Interview: Mathu

1. Date: 2021-01-08
2. Time: 13:00

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| Hello, I am Zakes Hlatshwayo, a Ph.D. candidate at UP, conducting a study on emerging black farmers’ practices and state support to them, the study is conducted in three provinces. This study aims to understand emerging black farmer practices and how they are supported by the state. Thank you for your willingness to participate. I am interested to understand your farming practices and experience, as well as the support you receive. Information will be used only for academic and research purposes. You do not have to give your name if you don’t want to and can decline to answer any question. I appreciate your assistance and request you provide as much information as possible to help us understand your work.  The research study has been approved by the University of Pretoria’s Research Ethics Committee. Your privacy and confidentiality will be secured. No direct reference will be made to you, I will use a pseudonym, codes and categories to keep information about you confidential, and to protect it from unauthorized disclosure, tampering, or damage. You are not required to use your name, do not write your name on any of the documents. The data will be kept for 15 years in a password protected format and used for University of Pretoria research only.  For the purpose of this research I will use semi-structured questions, with your permission I will record the interview and take notes. The interview will not be longer than 50 minutes. Hopefully, the information will help policymakers, practitioners, officials and managers to make informed decisions on such programmes in the future. | | | |
| RQ1: What is your name? Mathu  RQ2: Where do you live? Naledi, single.  RQ3: What is your highest level of qualification? post matric training in agriculture and participated in various training workshops and seminars involving marketing and other forms of farming.  RQ4: Gender: Female  RQ5: Age: above 30 | | | |
| RQ6: Do you have another job? | | No | They grow seedlings that they sell. |
| RQ7: How long have you been in this job? | | +3year |  |
| I’m part of a PTY (LTD) a private farming company, I’m with Itumeleng. Itumeleng was present during the interview, she asked that he sit in. The company originally had six members, the others left because of the distance from Soweto to Sedibeng and others got other jobs. | | | |
| RQ8: Where do you farm? | | Sedibeng Agripark | The farm size is about 1½ -hectares covered by a net. Outside. |
| RQ9: What do you grow? | | High-value crop | Spinach, red pepper, pepper bells, lettuce, carrots, and kale. |
| They also use an additional site as a nursery for growing seedlings which they sell to others in the Agripark and other farmers. They indicate that they would like to venture in marijuana farming if capital allows them. | | | |
| RQ10: How many hectares do you farm? | | 1½ hectares | Another patch of land of about 200 squares. |
| RQ11: How did you obtain this land, and under what tenure? | |  | We responded to an advert by the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform. The advert urged the youth to apply for agricultural land, either in tunnels or outside.  We have a three-year contract, which is coming to an end. |
| A contract to use the land, which is owned by a local municipality, is valid for 3 years, renewable. Farmers have to move to their own land. I could not get a copy of the contract. The farming project is supported by the Department of Agriculture. | | | |
| RQ12: Have you always produced and sold the same things? | | Yes | Sometimes more of one or the other, depending on the seedling and growth. |
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| RQ13: How did you start farming? | I’m from Naledi township, when I was younger on my way to school I often encountered women growing vegetables on small patches of land on the side of the road. I grew a keen awareness and interest, I asked questions, next thing I was helping out. That’s how the bug bit me.  Strange, that’s how Itumeleng and I first met. We later decided to go on our own with friends. | | |
| RQ14: How did you learn about this business? | In 2016, I participated in a training programme on farming and marketing. I also did management studies. I’m interested in the training and the digital aspects of the business. | | |
| RQ15: Where did you obtain the capital? | I used my own money, and Itumeleng contributes whatever he had.  They also act as agents for other farmers connecting them with buyers or going look for buyers for farmers. Sometimes they take produce to go and sell. In that way, they make a commission that keeps them going. | | |
| RQ16: How many people are farming, temporarily and full-time? | They had one person, living close to the Agripark, to come water the plants, especially the seedlings. However, because of a lack of capital, they could not keep the person, and the plants and seedlings died. This was a loss of income for them. | | |
| RQ17: What are your main inputs? | Seedlings, water, pesticides, fertilizers, nets, and equipment. Packaging. Transport hire and labor | | |
| RQ18: Where do you get your inputs from? Mainly from the Agripark, but the transport to get the material delivered to them they have to hire themselves. Sometimes they buy their own seedlings when delivery did not happen.  RQ19: Where do you sell? Community stalls, bakkie off-takers, Shoprite. We use crates and boxes, there is no branding. | | | |
| RQ20: What do you supply? | |  | Tomatoes, kale, pepper bells, carrots lettuce, and seedlings of same. |
| * How often? | |  | Every other day, we stay far and cannot come daily. |
| * How did you get the market? | |  | Buyers walk and drive in and out of the Agripark, sometimes we sell to restaurants. It is referrals and word of mouth. |
| * Are produce collected or delivered? | |  | All are collected, except when we go sell to restaurants I hire a truck or take a taxi depending on the size. |
| * What quantity or value of each crop produced? * What market works best, why? | |  | It varies on the availability of seedlings, the value depends on the quality, it is not stable.  Hawkers pay better prices than markets. I feel cheated by the markets, they pay less per bundle. |
| * What could be done to make markets work better? | |  | The markets favour big business, the system looks rigged against the small producers. The agents wield a lot of influence in the markets, if we could deal directly with the buyers it might be better. |
| * Have you sold elsewhere before, if so, where? | | No | We stay almost in the same circle. |
| * Are you part of an organisation or association? No. * Do you have any other collaboration, individual or group? No. We have applied for funding to buy a farm and we are still waiting. We are unemployed and doubt that we will get the loan, institutions are sceptical of black young farmers. | | | |
| * Has there been any changes in your farming? | |  | Initially, we lost members, we could not come here. We feel like starting all over, this time with no capital,  The challenge for the company is to grow its capital base and improve quality and quantity of products. |
| * How did you hear about Covid-19? * How did Covid 19 affect you? * How did you respond to the government’s lockdown? * How did you hear about the government’s response and how did you benefit? | |  | Mostly from the radio, newspapers, tv and community.  I (we) were worried about my well-being and that of my family, we discussed it as a company.  I struggled during the first lockdown when asked to remain at home. I had no source of income and relied on my pensioner parents even for the most basic needs.  I had no income, I did not apply for the Covid relief grant, I do not have the company records to show loss of income. We changed what we bought and consumed as a family, looking for substitutes.  I heard from the officials but did not benefit from the grants. |
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Observation: Mathu and Itumeleng seemed committed to farming, they showed me around, including a fruit orchard they would apply to takeover. They asked if they could use me as a reference in their funding applications, and I indicated that it would be unethical to allow that.

The two farmers are unhappy with the government support programme which they describe as anti-transformation and it perpetuates the apartheid stereotypes about black farmers. They complain that banks and investors discriminate against black farmers, especially youth.

I was fortunate, on the day of the interview, to meet Stephen Greenberg who is considering helping them source funding for the project.

Covid-19: Feel insecure about the long-term impacts of the Covid-19 on their farming, families and general wellbeing.