANGOES

Mango farming is not an overnight success story. Shongwe understood this from the beginning. Mango trees take four to five years to mature and begin producing fruit, requiring both patience and consistent care.

His farming approach is simple but effective: reliable irrigation using river water, careful monitoring of tree health, and timing the market.

Mangoes typically ripen between late November and early December. As harvest season approaches, Shongwe activates his network of buyers, mainly informal traders who come directly to his farm.

They inspect the fruit, assess ripeness, and purchase in bulk, often by the crate, before distributing to local communities.

“When the mangoes are almost ready, I call my buyers, and they come to check the quality before buying in bulk,” he explains.

This direct-to-market approach eliminates middlemen and ensures steady cash flow.

SUPPORTING A FAMILY THROUGH AGRICULTURE

Shongwe is not just a farmer; he is a provider. As a father, he has used his mango business to support his household and secure his children’s education.

At the height of his production, proceeds from mango sales were sufficient to cover tuition fees for four of his children for an entire year.

His story underscores the power of agriculture not just as a livelihood, but as a tool for generational upliftment.

CHALLENGES IN THE ORCHARD

Like any farmer, Shongwe has faced setbacks. Theft has occasionally threatened his harvest, while pests, particularly mango leafhoppers, have posed risks to productivity.



Hon. Mandla Tshawuka, Minister of Agriculture

Yet, his resilience has remained unwavering. Years of experience have taught him how to manage these challenges through vigilance, timely intervention, and consistent farm management practices.

LESSONS FROM THE RETIREMENT ARCHITECT

Lucas Shongwe’s journey highlights the importance of starting early, as careful planning before retirement can create a smooth and secure transition into the next phase of life. His story also underscores the value of investing wisely, particularly in long-term crops like mangoes, which require patience but

ultimately deliver sustainable returns. By leveraging his background in accounting alongside practical farming knowledge, he was able to make informed decisions that strengthened his enterprise. Equally important is his focus on building direct markets, cultivating strong relationships with buyers to ensure a consistent and reliable income stream year after year.

Above all, his story is a reminder that retirement is not about stopping; it is about repositioning.

At 91, Shongwe continues to tend to his orchard, a living legacy of foresight and determination. Where others saw an ending, he saw an opportunity, and he calculated it well.



LaMgabhi farmers at the meeting with Minister of Agriculture at LaMgabhi Inkhundla

SIGANGENI MAIZE FARMERS TARGET E2.1 MILLION HARVEST UNDER EWADE COMMERCIALISATION DRIVE

BY: PHESHEYA KUNENE



A state-backed irrigation and input support programme is helping smallholder farmers move from subsistence production to commercial agriculture, with the Sigangeni cluster now projected to generate more than E2.1 million from maize production.

Fresh data from the Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise (EWADE) shows that 13 farmers in Sigangeni have planted 85.5 hectares under the Hamba Ubuye Commercial Maize Project, supported by more than E840,000 worth of inputs.

The cluster is expected to produce about 342 metric tonnes of maize, a strong indication of how targeted financing, irrigation access and

technical support are beginning to transform smallholder productivity in rural Eswatini.

The figures point to a broader shift in the country's agricultural landscape. Across EWADE-supported clusters, farmers are increasingly being organised into commercially viable production units, supported through input financing, mechanised services, technical guidance and structured market linkages.

For many smallholder farmers, the model is creating an opportunity to expand production, reduce uncertainty and participate more meaningfully in the maize value chain.

EWADE Chief Executive Officer Dr Samson Sithole said the programme was designed to

unlock productivity while building a more sustainable agricultural base. "What we are seeing is a transition from subsistence to structured, market-oriented farming. Through targeted support, farmers are able to increase yields, improve quality, and participate meaningfully in the value chain," he said.

Dr Sithole said the cluster approach was central to improving efficiency and scale, especially for smallholder farmers who would otherwise struggle to access inputs, machinery and markets individually. "By organising farmers into clusters, we are able to optimise input distribution, strengthen technical support, and enhance market coordination. This improves both productivity and profitability at



farmer level," he added.

The performance of other clusters reinforces this trend. In Gege, 26 farmers cultivating 169 hectares under the same programme are expected to produce 676 metric tonnes, with projected revenue exceeding E4.25 million.

In Sicunusa, eight farmers, including youth participant Mr Johnson, have planted 207 hectares and are expected to produce 828 metric tonnes of maize, translating to more than E5.2 million in potential earnings.

For farmers on the ground, the impact is already visible. One beneficiary from the Gege cluster said access to financing and coordinated support had changed the way they farm. "Before this programme, production was limited and uncertain. Now we have inputs on time, technical guidance, and a clear market. It has improved both our yields and our income," the farmer said.

The Hamba Ubuye Commercial Maize Project operates as a revolving fund, providing farmers with inputs upfront and allowing repayment after harvest. This model is designed

to ensure continuity across seasons while expanding the number of participating farmers. Since its launch, the initiative has grown significantly, supporting hundreds of farmers and covering thousands of hectares across the country.

Complementing Hamba Ubuye is the Smallholder Agricultural Productivity Enhancement and Marketing Project (SAPEMP), another EWADE-led initiative aimed at rural transformation. With a budget of approximately E800,000, SAPEMP has already reached more than 40 chiefdoms, focusing on capacity building, market access and value chain integration.

Together, these programmes are beginning to address some of the long-standing constraints that have limited smallholder agriculture in Eswatini, including limited access to capital, weak technical support, fragmented production and poor market coordination.

By strengthening irrigation infrastructure, improving access to inputs and linking farmers to formal markets, EWADE is helping reduce production risk while improving output consistency.

Analytically, the model tackles three key bottlenecks at once: financing, technical efficiency and market participation. This makes it more than an input support programme; it is a structured commercialisation pathway for smallholder farmers.

EWADE says more than 155,000 emaSwati have already been impacted through its interventions, with women accounting for more than half of the beneficiaries. The inclusion of youth farmers also signals a gradual shift in the demographic profile of agriculture, as more young people begin to view farming as a viable business.

As Eswatini continues working to reduce maize imports and strengthen national food security, EWADE's cluster-based approach is emerging as an important pillar in the country's agricultural strategy. For Sigangeni and other participating communities, the message is clear: with the right support, smallholder farming can become a predictable, scalable and profitable enterprise.

YOUNG MATSETSA FARMER TURNS ONE HECTARE INTO MARKET-DRIVEN VEGETABLE ENTERPRISE

BY: PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR



(L) Butternut plant ready to be harvested. (R) Melissa Smith young farmer.

On a one-hectare plot in Matsetsa, young farmer Melissa Smith is quietly building a structured vegetable enterprise anchored on market demand, discipline, and gradual growth.

Smith, a young female farmer currently undergoing the Innovative Smart Climate Youth Tunnel Training, produces cabbage, lettuce, butternut and other vegetables for local buyers, including Mpaka SaveMore, informal traders and household consumers.

Her journey into farming was shaped by both family heritage and personal responsibility. Before returning to the land, Smith worked in customer service at MTN. However, following the passing of her father, she took over land he had set aside for agricultural use and began building a production system focused on vegetables.

Raised by her grandparents,

Smith was exposed to farming from an early age, including maize production and poultry rearing. That background, she says, helped her understand agriculture not only as a source of food, but also as a practical livelihood.

From Family Land to Commercial Production

Today, her farming operation is centred on leafy and field vegetables, with cabbage, lettuce and butternut forming the core of her production. She is also preparing to introduce cayenne peppers as part of a broader diversification plan.

Although the farm remains small in scale, Smith's approach is increasingly commercial. Her production decisions are guided by demand from nearby markets rather than simply planting and hoping to sell afterwards. "Farming must be linked to a market. You cannot just produce without knowing who will buy," she said.

This market-first approach has allowed her to build relationships with retail outlets, community buyers and informal traders, creating a foundation for more structured growth.

Water Remains the Biggest Constraint

Despite her progress, water access remains the biggest challenge facing her enterprise. The farm currently relies on Eswatini Water Services Corporation supply and rainwater harvesting, both of which are costly and unreliable for consistent irrigation.

This has limited her ability to expand production, especially during dry periods when vegetable crops require dependable water supply.

Smith says water management is one of the most urgent issues affecting smallholder vegetable farmers, particularly those who depend on rainfall or expensive municipal water. "Farmers need

hands-on training where they are, not only in towns. Water management should be a priority because it affects everything we produce," she said.

Financial constraints have also slowed her expansion plans. Although she previously attempted poultry production, she has paused that side of the business due to limited capital and is now focusing on stabilising vegetable production.

Training Builds Confidence and Technical Skills

Smith has continued to strengthen her skills through agricultural training. She has attended poultry production training at Kitali and completed bookkeeping training through Likusasa Letfu.

She is currently enrolled in a tunnel farming programme supported by the Woman Farmer Foundation, which focuses on controlled environment vegetable production.

The programme has exposed her to improved horticultural practices, including efficient irrigation, pest management, companion planting and production planning for different seasons.

She says the training has helped her understand how tunnel systems can improve yield consistency, protect crops from harsh weather conditions and support production during periods when open-field farming is more vulnerable.

Smith is now working towards more structured vegetable production under tunnel systems, with the long-term aim of reducing weather dependency and improving supply consistency.

A New Generation of Rural Producers

For Smith, farming is not just about continuing a family legacy. It is about transforming inherited land into a productive rural enterprise.

Her long-term vision is to build a stable vegetable production unit capable of supplying consistent volumes to both formal and informal markets. She plans to improve infrastructure gradually, strengthen irrigation capacity and expand crop diversity as resources allow.

For now, her farm remains modest in size but commercially focused in its thinking. Smith's story reflects a growing generation of young farmers in Eswatini who are moving beyond subsistence production and attempting to build market-driven agricultural enterprises from rural land.

In Matsetsa, one hectare is becoming more than a family inheritance. It is becoming the foundation of a young farmer's commercial future.

GO BIG OR GO HOME

Entrepreneur of the Year challenges youth farmers as he eyes Mozambique pig market



BY: PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR

Eswatini's piggery sector has achieved something rare in African agriculture: sustained self-sufficiency. But as a recent industry engagement session made clear, sufficiency is no longer the finish line — competitiveness is.

That message came into sharp focus at the Youth Enterprise Revolving Fund (YERF) Piggery Engagement Session, where policymakers, financiers and young farmers gathered to confront a persistent paradox: why does a sector capable of meeting national demand still struggle to scale?

At the centre of the discussion was

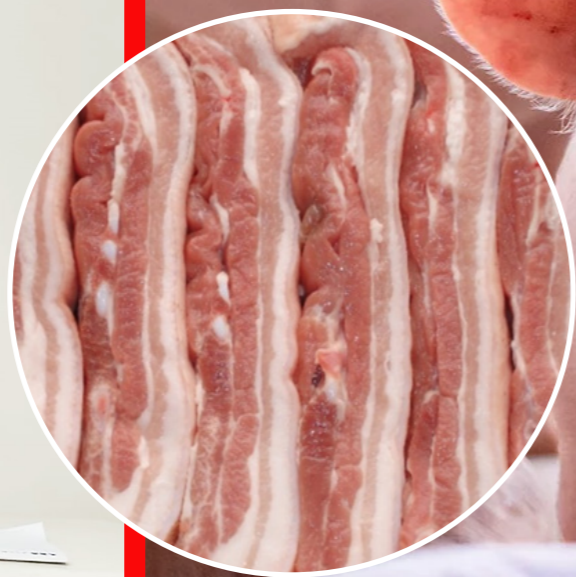
Duncan Dlamini of DJD Piggery — current Entrepreneur of the Year — whose presentation delivered both a technical roadmap and a commercial reality check. His intervention came at a pivotal moment, as YERF publicly confirmed a shift towards value-chain financing, mandatory training and tighter risk controls for youth-funded agricultural enterprises.

A Sector That Produces Enough, But Struggles to Scale

Official agricultural data shows that Eswatini has maintained pork self-sufficiency since 2019, effectively eliminating the need

for sustained imports as domestic production has kept pace with national demand. Imports of fresh pork have fallen to near-zero levels since 2020.

Output figures tell a story of uneven growth. Pork production climbed to approximately 2,045 tonnes in 2020, before peaking at around 2,370 tonnes in 2021 — a short-term expansion that gave way to volatility driven by rising input costs, disease pressures and market fragmentation. Broader meat production across Eswatini stood at around 22,032 tonnes in 2023, representing a 15 percent decline



operate without reliable records, production planning or financial discipline, making it impossible to consistently meet processor standards or sustain growth.

Commercially viable operations, he argued, are built on measurable systems — feed efficiency tracking, breeding schedules, mortality records and cash flow management. Without these, farmers lack visibility, and without visibility, they lack control.

A recurring theme was financial discipline. Dlamini cautioned against treating livestock revenue as personal cash flow, instead urging structured reinvestment and formal financial record-keeping as the foundation for building creditworthy businesses. Lenders, he noted, increasingly read financial behaviour as a proxy for business viability.

Genetics, Infrastructure and the Productivity Gap

Technical constraints also featured prominently. Dlamini noted that carcass weights in South Africa average approximately 85kg, while many Eswatini producers remain closer to 75kg — a gap driven largely by genetic limitations. Closing it requires investment in improved breeding stock, higher semen quality and a systematic approach to genetic upgrading.

Infrastructure was presented as equally non-negotiable. Proper housing, ventilation, spacing, clean water systems and biosecurity controls are baseline requirements for commercial production — not optional enhancements. Inadequate infrastructure, Dlamini warned, directly translates into slower growth rates and higher mortality.

African swine fever was highlighted as an existential biosecurity threat. Regional experience shows that outbreaks can wipe out entire herds within days, reinforcing the imperative for strict access controls, sanitation protocols and vaccination programmes.

Go Big or Go Out

One of the session's strongest policy recommendations was the need

to finance larger production units — ideally between 20 and 30 sows. Smaller units, Dlamini argued, fail to generate consistent supply, weaken cash flow stability and undermine the ability to fulfil commercial contracts.

The proposed DJD–YERF model links financing directly to structured training, production planning, monthly farm visits and market alignment. Farmers are expected to operate within defined production cycles, ensuring that output is synchronised with repayment schedules and buyer demand.

From Sufficiency to Competition

The YERF piggery engagement session did not produce a single dramatic announcement. What it produced was something more durable: a shared diagnosis of where the sector stands — and what it will take to move forward.

Eswatini's piggery industry has earned its self-sufficiency. The next milestone — regional competitiveness — will be harder won. For DJD, YERF and the young farmers attempting to build meaningful enterprises in the sector, the session delivered a consistent message: the industry is no longer constrained by capacity. It is constrained by discipline.

from the prior year and underscoring system-wide pressures across the livestock economy.

The developmental ambition is explicit: to produce commercially viable entrepreneurs capable of building scalable agribusinesses — not subsistence operations — and positioning them to compete in regional markets.

DJD's Model: Structure Over Sentiment

Dlamini's presentation aligned closely with YERF's new direction. His core argument: the piggery sector's chief constraint is not demand — it is structure. Too many farmers



YERF CEO, Mandla Nkambule



BEANS IN LIMBO

Unsold local beans worth over E9 million are testing Eswatini's grain sovereignty ambitions and shaking farmer confidence ahead of the next planting season.

BY: PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR

For many local bean farmers, Eswatini's grain sovereignty promise was simple: produce more, feed the nation, reduce import dependence and build a stronger agricultural economy. But that promise is now under pressure, with locally produced beans worth more than E9 million still sitting unsold in National Maize Corporation storage facilities.

The Eswatini National Agricultural Union says the issue is no longer just about storage or marketing. It has become a crisis of confidence for farmers who responded to the national call to increase domestic production, only to see imported beans continue entering the market while local stock remains unsold.

ESNAU Chief Executive Officer Tammy Dlamini described the situation as "shocking and disappointing", warning that government must act quickly before farmers lose faith ahead of the next planting season.

"Government needs to urgently step in and fix this problem," Dlamini said. "We still believe this situation can be corrected before it is too late. Local farmers and local produce must become the priority."

At the heart of the concern is a difficult question: what happens when new harvests arrive while old stock is still in storage?

Dlamini said the crisis has exposed deeper weaknesses in the agricultural value chain, particularly around market access, procurement,

import management and coordination between public institutions.

"What happens when NMC starts collecting new produce while old stock is still sitting in storage?" he asked. "Farmers are frustrated because the whole system appears broken."

For ESNAU, the solution must begin with government procurement reform. Dlamini argued that public feeding programmes, including school feeding schemes, should prioritise locally produced beans before imports are considered.

"Money is being allocated to supply beans in programmes like school feeding, yet we already have the produce in the country," he said. "Government and NMC must control what they can control."



ESNAU CEO, Tammy Dlamini

The union has also questioned the handling of temporary import restrictions introduced earlier this year but lifted within weeks. Dlamini said farmers were never properly informed why the measures were reversed, leaving producers confused and exposed to competition from imported beans.

Across the sector, farmers say the current situation is unfair to producers who invested money, labour and time into local production.

Farmer Nkosinathi Dlamini called for bean imports to be restricted, while also acknowledging that consumer prices must remain affordable. Other producers pointed to the structural disadvantage faced by local smallholder farmers, who often compete against large-scale foreign producers with stronger mechanisation, lower production costs and larger economies of scale.

"A farmer producing on 2,000 hectares with their own machinery spends far less per hectare than a local farmer operating on three hectares using hired equipment," said one farmer from Mayindisa Farm.

Temashayina Manana urged the Ministry of Agriculture to strengthen procurement protection and invest in consumer awareness campaigns that encourage emaSwati to buy local food.

Mbuso Dlamini said the emotional burden on farmers should not be ignored.

"Local farmers work hard to feed the nation. It is painful to see imported products filling shelves while local beans remain in storage," he said.

The Ministry of Agriculture has acknowledged the seriousness of the matter. Principal Secretary Sydney Simelane said the ministry was awaiting a comprehensive report before deciding on the next course of action.

"We will engage all relevant stakeholders to find a solution," Simelane said.

The National Maize Corporation has also indicated that it is compiling a detailed report. NMC Communications Officer Lungelo Nkambule said the corporation would respond in due course.

However, these responses have done little to calm farmers, many of whom believe the time for reports has passed. For them, the issue is immediate: stock is sitting in storage, money is tied up, the next planting season is approaching and confidence in local production is weakening.

The bean crisis comes at a critical time for Eswatini's agricultural ambitions. Over the past five years, government has promoted crop diversification and domestic grain production as part of efforts to reduce import dependence, strengthen food resilience and protect the country from climate shocks and rising global food prices.

Yet the current situation shows that production alone is not enough. If local agriculture is to thrive, the full value chain must work — from planting and harvesting to storage, procurement, marketing and consumption.

Regional market pressures further complicate the picture. South Africa's large-scale mechanised farming sector can often produce grains and legumes at prices that local smallholder farmers struggle to match. This creates a structural gap that requires more than encouragement for farmers to plant. It requires deliberate policy alignment, targeted market protection, effective procurement systems and strong logistical support.

What is needed now, farmers argue, is a coordinated response that brings together government, NMC, public feeding programmes, retailers, producers and consumers around one clear priority: protecting local production.

As the next season approaches, the stakes are high. If the existing bean stock is not cleared and confidence is not restored, Eswatini risks discouraging the very farmers it needs to achieve grain sovereignty. But if government acts decisively, the crisis could become a turning point that finally aligns policy, procurement and food security ambitions with the farmers already producing for the nation.



Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Sydney Simelane

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