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ROOTS OF PROFIT

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BIOTECH AT KaGULE FARM

Farmers See Sweet Potato Science in Action

BEANS UNDER PRESSURE

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BIOTECH SWEET POTATO: FROM LAB BENCH TO FARMLAND

This July, as the winter frost settles across Eswatini, the country's most consequential crop isn't actually in the soil. It is suspended in nutrient agar, inside a sterile test tube.

Our cover features a UNESWA master's student peering through a microscope—the human face of a major structural shift: biotechnology migrating from academic curiosity to commercial enterprise. For too long, science in African agriculture has been treated as a philanthropic luxury, funded by foreign grants and buried in unread white papers. This month, we track an explicit rebellion against that status quo. From the tissue culture labs brewing Eswatini's coffee future from scratch, to the clean, multiplied biotech sweet potato varieties now leaving Kagule Farm, the laboratory is finally repositioning itself as an essential input shop.

The economic logic is straightforward. By substituting imported seeds with locally multiplied, disease-free material, Eswatini can aggressively cut its foreign input bill while insulating its yields from regional climate shocks. It is intelligence substituting for luck.

Yet, as any economist knows, science alone does not feed a nation. Markets and people do.

And right now, our local markets are flashing amber. In this issue, we interrogate a glaring policy friction: the National Maize Corporation's blunt 21% price cut on beans, happening concurrently with NAMBoard's moves to block external



imports. It is a classic protectionist dance—shielding local growers from foreign competition with one hand, while squeezing their margins with the other.

When macro-policies conflict, survival dictates micro-level creativity. It forces farmers to look to underutilized alternatives, whether that means uncovering overlooked margin in tuber crops or bypassing commercial fertilizer altogether by transforming the invasive Mexican sunflower into an organic soil booster.

Ultimately, the true test of an agricultural revolution isn't found in a laboratory's sterile petri dish, nor in a regulator's spreadsheet. It is found in the grit of our people.

That is why I am particularly struck by our profile of a 72-year-old farmer currently drawing serious attention from the SEDCO EYA competition team. At an age when most are winding down, he is doubling down—investing, planting, and scaling. His

thriving fields serve as a potent rebuke to pure techno-optimism: innovation is useless without endurance, and even the most advanced lab-grown variety must ultimately answer to the same ancient judges—the patience of the earth, and the hard labor applied to it.

Winter is the season of preparation. The sweet potato in the lab today is the sovereign food supply of tomorrow.

Read well. Farm with foresight.

Pshesheya Kunene
Editor, Agribusiness Media



BEANS, BORDERS AND BROKEN PROMISES

NMC's 21% price cut and NAMBoard's import controls expose the pressure facing local bean farmers

BY SIBUSISO MNGADI | EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The National Maize Corporation's decision to cut the sugar bean purchase price from **E27,400 to E21,700 per tonne** has sent a shock through Eswatini's farming community.

For farmers, this is not a simple price adjustment. It is a **20.8 percent drop in expected income** after many had already planted, hired labour, bought inputs and, in some cases, taken loans based on the belief that beans had a ready and reliable market.

NMC Chief Executive Officer Mavela Vilane confirmed the revised price to Agribusiness Media, saying a formal statement would explain the decision in due course. But the wider context is already visible.

Locally produced beans worth millions of emalangeneni have been sitting in storage while retailers continued buying cheaper imports from South Africa. At the same

time, NAMBoard has introduced a temporary import restriction requiring importers to source at least **25 percent** of their intended sugar bean volumes locally before import permits are issued.

Together, the NMC price cut and NAMBoard's border control point to a coordinated effort to clear local stock, narrow the price gap with imports and force the retail sector to engage with domestic supply. The challenge, however, is that farmers are now carrying much of the cost of correcting the market.

At the old price, a farmer producing **1.5 tonnes per hectare** would have earned **E41,100**. At the new price, the same harvest brings in **E32,550**, a loss of **E8,550 per hectare**. At **2 tonnes per hectare**, revenue falls from **E54,800 to E43,400**, a loss of **E11,400**.

On paper, beans may still provide a margin. NMC's input subsidy package costs about **E6,000 per**

hectare, while total smallholder production costs can easily reach **E12,000 to E15,000** once land preparation, labour, pesticides, irrigation, transport and loan repayments are included.

But farming is not done on paper. It is done with borrowed money, rising input costs, family labour and expectations built around the price farmers were given when they planted.

For young farmers financed through the YERF-NMC production loan facility, the impact is even sharper. A farmer who borrowed **E40,000** to plant three hectares and expected about **E123,300** under the old price now faces projected revenue of about **E97,650** under the new price. That is a shortfall of more than **E25,000** before delivery costs and other obligations are settled.

Key numbers

Old NMC price: **E27,400 per tonne**

New NMC price: **E21,700 per tonne**

Reduction: **E5,700 per tonne**

Estimated price drop: **20.8%**

Loss at 1.5t/ha: **E8,550**

Loss at 2t/ha: **E11,400**

The bean crisis did not begin with the price cut.

For months, government encouraged farmers to produce beans, presenting them as nutritious, in demand and important to national food security. That message was supported by input subsidies and production loans. Farmers were effectively told: plant beans, the market exists.

They responded. The market did not.

By mid-2026, the Eswatini National Agricultural Union had raised alarm that locally produced beans worth more than **E9 million** were sitting unsold in NMC facilities. ESNAU Chief Executive Officer Tammy Dlamini described the situation as shocking and disappointing, calling for it to be treated as a national agricultural emergency.

The reason was straightforward. Retailers were buying cheaper beans from South Africa, where large commercial producers benefit from scale, mechanisation and stronger supply chains. Eswatini's smallholder farmers were being asked to compete

against a regional production system with much lower costs.

At NMC's former price of **E27,400 per tonne**, local beans were more expensive than imports. The revised price of **E21,700 per tonne** brings local beans closer to the likely landed cost of South African beans. That explains why NAMBoard's intervention matters.

NAMBoard's revised temporary restriction requires sugar bean importers to prove that at least **25 percent** of the volume they intend to import has already been sourced locally. The restriction will remain in place until local stocks are depleted, subject to monitoring.

This is a direct attempt to protect domestic producers and prioritise local supply. It also shows that price alone was not enough to move stock out of storage. NMC has reduced the price to make local beans more competitive, while NAMBoard has created a rule to make sure retailers cannot completely ignore local supply.

However, the wider problem remains unresolved. Eswatini wants to strengthen food production, reduce imports and grow rural incomes. Yet smallholder farmers are competing with large regional suppliers whose production costs are

far lower. Annual bean consumption is estimated at about **7,000 tonnes**, while local smallholder production remains well below that level. Imports have historically filled the gap.

Closing that gap will require more than encouraging farmers to plant. It will require irrigation, mechanisation, better storage, aggregation, predictable procurement and stronger alignment between production targets and market access.

Government procurement is one immediate solution. Schools, hospitals, correctional facilities and other public institutions consume beans. Directing that demand towards local NMC-held stock would show that government's commitment to local production goes beyond speeches.

NMC's forthcoming statement will need to do more than explain the price cut. It must also address what happens to farmers who planted under one expectation and are now selling under another.

The lesson is clear: food security cannot be built by asking farmers to carry production risk while markets remain unmanaged. NAMBoard's intervention may help clear stock. NMC's price cut may unlock retailer demand. But the long-term question remains whether Eswatini can build a domestic bean sector that protects farmers, satisfies retailers and competes with imports without sacrificing the producers it claims to support.

For now, the beans in storage are more than agricultural produce. They are evidence of a broken link between policy ambition, market discipline and farmer protection.





LAKE AGRICULTURE INTRODUCES HYBRIDS BUILT FOR CHANGING SEASONS

As changing weather patterns continue to affect maize production across Eswatini, farmers are being urged to rethink how they choose seed.

With rainfall becoming less predictable and planting seasons harder to plan, improved maize hybrids are becoming an important tool for protecting yields, reducing losses and strengthening household food security.

This was the key message shared by Dumsani Mbingo from Lake Agriculture during a farmer field engagement at Ntondozi, where the company introduced its range of climate-adapted maize hybrids. Mbingo said the hybrids were developed to help farmers produce maize under different conditions, including late planting, erratic rainfall and disease pressure.

Lake Agriculture currently offers five maize hybrids, made up of four white maize varieties and one yellow maize variety. These include early-maturing, medium-maturing and specialised hybrids, giving farmers options depending on planting time, rainfall, market demand and whether they are producing green mealies, dry grain, animal feed or commercial maize.

Mbingo explained that farmers can no longer depend on one seed

type for every season. Instead, they must select varieties based on soil moisture, expected harvesting time and market needs. He said one major advantage of the Lake Agriculture hybrids is their ability to adapt to local climatic conditions.

The hybrids also offer good eating quality. Mbingo said the maize is sweet and palatable, making it suitable for green mealies and dry grain. This gives farmers flexibility because the crop can be sold fresh when market demand is high or left to mature for grain.

Another key feature is improved cob protection. During silking and cob formation, the husks close well at the tip of the cob, helping to prevent water from entering. This reduces the risk of poor grain development, damage and lower quality at harvest.

Disease tolerance is also important. The hybrids show tolerance to common maize diseases such as maize streak virus, locally known as sifo semkhwane, leaf blight, known as lidvuba, and rust. These diseases often become a problem after heavy rainfall followed by strong sunshine.

Among the early-maturing hybrids is Lake 401, locally known as Udokotela. It tassels at about 66 days after planting and reaches physiological maturity between 115 and 120 days. It produces

one large cob per plant and, under good management, can produce two. Mbingo said it is useful for late planting and can also support sequential planting with fast-maturing beans.

Another early-maturing hybrid is RO413, known as Lushikishi. It is suitable for late planting, even in December. Its shorter plant height helps reduce lodging during strong winds, and it can produce up to two cobs per plant. However, Mbingo noted that it has a softer dent grain type, making it unsuitable for samp.

For farmers seeking a medium-maturing option, Lake Agriculture offers Lake 601, known as Vulindlela. It tassels around 67 days after planting, can be harvested as green mealies at about 100 days and dries fully at around 135 days. It produces two average-sized cobs and flint grain, which is suitable for mealie meal and samp.

The company's yellow maize hybrid is Lake 606, known as Njengelanga. It matures at around 130 days and is rich in carotene, vitamins and minerals. It is mainly suited for animal feed but can also be eaten as green mealies. Mbingo advised farmers to plant white maize first and yellow maize four to five weeks later to avoid cross-pollination.

For green mealies production, Lake Agriculture offers Lake 711, known as Vuvulane. It can be harvested between 94 and 104 days after planting and produces large, attractive cobs with a sweet taste. If left to mature, it can also be harvested as dry grain.

Mbingo encouraged farmers to choose maize hybrids carefully, based on planting time, rainfall and intended market. His message was clear: in a changing climate, the right seed is no longer just an input; it is a risk-management tool.



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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.



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MTN LAUNCHES CATTLE TRACKER - BUT A LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR WAS ALREADY IN THE FIELD

MTN's livestock tracker enters a market where a local entrepreneur had already begun offering a similar solution to farmers

BY: PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR



MTN Eswatini has launched a GPS-based livestock tracking system aimed at helping farmers monitor cattle in real time, as the country continues to battle livestock theft running into millions of emalangeni.

The launch, held at Happy Valley Hotel, received strong backing from government and agricultural stakeholders. The system is expected to help farmers track the movement

of their animals, reduce losses and improve response time when cattle move outside expected grazing areas.

MTN Eswatini Chief Executive Officer Jerry Soko said livestock remains both an economic asset and a source of pride for many families. "Through our animal tracking solution, farmers can monitor the location of their cattle in real time and know where their livestock is at any given moment," Soko said.

Hhohho Regional Veterinary Officer Dr. Thembi Ndlangamandla said livestock tracking could also support disease control, noting that such technology would have been useful during last year's Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak.

For farmer Enock Nkambule from Malindza, the key issue is affordability. "I am hoping the device

will be affordable for farmers. If the cost is within reach, I believe it can help us fight stock theft,” he said. The concern is urgent. Between January and October 2025, livestock worth more than E20.5 million was stolen in the country, including about 1,689 cattle valued at more than E17.3 million.

But MTN’s launch has also opened a wider conversation about local innovation. Earlier this year, Bheka Tsabedze, founder of Wayfinder Investments, introduced Umelusi GPS to the local market. Agribusiness Media reported in February 2026 that the system was already operational, with installations taking place across the country.

Tsabedze was not present at MTN’s launch. He said he only became aware of it through social media. “When people started sharing updates online, that is when I became aware of it,” he said.

Tsabedze’s entry into livestock technology was shaped by personal loss. Raised in Bhunya and trained in engineering and electronics at the Eswatini College of Technology, he previously worked in electronic security, including CCTV installations.

A fatal road accident involving unmonitored cattle later pushed him to focus on livestock tracking. He began asking why farmers were still losing cattle to theft, accidents

and poor visibility in an era of smartphones and satellite technology.

By 2023, that question had become Umelusi GPS. The system uses a GPS ear tag and a reflective collar-mounted tracker linked to a farmer’s mobile phone. Through geofencing, farmers can create virtual grazing boundaries. If an animal moves outside those boundaries at unusual hours, the farmer receives an alert.

According to Tsabedze, one unit can cover up to ten cattle. Monthly data costs can be as low as E25, while units are priced at E1,850. The reflective collar also improves cattle visibility on public roads at night.

No allegation of wrongdoing has been made against MTN Eswatini. Tsabedze has not accused MTN of copying Umelusi GPS, and both systems are responding to the same national challenge.

However, the issue raises an important question: when government and major companies discuss national digital agriculture systems, are local entrepreneurs already working in the field being included?

Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture Sydney Simelane has previously confirmed that government is working on a national digital tracking framework involving MTN Eswatini and the Royal Science and Technology Park. It remains

unclear whether entrepreneurs already deploying livestock tracking technology were part of those discussions.

Asked whether he felt overlooked, Tsabedze remained diplomatic. “I do not have much to say about the MTN device. This is competition and my focus is on improving my own innovation,” he said.

He is already working on an international SIM capability for Umelusi GPS after farmers raised concerns that trackers can lose signal when cattle cross into South Africa or Mozambique. “We are currently testing a solution that will allow the device to operate anywhere in the world, even outside Eswatini,” he said.

MTN’s entry brings scale, network strength and national visibility to livestock tracking. Umelusi brings local field experience, farmer feedback and an entrepreneur already testing solutions on the ground.

For farmers, the winner will be the solution that is affordable, reliable and practical in real grazing conditions. For policymakers, the bigger test is whether local innovators will be included in building the country’s digital agriculture future — or left to compete from outside the room.





E42.7 MILLION EADF DRIVE BEARS FRUIT AS FARMERS EXPAND AND CREATE JOBS

...PM's tour showcases how strategic financing is moving Eswatini agriculture from subsistence to commercial enterprise

BY: PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR

HLANE – Less than two years after its establishment, the Eswatini Agriculture Development Fund (EADF) is beginning to produce visible results on farms across the country, with beneficiaries expanding production, creating jobs and positioning themselves for commercial growth.

During a tour of EADF-supported projects in the Shiselweni and Lubombo regions, Prime Minister Russell Mmiso Dlamini visited three enterprises that together tell a broader story about the future of agriculture in Eswatini: an 80-hectare maize and bean operation in Sicunusa, a commercial egg production enterprise in Njojane, and a large-scale broiler facility in Hlane.

The tour started with a breakfast



briefing at Happy Valley Hotel, where EADF Director Nokwazi Mamba-Hlophe presented the Fund's progress and impact. She said the Fund was created as a strategic vehicle to unlock agricultural growth, improve productivity and widen access to finance for farmers and agribusinesses.

Mamba-Hlophe said the EADF had already disbursed E42.7 million, supported 79 beneficiaries through direct loans, and financed projects across grains, horticulture and livestock.

“The EADF is not just funding farmers; it is catalysing agricultural growth, supporting business expansion and increasing incomes in farming communities,” Mamba-Hlophe said, adding that the Fund was also driving mechanisation, climate-smart technologies and rural employment.

Speaking during the tour, Prime Minister Dlamini said the projects demonstrated how targeted financing could unlock agricultural productivity while advancing food sovereignty, job creation and rural economic development. “The progress achieved through the Fund in a relatively short period has been both encouraging and inspiring,” he said.

FOUR BROTHERS, ONE VISION

The first stop was Agro-Acres, an 80-hectare maize and bean enterprise operated by four brothers from the



Ltd. What impressed visitors was not only the scale of production but also the clarity of vision displayed by the young farmers.

Co-founder Ndumiso Mkhalihi told the Prime Minister that the enterprise had grown rapidly after receiving more than E2.3 million in EADF support, including a tractor and farming implements.

“Three seasons ago, we harvested barely 3.4 tonnes per hectare on 20 hectares. Today we have expanded to 60 hectares and are producing close to five tonnes per hectare. Our target is seven to eight tonnes per hectare,” he said.

Mkhalihi said the business currently employs 10 permanent workers and 101 seasonal employees, most of them young people from surrounding communities. In a speech that drew praise from officials, the young farmer argued that access to finance, rather than collateral, was the missing ingredient preventing many young people from succeeding in agriculture.

“Collateral is not the same as capability. What we lacked was a bridge. Government built that bridge and we crossed it,” he said. He further challenged policymakers to expand access to agricultural financing through digital application systems, group guarantee schemes and innovative repayment mechanisms linked to grain production.

The Prime Minister described the siblings as a model of what youth participation in agriculture could achieve when ambition is matched

EGGS, INCOME AND BIGGER DREAMS

At Njojane, the delegation visited the poultry enterprise of Zwelithini Felix Nkentshane, who has transformed a modest layers project into a growing commercial operation. With E361,293 in EADF support, Nkentshane expanded his flock from 400 to 1,600 layers. The enterprise now generates approximately E60,000 in monthly gross income.

Nkentshane said he had already begun repaying the loan and thanked Government and the EADF for giving him an opportunity to grow. “My dream is to expand this enterprise, export eggs outside Eswatini, employ more people and eventually produce agricultural inputs as well,” he said.

After the visit, the farmer



presented the Prime Minister with a goat as a gesture of appreciation. He also encouraged other farmers to take advantage of the Fund. “Many farmers have good ideas but lack capital. This funding can help people move from small-scale farming to commercial production,” he said.

MAGAGULA’S POULTRY EMPIRE TURNS HEADS

The final stop at Hlane arguably produced the day’s most captivating discussion. Former Member of Parliament Mduduzi Johannes Magagula guided the delegation through his Imfihlo Yebesutfu Broiler Production project, a highly automated poultry facility supported by E3.9 million in EADF financing.

Magagula's detailed understanding of poultry production, market dynamics, automation systems and expansion strategies drew visible admiration from members of the delegation.

The facility currently has capacity for 26,000 broilers at a time and forms part of a broader business that has already increased production from 28,000 to 55,000 birds.

His next target is ambitious: 100,000 broilers. "We are not building this business for ourselves alone. We want it to create opportunities for the people of Hlane and contribute meaningfully to the economy," Magagula said. The project has already created employment for about 10 people and supplies poultry to Umbuluzi Chicken.

The former MP said the new state-of-the-art poultry house, valued at more than E4 million, is equipped with automated feeding and drinking systems, climate-control technology and modern production equipment designed to withstand the intense heat conditions of the Lubombo region.

Only one challenge remains. The facility still requires more than E200,000 for electricity connection before it can become fully operational. Once connected, Magagula believes the enterprise will significantly increase production and move beyond simply supplying chickens to becoming a larger agribusiness operation.

BUILDING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The stories from Sicunusa, Njojane and Hlane offer a glimpse into what policymakers describe as the next phase of Eswatini's agricultural transformation.

For decades, agriculture has often been associated with subsistence production. The EADF is attempting to change that narrative by financing farmers with commercially viable

ideas, modern technology and growth ambitions. According to EADF figures, supported projects have already created hundreds of jobs while driving adoption of mechanisation and climate-smart technologies.

For the Prime Minister, the lesson from the tour was straightforward. "The resilience, dedication and entrepreneurial spirit of these farmers are turning investment into impact. They are transforming agricultural enterprises into engines of growth and helping to build a more food-secure, prosperous and self-reliant Eswatini." And in the maize fields of Sicunusa, the layer houses of Njojane and the automated broiler units of Hlane, that

transformation is already taking shape.



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ESWATINI MOVES TO TURN GINGER AND TURMERIC INTO HIGH-VALUE EXPORT INDUSTRIES

New UNESWA–Indonesia partnership targets research, production and value addition in a global turmeric market estimated at E90 billion

BY: PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR

Eswatini has taken a major step towards building new agricultural value chains with the launch of the Ginger and Turmeric Research, Production and Value Addition Initiative at the University of Eswatini’s Luyengo Campus.

The initiative was launched during the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between UNESWA, Indonesia’s Universitas Airlangga and Royal Tirta Ayu Spa, in a partnership aimed at turning ginger and turmeric from ordinary crops into high-value products for local, regional and international markets.

Prime Minister Russell Mmiso Dlamini officiated the ceremony, which also included the commissioning of a modern

greenhouse tunnel donated by Universitas Airlangga. The facility will support research, farmer training, cultivation trials and innovation in ginger and turmeric production.

“Today, we are not merely signing a document. We are planting the seeds of sustainable economic growth, agricultural innovation, scientific advancement and community empowerment,” said the Prime Minister.

The partnership comes at a time when the country is looking for new agricultural opportunities beyond traditional commodities. Ginger and turmeric are widely used in food, wellness, cosmetics, herbal medicine and pharmaceutical industries, giving them strong potential for value addition.

UNESWA Vice Chancellor Professor Justice M. Thwala said the collaboration showed how universities can move beyond

teaching and become active players in national development. He said the initiative would strengthen research, innovation, student training and community engagement while turning agricultural knowledge into practical economic opportunities.

At the heart of the project is a shift from selling raw crops to producing higher-value goods. These include essential oils, herbal extracts, cosmetics, nutraceuticals, wellness products and pharmaceutical ingredients.

For farmers, the initiative could open access to improved planting material, research-based production methods, quality standards and more reliable markets. For students, it creates a practical learning platform where science, production and enterprise meet. Speaking on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, Bongani Ndzima said the country has a clear opportunity to reduce imports and build a local industry around

ginger and turmeric.

He said Eswatini spends about E2.2 million annually on turmeric and turmeric-based imports, while the global turmeric market is estimated at around E90 billion. Ministry data also shows that one hectare of turmeric can accommodate up to 150,000 seedlings and yield up to 40 tonnes under proper management. Those figures make turmeric an attractive option for farmers looking beyond traditional crops, especially if production is linked to processing, branding and guaranteed markets.

Royal Tirta Ayu Spa founder Lenywati Cidesco said the project was inspired by the need to reduce dependence on imported products and help build stronger local industries.

“During the seven months I spent in lockdown, I observed that almost all products available in supermarkets were imported,” she said. She said her vision was to support the country in producing more of its own goods while creating industries that can supply both domestic and export markets.

Universitas Airlangga said the partnership would support education, research, innovation and community engagement. The donated greenhouse tunnel forms part of its commitment to practical knowledge transfer and skills development, giving UNESWA a facility that can support both academic research and commercial agriculture trials.

During a tour of the Luyengo Campus fields, the Prime Minister pointed to cassava, coffee, marula, ginger and turmeric as crops that could shape the country’s agricultural future. He singled out cassava as having strong potential, revealing that the Public Service Pensions Fund was already in talks with a possible partner interested in cassava by-products.

His message to farmers and researchers was direct: the country

must take these crops seriously if it wants to broaden markets, create jobs and reduce overdependence on a narrow range of traditional agricultural products.

For Luyengo Campus, the initiative strengthens its role as more than a teaching institution. It positions the campus as a research, innovation and enterprise hub where students learn not only how to grow

potential.

If properly scaled, the project could open new income streams for smallholder farmers, women, youth, processors and exporters. Its success, however, will depend on consistent production, quality control, processing capacity and access to dependable markets.



crops, but also how to process, package and commercialise them.

That shift was already visible during the event, where students showcased coffee products already on the market, compost made from agricultural waste and other value-added goods developed through practical agricultural training.

The Prime Minister said universities must become engines of economic transformation, not only centres of learning. The ginger and turmeric initiative gives practical expression to that message by connecting academic expertise with industry knowledge, farmer participation and international market

The challenge now is execution. Research must move into farmer fields. Greenhouse trials must lead to commercial production. Raw crops must become branded products. International partnerships must translate into local jobs and sustainable businesses.

For now, the seed has been planted at Luyengo. The task ahead is to turn ginger and turmeric into industries that can help diversify agriculture, reduce imports and position the country in a high-value global wellness and food market.



E230 MILLION HONEY PLAN SEEKS TO CUT IMPORTS AND BUILD EXPORT-READY INDUSTRY

BY: PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR

Eswatini's honey sector could receive a major boost under a proposed E230 million investment plan aimed at expanding local production, improving quality controls and reducing the country's dependence on imported honey products.

The plan was validated during the World Bank-supported PROGREEN Value Chain Validation Workshop held in Mbabane, where government, development partners, technical experts and industry players discussed the future of honey and other forest-based value chains.

At the centre of the proposal is a Sector Development Programme Agreement for honey, designed to close the gap between rising local demand and limited reliable

domestic supply. Findings presented at the workshop showed that between 30 and 40 percent of honey sold on the local market is imported, adulterated or incorrectly labelled, mainly from South Africa, India and China. Stakeholders warned that poor-quality imports were distorting prices, weakening consumer trust and making it difficult for genuine local producers to compete in formal

retail markets.

Under the proposed programme, E58 million would go towards infrastructure development, including four certified honey-processing hubs, cold rooms and six community information centres. A further E74 million would support production and hive expansion through improved hives, new apiaries and climate-resilient systems.

The plan also allocates E36 million for extension services, training and

institutional support, E30 million for market development, branding, export readiness and traceability systems, and E32 million for finance and programme management. The proposed financing model provides for a 30 percent public contribution, estimated at E69 million, while the remaining E161 million is expected to come from private investors and public-private partnerships. However, presenters noted that funding sources and implementation timelines still need to be clarified.

Minister of Tourism and Environmental Affairs Jane Mkhonta-Simelane said forest-based value chains could support rural livelihoods, attract investment and create jobs if managed sustainably. "From timber and bark to honey and related bee products, the development of forest-based value chains can create meaningful benefits for communities, private enterprises and the nation," she said.

The workshop identified the domestic formal retail market as the most

immediate opportunity for local honey producers. Supermarkets and specialty stores continue to stock imported honey despite growing demand for authentic local products.

South Africa was identified as the most practical short-term export market, while longer-term opportunities exist in the European Union and United States. Access to those premium markets, however, would require strict compliance with traceability, residue monitoring, certification, laboratory testing and proper labelling standards.

For smallholder farmers, the business case remains promising. A 10-hive operation can be established with relatively modest capital and is projected to generate more than E40,000 in net profit over five years. Hives can remain productive for up to 10 years, while the labour requirements allow farmers to combine beekeeping with other agricultural activities.

Local honey farmer Mhlonishwa Dlamini said genuine producers were struggling to compete with cheaper products that many consumers mistake for pure honey.

“Many people look at price first and do not understand the difference between pure honey and syrup-based products. Genuine honey takes time and investment to produce, but some imported products are sold at prices we simply cannot match,” he said.

Dlamini said stronger regulation, consumer education and better access to processing facilities could unlock the sector’s potential. “c,” he said.

The sector also faces governance challenges. Presenters noted that the repeal of the Importation of Bees Act left the industry without a clear legal framework, with responsibilities spread across several government institutions.

The roadmap proposes a National Apiculture Policy, formal honey



standards, stronger import controls, improved inspections, market surveillance and a national hive registration system to support traceability.

World Bank Country Representative Ikechi Okore said protecting forests remained critical, noting that the forestry sector supports more than 8,000 jobs in the country.

“If fake honey is removed from the market and farmers are supported with training and equipment, honey can become a serious income source for rural communities”

Stakeholders said the proposed E230 million investment could turn honey into a competitive rural enterprise, but warned that weak coordination, unclear funding and poor enforcement could limit its impact.

The validation meeting ended with calls for clear leadership, stronger regulation, investment in research and development, and practical support for producers to ensure the plan moves from paper to production.



LUYENGO LABS DRIVE ESWATINI'S PUSH TO BUILD A HOME-GROWN COFFEE INDUSTRY

UNESWA and Eswatini Coffee partnership turns research, student training and field trials into a practical roadmap for farmers

BY: PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR

LUYENGO — At the University of Eswatini's Luyengo Campus, coffee is being treated as more than an emerging crop. It is becoming a subject of science, a training tool for students, a business opportunity for farmers and a possible new value chain for the country's agricultural economy.

Through its Horticulture Department, UNESWA is using laboratory research, greenhouse technology and field trials to support the growth of the local coffee industry. The work is being carried out under the ARISE Project in partnership with Eswatini Coffee, at a time when demand for locally grown coffee is rising but production remains too limited to meet market interest.

Backed by the European Union, African Union, African Academy of Sciences, PELUM and industry partner Eswatini Coffee, the project connects biotechnology, agroecology and commercial farming. It focuses on coffee, sweet potatoes and other crops that can strengthen food

security, improve farmer productivity and open new value chains. During a field visit by Agribusiness Media for its **ASILIMENI MASWATI** programme, researchers demonstrated how coffee moves from laboratory propagation to greenhouse conditioning, field planting and eventual processing. The visit showed how the Luyengo Campus is turning academic research into practical farming solutions for students, farmers and agribusinesses.

Mfihlakalo Zukiswa Zikalala, Horticulture Laboratory

Technologist and ARISE Research Assistant, said the process begins with plant tissue

culture, where selected plant parts are regenerated into complete plants under controlled laboratory conditions.

"The novelty of plant tissue culture is hinged on the totipotency of cells, which means any plant part can be taken and regenerated back into a whole plant," said Zikalala.

"At Luyengo, we use explants from crops such as sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes and bell peppers and regenerate them into new plantlets. This





improves efficiency, productivity and yield.”

The laboratory helps produce clean, uniform and disease-free planting material, giving farmers access to better seedlings while reducing the risk of crop losses. Although the ARISE Project covers several crops, coffee has become one of its most visible examples of how science can support a developing agricultural industry.

Dr. Celimphilo Shakes Mavuso, Lecturer in Horticulture and Principal Investigator of the ARISE Project, said the department is studying coffee under both shade and open-field conditions to determine the most suitable production systems for local farmers. “Our research covers propagation, micro-propagation, nursery establishment, harvesting, drying and roasting. We are looking at the entire coffee value chain,” he said.

The department is also using modern equipment, including controlled growth chambers and an automated growth tent valued at about E50,000,

to improve plant development before seedlings are moved into the field. These technologies allow researchers to control light, temperature and other growth conditions, helping young plants become stronger before field establishment.

Master’s student Benanile Thandiswa Maphanga is among the young researchers working directly on coffee. Her research focuses on coffee mother plants and plant conditioning under controlled light and temperature.

“My research focuses on coffee mother plants and the conditioning of coffee plants. We use tissue culture techniques and controlled environments to improve plant development before field establishment,” she said.

Maphanga said sanitation remains critical in laboratory work because contamination can destroy plant material and compromise the propagation process. This makes clean laboratory practice an essential part of producing healthy, reliable planting material for future farmers.

The partnership with Eswatini Coffee has also established a coffee demonstration site and depot at Luyengo, turning the campus into a living classroom for students, researchers and farmers. It allows students to learn beyond theory, while giving farmers and industry players access to research-backed knowledge.

Patrick D. Dupont, Director of Eswatini Coffee, said the collaboration brings industry experience into the university while allowing scientific research to guide the growth of the sector. “This initiative takes agroecology out of the classroom and into a live learning environment,” said Dupont. “The university brings scientific expertise while we bring industry experience.” Dupont said the market for locally grown Arabica coffee already exists, but production volumes remain too low. A buyer in Mozambique has submitted a Letter of Intent for 20 tonnes of green Arabica coffee beans after tasting local samples, signalling that regional market interest is already present.

“The challenge is that demand is growing faster than production. We need more farmers, more coffee trees and greater volumes of high-quality coffee,” he said. Coffee is planted from nursery-raised seedlings and, with proper management, begins producing meaningful harvests after about three years. Once the cherries mature, they are harvested, pulped, dried, roasted and prepared for local and export markets.

Dupont said farmers should look at coffee not only as a crop, but as a full business value chain. Opportunities exist in seedling production, nurseries, outgrower farming, harvesting, pulping, drying, roasting, packaging, branding and export trade. This means the industry can create income beyond the farm, opening space for youth entrepreneurs, processors, marketers, logistics operators and retailers. Researchers say Arabica coffee can perform well in cooler parts of the country, especially under shade-based agroforestry systems. These systems help protect the soil, retain moisture and reduce heat stress, making them suitable for climate-smart production. Beyond coffee, the ARISE Project is also working on sweet potatoes and other crops as part of a wider agenda to strengthen climate-smart agriculture. The project reflects a broader shift in agricultural research, where universities are increasingly expected to help farmers respond to climate pressure, market demand and productivity challenges.

For UNESWA, the work is also becoming a symbol of renewal. Luyengo Campus has long been associated with agricultural education, but the ARISE Project is placing it back at the centre of practical agricultural research, farmer support and agribusiness innovation. The project gives students hands-on exposure to laboratory science, greenhouse management, field trials and value-chain development. It also gives farmers access to science-backed solutions at a time when agriculture is being asked to

produce more under tougher environmental and market conditions.

From controlled growth chambers to coffee demonstration plots, the Horticulture Department is showing that a university can do more than teach agriculture. It can help build the industries that will feed, employ and export for the future.

As Eswatini Coffee calls for more farmers to enter the sector, Luyengo’s role is becoming increasingly important. The campus is helping answer one of the key questions facing the emerging industry: how does the country move from promising coffee samples to consistent commercial production? For now, the answer is taking shape in the laboratories, greenhouses and fields of Luyengo, where science and industry are working together to turn coffee into a serious agribusiness opportunity.



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BUILDING BUSINESS FROM THE SOIL

How Lomveshe Enterprise turned community land and patient institutional support into a 44-hectare commercial banana operation

BY SIBUSISIWE NDZIMANDZE

Lomveshe Enterprise began with community land, government support and a simple ambition: to build a commercial farming operation that could create income for local people. Today, the Gundvuni-based enterprise has grown into a 44-hectare banana project supported by grants, development finance and the determination of community shareholders who stayed the course when farming became difficult.

Established in March 2017, the enterprise received early support from the Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise and the Ministry of Agriculture. From the beginning, the founding members wanted to move beyond subsistence farming and build a

structured agribusiness.

The first major boost came from the Taiwan International Cooperation and Development



**ERNEST GAMEDZE,
CHAIRPERSON, LOMVESHE
ENTERPRISE**

Fund, which provided E1.6 million worth of banana seedlings. The contribution gave Lomveshe its identity as a banana enterprise and helped turn tested community land into a productive farming project. Soil tests had already confirmed that Gundvuni's pH levels were suitable for banana cultivation. With quality planting material available, the enterprise began taking shape.

The Ministry of Agriculture also played a major role by financing about 70 percent of critical infrastructure through a grant programme. This support covered irrigation systems, fencing, water pump engines, land preparation and the construction of a packhouse. Together, these interventions transformed the project from an idea into a working commercial farm.

In 2018, the Eswatini National Industrial Development Corporation extended a E3.9 million loan to Lomveshe Enterprise. Chairperson Ernest Gamedze described the loan as a turning point because it helped stabilise the business and strengthen its operations. The relationship later deepened, with ENIDC reinvesting in the enterprise and becoming a shareholder and long-term partner in its growth.

Lomveshe is now owned by 39 active shareholders drawn from the surrounding community. The group started with more than 90 members, but many dropped out as the realities of farming became clear. Those who remained have built an enterprise that continues to supply bananas to local vendors, the National Marketing Board and export markets.

Bananas remain the backbone of Lomveshe Enterprise, but the farm has started diversifying. Beans have been planted on two hectares, alongside dragon fruit, sweet potatoes and vegetables. Chairperson Gamedze believes bananas can be highly productive when managed properly. “When managed properly, bananas can produce between 30 and 40 tonnes per hectare,” he said. Maintaining that level of production requires consistent irrigation, proper fertilisation and careful crop management.

The plantation uses a micro-jet irrigation system fed by the nearby Usuthu River, with watering scheduled three times a week. The enterprise also applies both organic and commercial fertilisers to maintain fruit quality. Banana suckers are carefully managed, while fruit-bearing plants are supported with wooden props to prevent them from collapsing under the weight of developing bunches.

Challenges and Resilience

The progress has not come without setbacks. Lomveshe was hit by severe hailstorms in 2020 and again in 2022. An unusually cold season followed in 2023, further affecting production. In each case, the enterprise’s insurance did not cover natural disaster losses, forcing



the business to absorb the damage while still meeting its running costs.

“Production was affected, but our expenses did not stop. We still had electricity costs, loan repayments and operational expenses,” Gamedze said. Electricity remains one of the enterprise’s biggest burdens. Pumping water from the river over a long distance is costly, and the challenge is worsened by a poorly designed pump station that frequently requires excavation to restore water flow. Theft has also added pressure to the business.

A Model for Rural Development

Despite these challenges, Gamedze believes Lomveshe offers an important lesson for young people and communities with access to land. “Young people should not look down on farming because it involves working with soil. They must be willing to learn from experts and use the land available to them productively. Life is in farming.”

For the 39 shareholders who remained, Lomveshe is more than a banana farm. It is proof that community agriculture can become a viable business when land, technical support, finance and discipline come together. The enterprise’s story also shows the importance of patient institutional support. The seedlings from Taiwan helped establish the crop. Government support helped build the foundation. ENIDC financing helped keep the business moving. The shareholders supplied the resilience.

As Lomveshe continues to grow, diversify and supply formal markets, its journey offers a practical model for rural enterprise development. It shows that community farming can create jobs, generate income and anchor local economic activity when it is properly structured and consistently supported. The 39 members who stayed are now living proof that farming is not only about production. It is about patience, organisation, risk and the courage to keep going when the field tests the business.





BY PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR

LUSIP II OPENS COMMERCIAL FARMING DOOR FOR 219 MORE EMASWATI

E2.3 billion irrigation project expands by 441.5 hectares as Lower Usuthu communities move from subsistence farming to farmer-owned agribusinesses

The Lower Usuthu Smallholder Irrigation Project Phase II is entering its final implementation stage, with an additional 441.5 hectares now under development in a major expansion expected to bring 219 more emaSwati into commercial agriculture.

The E2.3 billion investment remains one of the country's most important rural economic development projects. It is designed to transform underutilised land in the Lower Usuthu region into productive farmland supported by reliable irrigation, electricity networks, roads and farmer-owned companies.

The latest expansion covers three new schemes: Geleza Ngovuma Farmer Company, with 86.6 hectares and 121 shareholders; Kuthula Makubekitsi Farmer Company, with

213 hectares and 50 shareholders; and Asidonse Kanyekanye Farmer Company, with 70.4 hectares and 48 shareholders.

Together, these schemes complete LUSIP II's target of establishing 30 farmer companies, marking an important milestone in the shift from subsistence farming to organised commercial agriculture.

To date, 3,957.47 hectares have already been developed and placed under production. This includes 3,180 hectares of sugarcane, 515.65 hectares of bananas and 261.82 hectares of field crops, all managed by 27 operational farmer companies. When fully completed, LUSIP II is expected to deliver 5,273 hectares of irrigated farmland. This will comprise 4,000 hectares of sugarcane, 500 hectares of bananas and 773 hectares for alternative crops.

For farmers, irrigation is the difference between uncertainty and planning. Reliable water reduces dependence on rainfall, improves productivity, supports year-round farming and allows rural communities to participate more meaningfully in formal agricultural value chains.

For the wider economy, the impact extends beyond the farm. More irrigated land means higher agricultural output, increased employment, stronger rural incomes and greater participation of emaSwati in commercial farming. It also supports related sectors such as agro-processing, transport, input supply, maintenance services and market linkages around sugarcane, bananas and field crops.

The project has already created more than 2,100 jobs. More than 775 of these have been generated

directly by farmer companies, while contractors involved in implementation have created over 1,375 additional employment opportunities.

EWAVE Chief Executive Officer Dr Samson Sithole said LUSIP II is delivering more than infrastructure. He said the project is creating a platform for rural economic transformation by giving communities the tools to participate in commercial agriculture.

“As LUSIP II moves towards completion, we are not merely developing infrastructure or bringing additional hectares under irrigation. We are creating new economic opportunities for emaSwati and extending the benefits of commercial agriculture to more communities,” said Sithole.

He said the new schemes under development would bring more households into productive farming enterprises while strengthening rural economies through jobs and income generation. “The additional schemes currently under development will bring hundreds more households into productive farming enterprises, creating jobs, increasing household incomes and strengthening rural economies. This is exactly the kind of broad-based economic transformation that the project was designed to achieve,” he added.

The Cane Growers Association of Eswatini said the expansion would strengthen the sugar industry while



DR. SIMON SITHOLE, EWAVE CEO

giving more smallholder farmers access to commercial farming opportunities.

“LUSIP II has shown that when farmers have reliable access to water, infrastructure and technical support, they are able to participate meaningfully in commercial agriculture. The growth of farmer-owned companies strengthens the sugar industry while creating employment and economic opportunities in rural communities,” the association said.

The association also noted that irrigation remains critical in helping farmers withstand climate shocks and maintain production in an increasingly unpredictable climate. This is one of the central strengths of LUSIP II. It is not only about increasing hectares under irrigation. It is about building resilience in a

sector where rainfall uncertainty, drought risk and climate pressure continue to affect production.

As the country pushes to increase agricultural productivity, reduce rural poverty and build a more inclusive economy, LUSIP II stands out as a practical model of how water infrastructure can shift communities from survival farming to business ownership.

Its farmer-company model gives communities a formal structure through which they can own, manage and benefit from commercial farming enterprises. That structure is critical because irrigation alone does not create success. Farmers also need governance systems, markets, technical support, financial discipline and long-term planning.

The final implementation phase will therefore test more than engineering capacity. It will test whether the new farmer companies can turn land, water and infrastructure into profitable enterprises that sustain jobs and household incomes beyond project construction.

In the Lower Usuthu, water is no longer just flowing through canals. It is carrying the promise of jobs, income, climate resilience and a new economic future for rural communities.

 An advertisement for STRATCOM. The background shows a man in a light-colored t-shirt holding a drone controller, with a drone flying in the sky over a field of banana trees. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

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INFECTIOUS BRONCHITIS IN CHICKENS



A SMALL COUGH CAN BECOME A BIG FARM PROBLEM

In poultry farming, the sound of a cough should never be ignored. What may begin as a few birds sneezing, gasping or looking dull can quickly turn into a serious flock-wide challenge. One disease poultry farmers must watch closely is Infectious Bronchitis (IB), a fast-spreading viral disease that affects chickens and can reduce production, weaken birds and cut into farm income.

Infectious Bronchitis is a highly contagious respiratory and urogenital disease caused by an avian coronavirus. It spreads rapidly through the air, dust and contaminated environments. Although it does not infect humans, it can cause major losses in poultry businesses, especially where farmers delay action.

For layer farmers, IB can be particularly costly. The disease may cause a sudden drop in egg production, poor egg quality, thin or rough shells, misshapen eggs and watery egg whites. In broilers and young birds, it can lead to breathing problems, weakness, poor performance and, in some cases, higher deaths.

Symptoms usually appear within 24 to 48 hours after exposure. Farmers should look out for coughing, sneezing, gasping, watery nasal discharge, loss of appetite,

huddling and general tiredness. Some strains can also affect the kidneys, leading to increased water intake, wet droppings and increased mortality.

The danger with IB is how easily it moves. The virus can travel through the air between birds and poultry houses. It can also survive on shoes, clothing, equipment, litter and feed-related surfaces. This means workers, visitors and tools can unknowingly carry the disease from one flock to another.

Once IB enters a flock, there is no specific cure or antiviral treatment for the virus itself. Management focuses on supporting the birds and reducing further spread. Farmers should keep poultry houses warm, clean, dust-free and well-ventilated. Electrolytes and vitamins in drinking water may help reduce stress and support recovery.

Sick birds should be isolated immediately to protect the rest of the flock. Antibiotics do not treat IB, but they may sometimes be used under proper guidance to control secondary bacterial infections such as *E. coli*. Farmers are strongly advised not to misuse antibiotics, as poor use can create bigger health and production problems.

The best defence remains prevention. Vaccination is important in commercial flocks and areas where Infectious Bronchitis is common. Because the virus changes frequently,

farmers need proper advice to ensure vaccination programmes respond to the strains present in their area.

Biosecurity must also become part of everyday farm discipline. Poultry houses should have controlled access, clean equipment, disinfected tools and proper foot hygiene. Visitors should be limited, and workers should avoid moving from one flock to another without changing clothing or shoes.

Good management is equally important. Birds need clean water, balanced feed, proper ventilation and reduced stress. A well-managed flock is more resilient and better able to withstand disease pressure.

Farm Services (Pty) Ltd is encouraging farmers to treat flock health as a business priority. Early detection saves birds. Strong biosecurity protects production. Healthy birds build healthy businesses. Farmers who notice signs of Infectious Bronchitis should act quickly and seek guidance before the disease spreads further.

For support, contact Farm Services (Pty) Ltd
1 Tambuti Street, Matsapha
Tel: +268 7602 4380

INFECTIOUS BRONCHITIS (IB)

— IN CHICKENS —

KNOW THE SIGNS. PROTECT YOUR FLOCK.

Infectious Bronchitis (IB) is a highly contagious respiratory and urogenital disease in chickens caused by an avian coronavirus. It spreads rapidly through the air and contaminated environments.



While it is not transmissible to humans, it causes severe respiratory distress, drops in egg production, and poor egg quality.



KEY SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Symptoms usually appear within 24 to 48 hours of exposure and can vary depending on the strain of the virus and the bird's age:



RESPIRATORY:

Gasping, coughing, sneezing, and watery nasal discharge.



EGG PRODUCTION:

Significant drops in yield; eggs may be misshapen, have thin or rough shells, and watery whites.



GENERAL:

Loss of appetite, lethargy, and huddling.



RENAL (KIDNEY) STRAIN:

Some strains specifically target the kidneys, causing increased water intake, wet droppings, and higher mortality rates.



PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN TREATMENT



VACCINATION:

In commercial flocks and certain endemic areas, live attenuated and inactivated vaccines are used to prevent outbreaks. Because the virus mutates frequently, vaccines must target the specific viral serotypes present in your region.



BIOSECURITY:

Maintain strict farm hygiene. Limit visitor access, disinfect equipment, and change clothing/shoes before entering the coop.



GOOD MANAGEMENT:

Proper ventilation, nutrition, and reducing stress help maintain a strong immune system in your flock.



HOW DOES IB SPREAD?



AIRBORNE:

The virus travels easily on dust and in the air between flocks.



INDIRECT CONTACT:

It can survive for weeks on contaminated equipment, shoes, clothing, litter, and feed.



HIGHLY CONTAGIOUS:

Spreads quickly within a flock and can affect birds of all ages.



TREATMENT & MANAGEMENT

THERE IS NO SPECIFIC CURE OR ANTIVIRAL TREATMENT FOR THE VIRUS ITSELF.



SUPPORTIVE CARE:

Keep the chicken coop warm, dust-free, and well-ventilated. Electrolytes and vitamins in the drinking water can help reduce stress.



ISOLATION:

Immediately quarantine sick birds to prevent the virus from spreading to the rest of the flock.



ANTIBIOTICS:

Broad-spectrum antibiotics are sometimes administered through water, not to treat the virus, but to prevent secondary bacterial infections (such as E. coli).

Antibiotics do not treat the virus but may help control secondary infections.



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CONTACT US IF YOU SUSPECT IB IN YOUR FLOCK



E5,000 GRANT GROWS SIPHOFANENI FARMING DREAM

BY: PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR

When Enock Hleta lost his job in December 2023, he was faced with uncertainty.

But instead of waiting for another employment opportunity, the young man from Mphumakudze under Siphofaneni Inkhundla chose to create one for himself.

He went into farming.

Today, Hleta is building a commercial farming enterprise producing pumpkins, butternuts, baby marrows, baby vegetables, maize, beans and other crops. His journey has become an example of how a small opportunity, matched with determination and discipline, can help turn unemployment into enterprise.

“I refused to let myself fail,” said Hleta. “I started farming maize and green peppers after losing my

job. The results encouraged me to continue and grow the business.”

His turning point came when he started following youth empowerment platforms and agricultural support organisations. Through that, he came across the ESNAU Step-Up Grant, implemented by the Eswatini National Agricultural Union in partnership with the Centre for Financial Inclusion.

After applying, Hleta received E5,000, which helped him expand into butternut production and strengthen his farming operation.

For him, the grant was more than money. It was a vote of confidence.

“ESNAU continues to follow up on our progress and also helps create market opportunities. That support has helped me grow and remain focused on the business,” he said.

Hleta’s story comes at a time when Eswatini continues to rely

heavily on imported vegetables, especially from neighbouring South Africa. While the country has favourable conditions for horticulture, local production still falls short of national demand.

For Hleta, this gap is not a discouragement. It is a business opportunity.

“Every day we see vegetables entering the country from outside. That means there is already a market. Local farmers simply need to produce consistently and maintain quality,” he said.

ESNAU Chief Executive Officer Tammy Dlamini said Hleta’s progress reflects the importance of structured support for young farmers. She said funding alone is not enough if young people are to build businesses that survive beyond the first planting season.

“What we are seeing through



young farmers like Enock is that agriculture can work when support is structured properly. Funding must be matched with training, follow-up, market access and a serious production mindset,” said Dlamini.

She said ESNAU wants young farmers to move beyond simply planting crops and begin building sustainable agricultural enterprises.

That same approach is increasingly guiding youth enterprise support across the country, including interventions by the Youth Enterprise Revolving Fund, which continues to emphasise mentorship, business

development and long-term sustainability.

For Hleta, farming is not guesswork. Before planting, he studies the market, checks demand, follows agricultural information platforms and seeks advice from experienced farmers and support institutions.

He believes this planning is what separates farming as a hobby from farming as a business.

“Agriculture is not about luck. You must plan properly, know your costs, understand your market and produce what customers want.” he

said.

His approach is also important during winter, a difficult season for many vegetable farmers. Lower temperatures can slow growth and reduce yields, meaning farmers must manage irrigation, soil health, fertiliser use and crop selection carefully.

For farmers who want to supply formal markets, consistency and quality remain key. Buyers increasingly expect produce that meets standards in size, freshness, appearance and reliability.

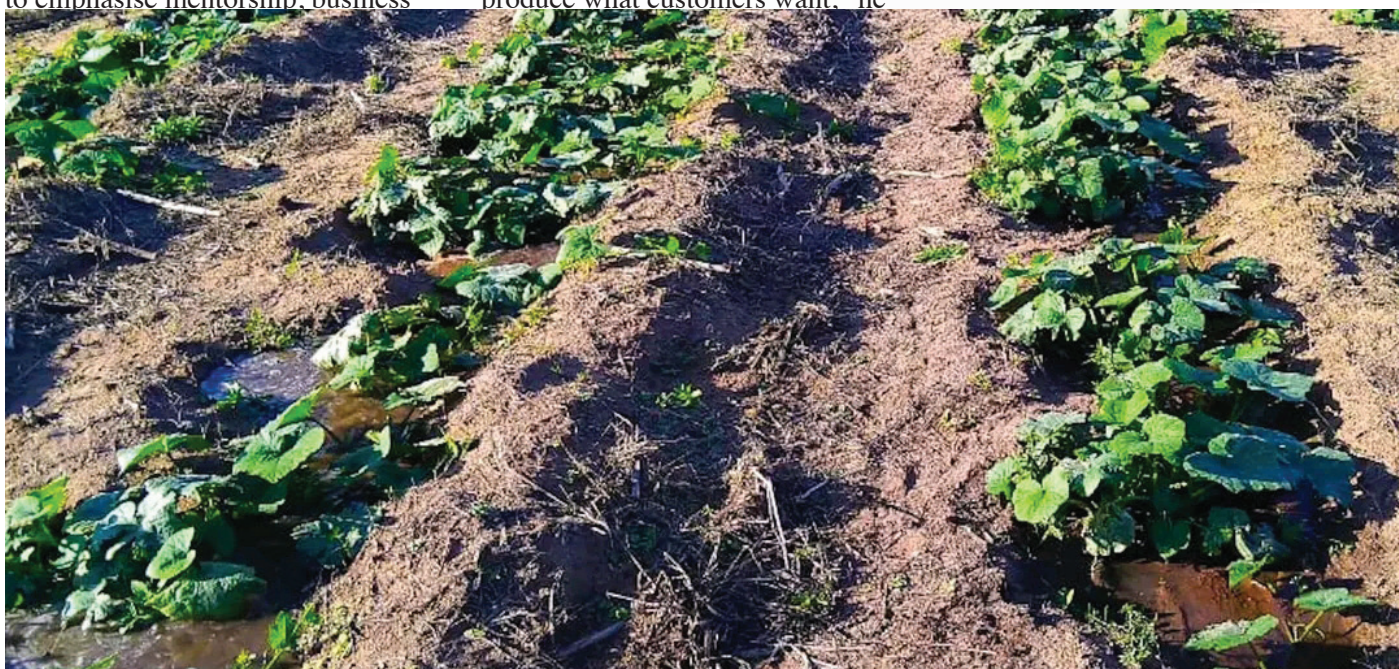
Hleta believes many young people miss opportunities because they are not actively looking for them. He encouraged youth to follow platforms that share information on grants, training, mentorship and market opportunities.

“If I had not followed these programmes, I might never have known about the grant. Sometimes one opportunity can completely change your life,” he said.

For Hleta, farming is no longer a fallback plan. It is a business.

And as pumpkins, butternuts and baby marrows continue to grow in his fields, so too does a vision that began with job loss, was strengthened by a modest grant, and is now rooted in the soil of Siphofaneni.

His message to other young people is simple: do not wait for opportunities. Plant them.





NEW FORESTRY BILL TARGETS ILLEGAL TREE CUTTING

BY: PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR

Eswatini has moved to strengthen forest protection and reduce illegal logging through a proposed Forestry Bill that introduces tougher penalties and a modern regulatory framework for sustainable land and forest management.

The Bill was validated on 3 June 2026 at a stakeholder workshop in Ezulwini, bringing together government officials, conservation bodies, industry players, communities and development partners. The initiative is supported by the Mbuluzi Ecosystems Restoration Project, a GEF-funded programme implemented by UNEP.

Representing Minister of Tourism and Environmental Affairs Jane Mkhonta-Simelane, Minister of Housing and Urban Development Apollo Maphalala said the Bill reflects government's commitment to protecting Eswatini's natural heritage. "Let us legislate out of national interest, not personal interest," he told stakeholders. He warned that laws influenced by private interests often become weak and require repeated amendments.

The Bill introduces a stronger



Representing Minister of Tourism and Environmental Affairs Jane Mkhonta-Simelane, Minister of Housing and Urban Development Apollo Maphalala framework for sustainable forest management, agroforestry and community tree-planting schemes. For farmers and landowners, the legislation could encourage tree planting within farming systems to improve soil conservation, protect water catchments and reduce land degradation. Tree-based enterprises and emerging carbon markets could also create additional income opportunities.

One of the most debated issues during consultations was enforcement. Stakeholders raised concern that existing fines were too low to discourage illegal logging and environmental crimes. In response, the Bill strengthens penalties and places fines in amendable schedules, allowing government to adjust them when circumstances change. The legislation also introduces schedules covering commercial tree species, invasive plants and international forestry agreements.

Maphalala warned against illegal cutting and sale of indigenous trees, which he described as a severe threat to biodiversity and ecosystem health. He also urged communities to help prevent wildfires as the country enters the dry season.

ENTC Director of National Parks Saneliso Makhanya described the validation workshop as a major milestone after more than a year of consultations. The next step will be to finalise the Bill and develop regulations for implementation.



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BROODING OF BROILERS IN WINTER

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



Winter broiler production presents one of the greatest management challenges for poultry farmers, particularly during the brooding stage where chicks are highly sensitive to environmental conditions. Brooding refers to the process of providing young chicks with adequate warmth, feed, water, ventilation, and care during their early stages of development. Proper brooding management is critical because the first two weeks of a chick's life determine future growth performance, feed conversion efficiency, immunity, and overall flock survival.

During winter, maintaining

the correct brooding temperature becomes even more important because day-old chicks cannot regulate their own body temperature effectively. The recommended brooding temperature during the first week is approximately 32–34°C, after which it should gradually be reduced by 2–3°C every week as the chicks grow feathers and improve their ability to withstand colder conditions. Farmers are encouraged to continuously monitor chick behavior because it provides immediate feedback regarding temperature conditions. Chicks huddling together under the heat source often indicate cold stress, while chicks spreading far away from the heat source indicate excessive heat.

One of the most important discussions in winter brooding management is the use of clean and sustainable energy sources. Modern poultry farming increasingly promotes the use of clean energy heating systems such as infrared globes, gas brooders with proper ventilation systems, electrical brooders, and heating systems fitted with chimneys. These systems provide stable and consistent heat supply while minimizing smoke and harmful gas accumulation within the poultry house. Clean energy systems not only improve bird comfort and growth performance but also reduce environmental pollution and health risks for both birds and farm workers.

Many small-scale and subsistence farmers still rely on open fire systems

using wood, charcoal, or firewood placed inside the poultry house to provide heat during winter. Although this method may appear affordable, it carries several serious risks. One major disadvantage of open fire heating is its short span of heat supply. Open fires require continuous attention, regular refueling, and constant monitoring throughout the day and night. Once the fire weakens or goes off unexpectedly, chicks become exposed to cold stress, which can rapidly lead to chilling, piling, dehydration, reduced feed intake, and mortality.

Open fire systems produce uneven heat distribution inside the poultry house. Areas closer to the fire may become excessively hot while other sections remain too cold. This causes poor chick distribution and uneven growth within the flock. Chicks exposed to inconsistent temperatures use more energy to maintain body heat instead of utilizing nutrients for growth and development. Consequently, poor brooding conditions negatively affect feed conversion ratio (FCR), body weight gains, and overall flock performance.

Another critical concern associated with open fire heating is oxygen competition within the broiler house. Both fire and chickens consume oxygen. When open fires are placed inside poorly ventilated poultry houses, oxygen levels decrease rapidly while harmful gases such as carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, and smoke accumulate. Young chicks have delicate and underdeveloped respiratory systems, making them highly vulnerable to poor air quality conditions. For this reason, poultry houses using heating systems must always maintain proper ventilation to allow fresh oxygen into the house while removing harmful gases and excess moisture. Ventilation is not only important during summer but is equally essential during winter brooding. Farmers often make the mistake of closing all ventilation openings during cold weather in an attempt to conserve heat. Unfortunately,



this creates stale air conditions that increase respiratory stress among the chicks.

Proper winter ventilation should aim to balance warmth and fresh air supply without creating direct cold drafts on the chicks. Fresh air helps remove ammonia from droppings, controls humidity levels, and supplies oxygen necessary for healthy chick metabolism and growth. High humidity and poor air circulation create ideal conditions for disease-causing microorganisms to thrive, increasing the likelihood of respiratory infections within the flock.

The use of heat sources fitted with chimneys is therefore highly recommended in winter brooding systems. Chimneys help direct smoke, harmful gases, and combustion by-products outside the poultry house while retaining adequate warmth inside. This greatly improves air quality and reduces respiratory complications among the chicks. Heating systems with chimneys are especially beneficial in enclosed poultry houses where airflow may already be limited due to winter weather conditions.

Poor ventilation and smoke exposure are major contributors to respiratory diseases such as Chronic Respiratory Disease (CRD) in broilers. CRD commonly affects the respiratory tract, causing coughing, sneezing, nasal discharge, reduced feed intake, and poor growth performance. Birds suffering from respiratory stress become weaker and more susceptible to secondary infections. In severe cases, poor

oxygen supply and respiratory damage may also contribute to Ascites (also known as water belly), a metabolic disorder associated with inadequate oxygen circulation in fast-growing broilers.

Ascites occurs when the bird's heart and lungs cannot adequately supply oxygen to support rapid body growth. Poor air quality, smoke inhalation, high altitude, cold stress, and insufficient ventilation are major predisposing factors. Birds affected by Ascites often show swollen abdomens, difficulty breathing, weakness, and sudden death. Preventing these conditions begins with maintaining excellent brooding management practices, proper ventilation, and clean heating systems. In addition to proper heating and ventilation, farmers must also focus on adequate feed and water supply during winter brooding. Chicks require easy access to fresh water and quality feed immediately after placement to support immunity development and growth. Early health management through vitamins, probiotics, and routine observation also plays a critical role in reducing stress and improving chick survival rates.

Ultimately, successful winter brooding depends on proper planning, good environmental management, and the adoption of safer and cleaner heating technologies. Farmers are encouraged to move away from risky open fire systems and invest in cleaner energy alternatives that promote consistent heating, better air quality, improved bird welfare, and higher production efficiency. By prioritizing proper ventilation and respiratory health, broiler farmers can achieve better flock performance, lower mortality, and improved profitability during the challenging winter season.



E42.7 MILLION EADF DRIVE BEARS FRUIT AS FARMERS EXPAND AND CREATE JOBS

BY: SIBUSISIWE NDZIMANDZE | JOURNALIST

MBABANE – The Eswatini Agriculture Development Fund (EADF) has invested E42.7 million in 79 agribusinesses across the country, supporting farmers in horticulture, fruit production, livestock and grain farming.

The Fund, launched by the Ministry of Agriculture on 28 November 2024, was created to help farmers access affordable finance for projects that can create jobs, reduce food imports and grow Eswatini’s agricultural economy.

EADF Director Nokwazi Mamba-Hlophe said the Fund supports farmers who are serious about turning agriculture into a sustainable business.

“We look at whether the project will create jobs, reduce imports, circulate money in the economy and contribute to the agricultural value chain,” she said.

Mamba-Hlophe said many farmers have land, passion and business ideas, but lack the capital needed for irrigation, fencing, water storage, inputs and other infrastructure.

She said EADF is helping to close that gap by financing projects with strong growth potential.

One of the Fund’s key examples is Lesibovu Agricultural Enterprise, a group of 10 young farmers from Gundwini. The

project started in 2024 with about E84,000 from the Youth Enterprise Revolving Fund (YERF).

After infrastructure gaps were identified, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) supported the project with fencing.

The group later approached EADF for support to expand production. EADF approved a loan of more than E800,000 for a solar-powered water pump, four water tanks with a combined capacity of 20,000 litres, drip irrigation, fencing across about 3.5 hectares, and farming inputs.

Lesibovu is now producing vegetables on about three hectares,

with produce already reaching the market.

“Lesibovu is one of the examples showing that when a farmer receives the right support, production can improve and the market can be supplied,” Mamba-Hlophe said.

Beyond individual projects, EADF is also working with institutions to support production at a larger scale.

Through the Hamba Ubuye Fund, in partnership with the Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise (EWADE), EADF has committed about E5 million to support 75 farmers growing maize and beans on 487 hectares.

The Fund has also partnered with the National Maize Corporation (NMC), investing E1.4 million into production on 116 hectares of underutilised government land.

Mamba-Hlophe said EADF understands that agriculture carries many risks, including changing weather conditions, pests, diseases, high input costs and market pressure.

To make loans more affordable, the Fund absorbs initiation and management fees that beneficiaries would normally pay. These costs are estimated at about 11 percent of approved loans, amounting to up to E4 million in support.

“That support works like a grant because beneficiaries do not pay those additional charges. It makes the loan cheaper and helps the business remain viable,” she said.

However, she stressed that EADF financing is not a handout. Farmers are expected to repay their loans so the Fund can support other applicants. So far, beneficiaries have repaid about E1.6 million.

“The money that helps you today must be repaid so that it can help another beneficiary tomorrow,” she

said.

Mamba-Hlophe encouraged farmers to understand their commodity, work with extension officers and consider land, water, skills, production costs and market demand before applying. She also urged farmers to explore opportunities beyond primary

production, including processing, packaging, storage, transport, logistics and seed production.

“Agriculture has challenges, but serious people should not be afraid. Let us work together to move the country from one point to another,” she said.

Farmers can apply through their nearest Rural Development Area offices or through the agriculture information system at <https://agrinfosystems.gov.sz/>.



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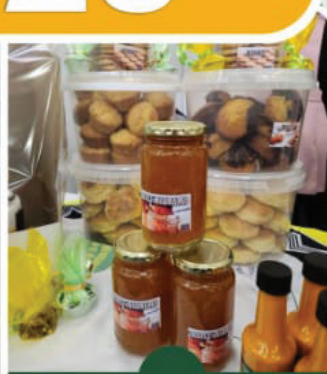
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UNLOCKING THE GREEN GOLD: HOW TAVS CAN CLOSE ESWATINI'S 82% VEGETABLE DEFICIT



By Mcebo Emmanuel Mnisi

For decades, Traditional African Vegetables (TAVs) like Amaranth (Imbuya), Pumpkin Leaves (Tintsanga), and Okra (Mandwandwe) have been relegated to the margins of Eswatini agriculture. Long perceived as mere subsistence crops or wild weeds to be gathered by women and children, these indigenous powerhouses have been chronically undervalued compared to exotic imports.

But in 2026, the economic reality of agriculture in Eswatini is shifting. Amid climate volatility and rising input costs, a compelling financial narrative is emerging at the intersection of climate resilience and market demand: TAVs are no longer just a food-security fallback; they are a lucrative commercial frontier.

The macroeconomic data is clear. Eswatini's national vegetable demand stands at approximately

41.5 million kilograms per year. Yet, a massive 82% gap in local production persists. We are systematically importing what our soils are naturally adapted to grow.

The market isn't just open; it is actively waiting. For forward-thinking agripreneurs, transitioning from "growing for the pot" to "growing for the pocket" offers quantified, multi-million-Emalangi opportunities within the "Big Three" crops:

- Pumpkin Leaves (Tintsanga): Possesses an informal sector value alone estimated at over E46.7 million across the country's 15 primary towns.
- Amaranth (Imbuya): A formal market demand of 133,200 kg holds a value of E4.0 million, driven by high-yielding commercial varieties like Nguruma and Madiira 1.
- Okra (Mandwandwe): A tight but highly profitable niche demanding 18,960

kg annually, valued at E0.57 million.

Agronomic Precision: Moving Past the "Wild Crop" Mindset

To capture high-margin retail channels (which yield up to a 71% profit share compared to traditional wholesaling), growers must abandon haphazard wild harvesting and adopt structured, commercial Good Agricultural Practices (GAP). According to the World Vegetable Center's latest commercial production guidelines, maximizing yield requires precise inputs and environmental management:

1. Amaranth (Imbuya) Cultivation

- Establishment: Direct seeding requires 2–3 kg/ha of fresh seed mixed with sand (1:10 ratio) to ensure even distribution. For repeated multi-cut harvesting, space plants at 15–20 cm within rows spaced 60 cm apart.
- Nutrition: While hardy,

high-yield leaf regrowth requires a targeted 50–100 kg N/ha in split applications, backed by 10–20 tons/ha of well-cured manure.

- Risk Mitigation: Ensure steady moisture. Drought stress triggers premature flowering, which halts leaf production and ruins market-

cost solar drying and mechanical milling turn highly perishable surplus leaves into shelf-stable, high-value powders (such as Imbuya or Ligusha powders). These processed products extend shelf life to over 6 months, drastically reducing waste while granting entry into lucrative urban supermarket and export



ability.

2. Pumpkin Leaves (Tintsanga) Dynamics

- Density & Soil: Plant at a high density of 1m x 1m for dedicated leaf production.
- The Organic Advantage: University of Eswatini research highlights that applying vermicompost at 10 tons/ha drastically outperforms purely synthetic regimes, significantly expanding leaf length and fresh biomass.

3. Okra (Mandwandwe) Mastery

- Harvest Window: Pods must be harvested rigorously every 2–3 days when they reach 8–10 cm in length. Allowing pods to overmature results in fibrous, unmarketable woodiness and signals the plant to stop producing.

Plugs and Bottlenecks: Solving the Post-Harvest Headache

The most significant leak in any vegetable value chain is post-harvest loss, which currently claims up to 50% of fresh TAV yields in Eswatini. Because leafy greens wilt rapidly under high temperatures, commercial success depends entirely on handling tech: The 2026 Strategy: Agripreneurs must look beyond primary farming and integrate value addition. Low-

channels.)

Additionally, deploying climate-smart infrastructure, like plastic tunnel production, de-risks operations by stabilizing year-round volumes, managing microclimates, and shielding crops from heavy regional pest vectors like whiteflies and fruit flies.

The Verdict

Traditional African Vegetables represent a profound alignment of public health, climate adaptation, and rural economic empowerment. By replacing outdated gatherer paradigms with data-driven, cooperative agronomy, Eswatini's farming sector can aggressively reclaim its domestic market. The market is looking for the product; it is time for our agripreneurs to grow for the pocket.

PLANTING CALENDAR BY AGRO-ECOLOGICAL ZONE (Eswatini)

To maximize yield quality and manage production cycles effectively, planting schedules must be tailored strictly to Eswatini's four primary agro-ecological zones. Under irrigation, secondary production cycles enable strategic off-season market windows.

Crop	System	Highveld	Middleveld	Lowveld	Lubombo
Pumpkin Leaves (Tintsanga)	Rainfed	Oct–Dec	Sep–Nov	Aug–Oct	Sep–Nov
	Irrigated	Feb–Mar	Feb–Mar	Jan–Feb	Feb–Mar
Amaranth (Imbuya)	Rainfed	Sep–Nov	Aug–Oct	Jul–Sep	Aug–Oct
	Irrigated	Feb–Mar	Jan–Feb	Jan–Feb	Jan–Feb
Cowpeas (Tinhlumaya)	Rainfed	Nov–Dec	Oct–Dec	Sep–Nov	Oct–Dec
	Irrigated	Feb	Feb	Jan–Feb	Feb
Okra (Mandwandwe)	Rainfed	Oct–Nov	Sep–Nov	Aug–Oct	Sep–Nov
	Irrigated	Feb–Mar	Feb–Mar	Jan–Feb	Feb–Mar

Agro-Ecological Zone Management Notes

- **Highveld:** Characterized by cooler temperatures and higher rainfall. Soil warming is slower here, meaning early-season plantings must be delayed to prevent stunted crop establishment or premature flowering in amaranth. The use of raised beds or ridges is highly recommended to prevent waterlogging during heavy summer rains.
- **Middleveld:** Possesses a balanced, subtropical climate that serves as the sweet spot for staggered, multi-cut leaf production. Farmers here can easily exploit consecutive 2-to-3-week planting intervals to guarantee local retailers a continuous, uninterrupted supply.
- **Lowveld:** A hot and semi-arid zone that requires defensive agronomy. Early planting windows are essential to establish crops before peak summer heatwave thresholds hit. Heavy mulching and drip irrigation infrastructure are structural investments in this zone to preserve soil moisture and prevent flower drop in crops like okra and cowpeas.
- **Lubombo Plateau:** A distinct microclimatic zone that shares similarities with the Middleveld but experiences specific wind and moisture variations. Planting schedules closely mirror Middleveld timelines, but particular attention should be given to site selection to minimize exposure to extreme weather.



Summary of Key African Indigenous Vegetables, Regions of Origin, and Nutritional Highlights

Vegetable	Region of Origin	Nutritional Highlights
African Eggplant (Garden Eggs/ <i>Solanum aethiopicum</i>)	Central/West Africa	Fiber, antioxidants, potassium, vitamins B1, B6, and C
Amaranth (Imbuya)	Sub-Saharan Africa	Very high in vitamin A, C, iron, calcium, and protein; surpasses cabbage in micronutrients
Bitter Leaf	West and Central Africa	Vitamins A, C, E, iron, calcium, antioxidants, anti-inflammatory compounds
Black Nightshade (Umso-bo)	East and West Africa	Vitamin A, C, calcium, and iron; strong antioxidant content
Cassava Leaves (<i>Manihot esculenta</i>)	Sub-Saharan Africa	High in protein, vitamins A, C, fiber, phenolics, carotenoids; must be detoxified
Cowpea (Tinhlumaya)	West and Central Africa	Protein-rich seeds and leaves, iron, folate, and calcium
Ethiopian Kale (<i>Brassica carinata</i>)	Ethiopia	Vitamin K, A, C, iron, calcium, chlorophyll, antioxidants, anti-cancer phytochemicals
Jute Mallow (Ligusha)	West and East Africa	Vitamin A, C, E, potassium, iron, dietary fiber, antioxidants
Malabar Spinach (<i>Basella alba</i>)	Tropical Africa/Asia	Vitamin A, C, iron, calcium, magnesium, folate, antioxidants
Okra (Mandwandwe)	Ethiopia/West Africa	Vitamin C, K, folate, soluble fiber, low fat, magnesium
Pumpkin Leaves (<i>Cucurbita spp.</i>)	East/Central Africa	Vitamin A, C, beta-carotene, iron, dietary fiber, antioxidants
Slender Leaf (<i>Crotalaria spp.</i>)	East Africa	Protein, iron, calcium, zinc, vitamin C, β -carotene
Spider Plant	Tropical and Southern Africa	Vitamin A, C, calcium, iron, protein, antioxidants
Waterleaf (<i>Talinum triangulare</i>)	West Africa	Omega-3, fiber, antioxidants, vitamin C, minerals

Source : Lugumira *et al.*, (2025) & Mativavarira *et al.*, (2024)

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LOCAL FARMERS URGED TO CLAIM PULSE MARKET AS IMPORTS DOMINATE SHELVES

World Pulses Day highlights Eswatini's bean production gap, climate challenges and market opportunities for local growers

BY: SIBUSISIWE NDZIMANDZE | JOURNALIST

Eswatini's shops, supermarkets and informal markets are already selling large volumes of pulses, but much of what consumers buy is imported, packaged and sold at higher prices while local production remains far below national demand.

This was the key message during this year's World Pulses Day commemoration held at Lomveshe Enterprise in Gundwini, where farmers were urged to increase production of beans, groundnuts, peas, lentils and other legumes to claim a market that already exists.

Eswatini produced only **1,040 metric tonnes of beans in 2025**, against an annual national requirement of about **7,000 metric tonnes**. Of that production, smallholder farmers on Eswatini Nation Land contributed about **450 metric tonnes**, leaving a gap of nearly **6,000 metric tonnes** to be filled through imports.

Ministry of Agriculture Senior Technical Officer Christopher Mtsetfwa said the figures show that local farmers have a clear opportunity to produce more and supply a ready market.

"We need 7,000 metric tonnes of beans as a country, but what we are producing is still very low, so the gap

is closed by imports," Mtsetfwa said.

The Ministry is encouraging farmers to treat pulses as both food security crops and commercial crops. Pulses are rich in plant-based protein, support household nutrition and are



better suited for dryland farming than many other crops, making them important as farmers face climate change, heatwaves and erratic rainfall.

However, the production gap will not be closed by encouragement alone. Ministry of Agriculture Principal Secretary Sydney Simelane, who represented Minister Mandla Tshawuka, said more than **80 percent** of smallholder farming remains rain-fed, leaving farmers exposed to mid-season dry spells and climate shocks.

Farmers also continue to face low-yielding seed varieties, limited irrigation, poor rural infrastructure, late input subsidies, rising production costs and post-harvest handling challenges. Many available pulse varieties produce less than two tonnes per hectare, showing the need for more climate-resilient and high-yielding seed.

Lomveshe Enterprise, which hosted the commemoration, reflected both the challenges and opportunities facing local farmers. The farmer-owned company has **39 members** and operates on **44 hectares**, producing bananas, sweet potatoes, vegetables and beans.

This season, Lomveshe planted **two hectares of beans**, taking advantage of the available off-take market through the National Maize Corporation. Enterprise Chairperson Ernest Gamedze said the farm has survived climate shocks and market challenges because it continues to diversify.

“Farming is the way to go. People can earn a living from farming as long as they get the right knowledge, from planting the crop to maintaining it and taking it to the market,” Gamedze said.

Lomveshe started with banana production in 2018, but has since expanded into other crops to maintain year-round production and reduce reliance on one commodity. The enterprise has faced storms, poor roads, late input support and rising

costs. Gamedze said storms damaged the farm three times, forcing it to restructure, while poor roads sometimes discourage buyers from collecting produce.

Despite these setbacks, Lomveshe continues to rebuild its production capacity. The enterprise received **E3.9 million** in support from the Eswatini National Industrial Development Corporation, which helped it procure inputs and continue farming. It currently supplies beans to NMC, while bananas are sold locally and exported when quality standards and market conditions allow.

For the Ministry of Agriculture, enterprises such as Lomveshe show that farmers can benefit from the pulse market if they plan properly,

diversify production, follow good agronomic practices and produce with the market in mind.

Mtsetfwa said farmers should not plant without first knowing where they will sell. Before planting, they must understand who will buy their produce, the required volumes, quality specifications and the price per tonne. He said this strengthens production planning and improves farmers’ ability to access agricultural finance from institutions such as the Eswatini Agricultural Development Fund.

He said NMC bought beans at **E27,615 per tonne** last year, giving farmers a useful market reference when preparing production plans. The Ministry wants farmers to improve bean productivity from the current average yield of about **600kg**





per hectare to at least one tonne per hectare, while improved seed varieties can produce up to **two tonnes per hectare** under good management.

Mtsetfwa added that the season at Lomveshe showed how climate conditions affect production. The area received too much rainfall in January and February, followed by a heatwave. Beans were planted on 11 March, but the use of two bean varieties is expected to help reduce risk and support a harvest.

Eswatini National Agricultural Union Chief Executive Officer Tammy Dlamini said pulses are not new to the country and should be treated as crops with real commercial and food security value.

“These plants have always been grown here in Eswatini, and the imported seeds do not always perform well in the country,” Dlamini said.

He said farmers need support across the full pulse value chain, from access to suitable seed varieties to market linkages, post-harvest handling and storage. Dlamini

added that pulses are already available in Manzini Market and in upper-end retail markets, but many are imported, packaged and sold at higher prices. This creates an opportunity for local producers if they can meet quality, quantity and consistency requirements.

To address seed access, Malkerns Research Station Research Officer Nicholas Manana said farmers interested in growing pulses can visit the station for suitable seed varieties and technical guidance.

Market access remains one of the strongest incentives for increased production. National Maize Corporation Officer Mangaliso Sihlongonyane said NMC buys beans throughout the year and encouraged farmers to work closely with extension officers to meet quality standards.

“We buy beans from January to December, but farmers must bring dry beans, not wet beans, because quality is very important,” Sihlongonyane said. He said NMC buys according to kilogrammes supplied, not the number of bags delivered. He added that NMC

accepts every variety of beans planted by farmers and is currently buying beans at **E21,875 per tonne**.

Principal Secretary Simelane said World Pulses Day is an important farmer learning platform and a reminder that pulses can support food sovereignty, nutrition and rural livelihoods. “Producing more pulses locally strengthens our food systems and supports rural economies, improving household incomes,” he said.

The commemoration carried a practical message: the pulse market already exists, but local farmers need stronger support to compete with imported products. With better roads, timely inputs, suitable seed, strong extension services, proper post-harvest handling and reliable markets, farmers can raise production and claim a bigger share of the pulse market. At Lomveshe, beans are no longer just modest crops. They are becoming part of a bigger national answer to food security, farmer income and agricultural transformation.

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HOW GULE FARM BECAME UNESWA'S LIVING LAB FOR SWEET POTATO RESEARCH

...Partnership between a family-owned farm, UNESWA and the Ministry of Agriculture is showing how research, improved varieties and commercial farming can raise productivity, strengthen food security and create wealth for farmers.

BY: PHESHEYA KUNENE | EDITOR

BIG BEND – On most farms, research arrives long after the planting season has ended, tucked away in academic journals, research papers and conference presentations that few farmers ever read. At KaGule Enterprise in Qokwane, however, research grows alongside the crops.

The neatly planted rows of sweet potatoes stretching across the family-owned farm are doing far more than producing food. They are testing improved varieties, evaluating

modern production methods and helping researchers understand how biotechnology performs under real farming conditions. At the same time, they are giving farmers something often missing from agricultural advice — evidence.

That transformation is the result of a partnership between KaGule Enterprise, the University of Eswatini's (UNESWA) Horticulture Department and the Ministry of Agriculture's Department of Agricultural Research and Specialist Services (DARSS). Together, they

have turned a commercial farm into a living research and demonstration site where science is tested under the same conditions faced by ordinary farmers.

The partnership was showcased during the Biotechnology Sweet Potato Farmers' Field Day, organised by UNESWA in collaboration with DARSS. The initiative introduced farmers to tissue culture-produced orange-fleshed sweet potato varieties, production and management practices, biotechnology, nursery establishment and value addition

while allowing them to engage directly with researchers and extension specialists.

Yet beneath the field demonstrations lay a broader question confronting Eswatini's agricultural sector: how can research move beyond laboratories to help farmers produce more, earn more and farm more sustainably?

A FAMILY FARM WITH A BIGGER PURPOSE

The answer may lie at KaGule Enterprise.

The farm, founded by veteran farmer S.M. Gule and now managed by his son Ngangelive Gule, has evolved from a family vegetable enterprise into a centre of agricultural innovation.

Instead of simply producing crops for the market, Gule opened his fields to researchers from UNESWA and DARSS, creating an environment where improved sweet potato varieties could be evaluated under commercial farming conditions.

Researchers supplied planting material, technical guidance and scientific support, while the farm contributed land, labour and daily management.

For Gule, the arrangement benefits everyone.

“We are learning alongside the researchers,” he explained during the field tour. “We plant the different varieties, monitor their performance and see first-hand which ones are best suited to our conditions.”

That knowledge, he believes, should not remain on his farm.

Throughout the day, neighbouring farmers moved from plot to plot comparing six improved sweet potato varieties, including Super Margaret, Cecilia, Alisha and Melinda. They examined plant vigour, discussed



disease tolerance and asked researchers about spacing, irrigation and expected yields.

The farm had become exactly what its partners intended — a classroom without walls.

RESEARCH THAT PRODUCES RESULTS

For years, one of the biggest criticisms of agricultural research across Africa has been the gap between scientific discoveries and adoption by farmers.

Technologies often perform well inside research stations but fail to reach the people expected to use them.

The partnership at KaGule Enterprise attempts to close that gap.

Rather than asking farmers to trust recommendations on paper, researchers are demonstrating improved technologies under practical field conditions.

Leading those demonstrations was researcher and sweet potato farmer Baring Nkambule, who urged farmers to adopt proper planting techniques if they wanted higher yields and stronger returns.

He explained that success begins with healthy planting material, properly prepared ridges, recommended spacing and consistent crop management.

Sweet potato, he added, offers commercial farmers an attractive opportunity because it generally requires lower production costs than many field crops while delivering favourable gross margins.

“The right technique gives you the right harvest,” he told participants.

Nearby, Nhlanhla Hlophe, a Roots Crops and Tubers Research Officer based in Big Bend, guided farmers through the six varieties, explaining how each performs under Lubombo conditions and why variety selection should depend on production objectives, local soils and market demand.

The demonstrations reinforced a simple but often overlooked reality.

The quality of the harvest is determined long before harvest begins.



FROM HARVEST TO HIGHER VALUE

While improving production remains essential, researchers argued that profitability depends equally on what happens after harvest.

During the food demonstration session, Ministry of Agriculture Food and Technology Research Officer Nokuthula Dlamini transformed sweet potatoes into flour, muffins, juice, chips and other products, showing farmers how value addition can unlock new income streams.

For many participants, it was the first time seeing sweet potato marketed as more than a fresh crop.

Processing and product diversification, Dlamini explained, allow farmers to capture greater value, reduce post-harvest losses and respond to changing consumer demand.

The lesson was clear: the value chain does not end in the field.

KNOWLEDGE IS THE BEST INPUT

Elsewhere on the farm, Gule used his tomato fields to illustrate another challenge confronting farmers.

Choosing the wrong pesticide, he warned, can destroy a crop instead of protecting it.

Drawing on his own experience, he encouraged farmers to consult agricultural retailers such as SAS and Farm Chemicals before purchasing agrochemicals and to seek guidance from extension officers rather than relying on trial and error.

His advice was echoed by NAMBoard Extension Officer Ernest Matsebula, who called on farmers to make greater use of extension services.

From selecting seed to applying fertiliser and controlling pests, he

said, technical advice remains one of the most valuable inputs available to farmers.

“Our doors are always open,” Matsebula said. “We want farmers to grow beyond production and become successful agripreneurs.”

BUILDING BUSINESSES, NOT JUST FARMS

Modern agriculture also requires finance.

Recognising that reality, Eswatini Bank participated in the field day to explain agribusiness financing opportunities available to farmers wishing to establish or expand commercial enterprises.

Agribusiness Officer Mlungisi Dlamini encouraged producers to engage the bank early, understand available loan products and develop viable business plans before investing.

The message aligned with the day’s broader theme.

Improved seed, research and technical knowledge achieve little without access to finance capable of supporting commercial growth.

ATTRACTING THE NEXT GENERATION

The event also highlighted a growing national concern — the future of farming itself.

Representing the Ministry of Agriculture’s Under Secretary, Vincent Dlamini said Eswatini must strengthen food sovereignty by producing more of its own seed, adopting improved varieties and ensuring research reaches farmers.

More importantly, he argued, agriculture must create wealth.

Young people, he warned, are increasingly turning away from farming because they do not see it as



a profitable career.

If agriculture is to compete with other industries, successful commercial farmers must become the sector's strongest ambassadors.

That message resonated with Nkilongo Member of Parliament Petros Sibandze, who encouraged farmers from his constituency to embrace agriculture as a business capable of creating employment, improving household incomes and driving rural development.

His appeal reflected a growing recognition that farming must be viewed not simply as a livelihood, but as an enterprise.

SCIENCE IN THE SERVICE OF FARMERS

The significance of the partnership at KaGule Enterprise extends beyond sweet potatoes.

It demonstrates how universities, government researchers, extension officers, financial institutions and commercial farmers can work together to solve practical problems facing agriculture.

For farmers, the benefits are tangible.

Improved varieties increase productivity.

Better planting techniques reduce risk.

Extension support improves decision-making.

Finance enables expansion.

Value addition creates new markets.

Together, they strengthen profitability and resilience.

As participants departed KaGule Enterprise, they carried home more than technical information.

They left with a clearer understanding that modern agriculture is no longer driven by hard work alone.

It is driven by knowledge, partnerships and innovation.

The sweet potatoes growing at KaGule Enterprise are, in many ways, only the beginning.

The more important harvest may well be a new way of thinking about farming in Eswatini—one in which research no longer ends at the laboratory door but begins where it matters most: in the farmer's field.



ESWATINI OPENS SEARCH FOR IDEAS TO FIX AGRICULTURE'S FIELD-TO-MARKET GAP

Solutions Marketplace 2026 targets innovators with practical answers to weak service delivery, climate pressure, value addition and market access

BY: SIBUSISIWE NDZIMANDZE | JOURNALIST

Eswatini's agriculture sector is looking for practical problem-solvers, and government wants to identify them before the end of June.

The Ministry of Agriculture, in partnership with the World Bank and FoodSystems 2030, has launched the **Eswatini Solutions Marketplace 2026**, a national innovation competition and showcase aimed at finding homegrown solutions to some of the sector's most persistent challenges.

The initiative is targeting innovations that can improve agricultural service delivery, raise productivity, strengthen climate resilience, promote value addition and close market gaps that continue to frustrate

smallholder farmers across the country.

Applications are now open and will close on **30 June 2026**. Sibonelo Mamba, Graduate-in-Training in Planning at the Ministry of Agriculture, said the platform is open to innovators of all ages who have ideas or working solutions that can help transform agriculture and agribusiness.

“There is no age limit, and we encourage innovators to take this opportunity seriously because it gives them a platform to network and have their innovations taken into consideration”

“The Eswatini Solutions Marketplace is a platform where innovators in the agricultural sector of all ages are invited to share their ideas on how to transform agriculture and agribusiness, especially in areas such as service delivery and the priority pillars of ENAIP 2.0,” Mamba said. She said shortlisted participants will be invited to a national showcase event where they will present their innovations directly to policymakers, development partners, private sector players and other key stakeholders.

“There is no age limit, and we encourage innovators to take this opportunity seriously because it gives them a platform to network and have their innovations taken into consideration,” she said.

The competition comes at a time when the country is pushing to modernise agriculture and make the sector more responsive to the needs of farmers, especially smallholders who often face poor access to inputs, weak extension support, limited finance, climate shocks and unreliable markets.

For many farmers, the challenge is not only production. It is the broken chain between the field and the market. Farmers may grow crops, but still struggle with storage, processing, transport, pricing, buyers and access to timely information. The Solutions Marketplace is designed to surface innovations that can help close those gaps.

The initiative is aligned with the **Eswatini National Agricultural Investment Plan 2023–2028**, also known as **ENAIP 2.0**, which focuses on improved productivity, food sovereignty, agribusiness growth, employment creation and stronger value chains.

The Solutions Marketplace is looking for ideas across a wide range of priority areas. These include digital extension services, tele-veterinary solutions, input delivery systems, fintech for farmers, climate-smart agriculture, food security and school feeding, agro-processing, cold storage, youth and women-led agribusiness, and market access platforms.

Applications are open to agribusinesses, micro, small and medium enterprises, farmer cooperatives, farmer organisations, technology platforms, digital service providers, NGOs, development programmes and research institutions. The Ministry is targeting at least **20 innovators** to be shortlisted for the national showcase event.

For selected participants, the opportunity goes beyond presentation. They will gain national

visibility, expert feedback, peer learning opportunities and direct engagement with government, development partners and private sector stakeholders. This could help promising solutions move from pilot stage to wider adoption.

The Marketplace also represents a deliberate attempt to close the gap between policy and implementation. Instead of only designing programmes from the top, the initiative seeks to find solutions already emerging from communities, entrepreneurs, farmer groups and institutions, then position them for support and possible scale.

For innovators, the message is clear: agriculture needs more than speeches and policy documents. It needs tools that work, services that reach farmers, technology that solves real problems and business models that make farming more productive and profitable.

Applications close on **30 June 2026**. For more information, contact **+268 7866 2716** or visit **eswatinisolutionsmarketplace.org/solutions-marketplace**.



APPLY NOW!
Scan to Apply or Visit
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250 YOUNG FARMERS, E12 MILLION AND A BIG FOOD SECURITY DREAM

BY: SIBUSISIWE NDZIMANDZE | JOURNALIST

MBABANE – The Youth Enterprise Revolving Fund (YERF) has invested nearly E12 million in agricultural businesses run by more than 250 young farmers, as Eswatini seeks to reduce its heavy food import bill and strengthen local food production.

YERF Chief Executive Officer **Mandla Nkambule** said agriculture remains one of the strongest sectors for creating youth employment while helping the country move towards food security and food sovereignty. The Fund's agricultural portfolio supports young people in vegetable production, poultry, dairy, orchards, fruit and livestock.

"We strongly believe that farming is a business. It is a commercial business," said Nkambule. "Young people can feed the nation and feed the continent if they take agriculture seriously."

One of the Fund's beneficiaries is **Lesibovu Agricultural Enterprise**, a group of 10 young farmers from Gundvini. The group approached YERF in 2024 to start a vegetable farming project and received about **E84,000** after a full assessment. Nkambule said YERF's support did not end with funding. When

the Fund identified infrastructure gaps that could affect the project, it engaged the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which assisted with fencing to protect the farm and its investment.

"We noted some gaps on the farm and approached FAO for support. They came on board with fencing to ensure that the farm and its investments are protected," he said. He said beneficiaries are also supported by Business Development Officers who provide mentorship, while technical support is coordinated through the Ministry of Agriculture, extension officers and other partners.

Nkambule said young farmers have a major opportunity to help close Eswatini's food import gap. He said the country spends an estimated **E2 billion** annually on imported vegetables and about **E1.8 billion** on maize and beans.

"That is close to **E4 billion** leaving the country every year," he said. "Young farmers have an opportunity to capture part of that market and keep that money circulating within our economy."

He also highlighted dairy farming as a sector with strong potential,

noting that Eswatini imports about **90 percent** of its dairy products. He said opportunities exist not only in milk production, but also in value-added products such as cheese.

To improve productivity, Nkambule encouraged young farmers to adopt technology-driven agriculture, including modern irrigation, drones and precision farming tools. He said YERF is also working to reduce risk through specialised insurance arrangements that protect agricultural projects against climate-related disasters, theft and other shocks. "We are deliberately trying to de-risk agriculture because we understand the challenges farmers face," he said. "We want young people to invest with confidence."

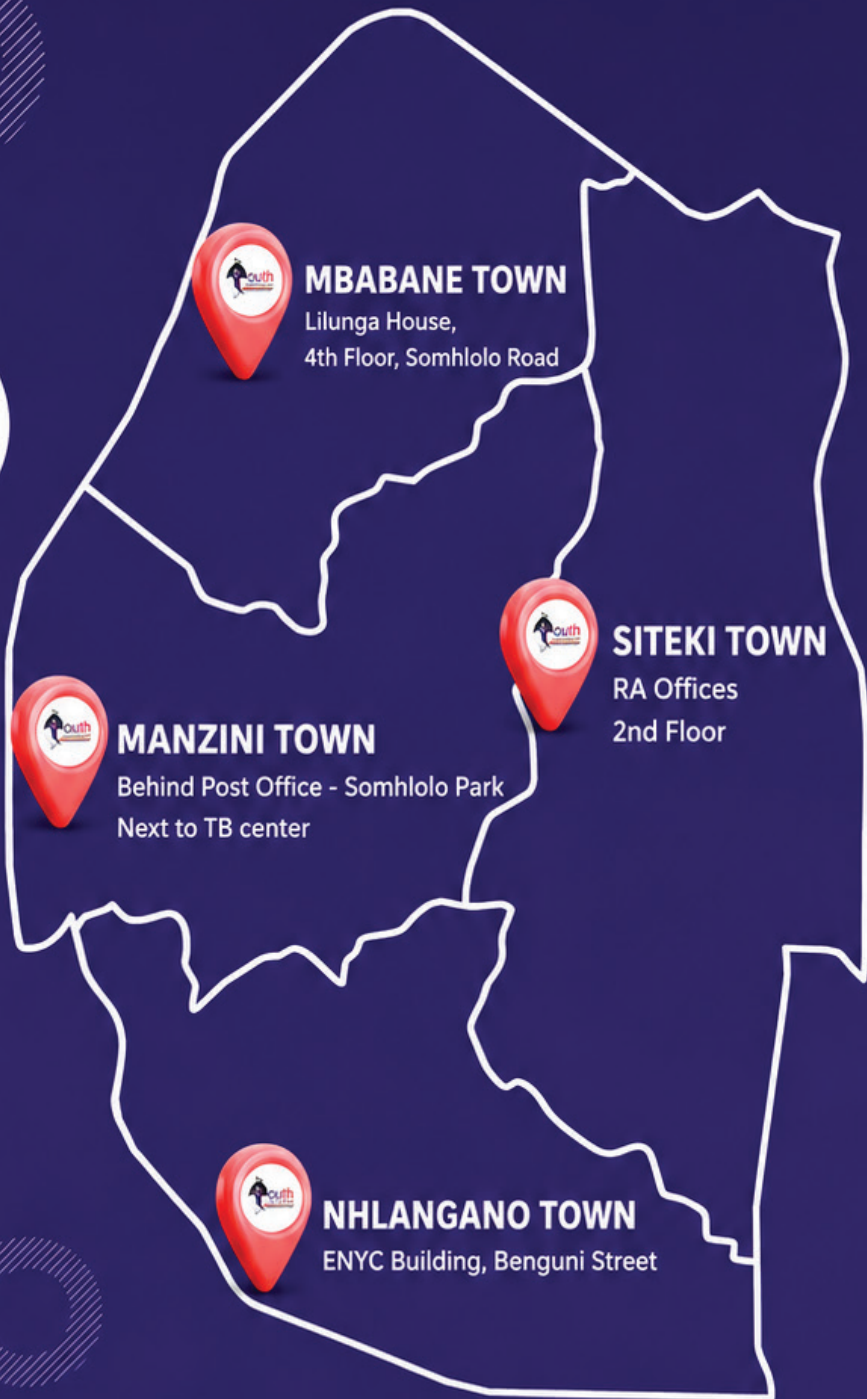
Looking ahead, YERF is preparing to launch an **Agricultural Infrastructure Loan Facility** to address major farming constraints such as irrigation and fencing. The facility is expected to help young farmers move from subsistence farming to fully commercial agriculture.

"Many agricultural projects are underfunded," Nkambule said. "We want young people to move from subsistence farming to commercial farming."

YERF is also exploring models that would allow young people without land to farm on government-owned land through structured agricultural hubs and shared production facilities. Nkambule said agriculture must be treated as a serious business opportunity capable of transforming lives and strengthening the national economy.

"We have the land. We have the markets. We have the demand," he said. "What we need now is for more young people to see agriculture as a serious business opportunity."

YERF OFFICE IN YOUR REGION



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Behind Post Office - Somhlolo Park
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