Interview: Thabo

1. Date: 2021-04-04
2. Time: 13:00

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| Hello, I am Zakes Hlatshwayo, I am a PhD candidate doing an academic study on: Emerging black farmers’ practices and state support to them: a study of three government Agriparks in South Africa. This study will explore the practices of emerging black farmers and their successes and challenges in three selected areas where Agriparks exist. Thank you for your willingness to participate. We are interested to understand your role and experience. 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 me 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? Thabo  RQ2: Where do you live? Westonaria, Single.  RQ3: What is your highest level of qualification? Matric  RQ4: Gender: Male  RQ5: Age: 30 | | | |
| RQ6: Do you farm? If so what do you farm? When did you start? How did you start? Why did you start, what informed your decision? Where is the farm located? | | Yes, in Westonaria | I started farming here around 2019. I responded to the department’s advert for vacancies here. I always wanted to own land and farm. |
| RQ7: How long have you been farming? | | +1year | I started around 2019 |
| I started as an individual farmer, and do not belong to a company or cooperative. | | | |
| RQ8: Where do you farm? | | Westernaria Agripark | Vertical hydroponic |
| RQ9: What do you grow? | | High-value crop | Lettuce and coriander |
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| RQ10: How many hectares do you farm? | | 100 X 100 meters | Inhouse hydroponic |
| RQ11: How did you obtain this land, and under what tenure? | |  | Responded to department advert. It is a three years contract. |
| Still does not have a tenure or lease signed contract, but is allowed to use the hydroponic building for three years. | | | |
| RQ12: Have you always produced and sold the same things? | | Yes | The in-house hydro phonic has structural limitations as to what can be produced. |
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| RQ13: How did you start farming? | I was raised in Lesotho and farmed various vegetables, and maize and kept livestock. | | |
| RQ14: How did you learn about this project? | I saw an advert, but I have always walked past here and was curious to know what was happening. | | |
| RQ15: Where did you obtain your capital? | I used my own money and I got all the other input from the Agripark. | | |
| RQ16: How many people are employed, temporary and full-time? | I’m the only one, I had two friends who helped me, for free. It is difficult to go up the stairs without additional help. | | |
| RQ17: What are your main inputs? | Seedlings, water, pesticides, fertilizers, electrical power, and other implements. | | |
| RQ18: What actual support have you received from Agripark? I have the building, I receive seedlings and fertilizer, and electricity. Where do you get your input from? Mainly from Agripark, I bought some. My client who pre-ordered and wanted me to produce lettuce brought the seedlings, fertiliser, and chemicals to use.  RQ20: What other services do you receive? We have storage facilities, ablution areas, and a fridge though it is not working now.  RQ21: How can support and other services be improved? We need land to farm and support services like infrastructure, roads, facilities such as packaging and logistics, research, and markets. I can’t get a bank loan because I have no collateral, the bank won’t talk to me. I have been dismissed by banks who don’t seem to have confidence in black farmers.  RQ22: Where do you sell? Retailers and Guesthouses. | | | |
| RQ23: What do you supply? | |  | Lettuce and coriander. |
| * How often? | |  | As and when ready, a week or so? |
| * How did you get the market? | |  | Walk-ins by sellers into the Agripark and word of mouth. |
| * Are produce collected or delivered? | |  | All are collected. |
| * What quantity or value of each crop produced? * What market works best, and why? | |  | The quantity varies based on the seedlings, the value depends on the quality of the soil preparation, all are not stable.  Pre-orders, because prices are fixed. |
| * What could be done to make markets work better? | |  | Onsite markets are convenient and cheaper. It would be ideal if the state-subsidized small-scale farmers’ prices. |
| * Have you sold elsewhere before, if so, where? | | No | Above |
| RQ24: Are you part of an organisation or association? No. I attended a Soweto Food Foundation workshop to learn about other systems of farming.  RQ25: Do you have any other collaboration with individuals or groups? No. I have informal talks with other participants and farmers. | | | |
| * Has then been any changes in your farming? | |  | No |
| RQ26: Do you about Covid-19 and how did you hear about it?   * How did Covid 19 affect you? * How did you respond to the government’s lockdown? * How did you hear about the government’s grant and how did you benefit? | |  | I heard about it on Radio, TV, and Newspapers. I was later informed by the management. I could not come to the farm until the management clarified the policy.  I could not come to the farm, I lost the entire harvest. I had no income.  Stayed at home with no income.  The official told me I did not qualify for the benefits because I lacked proof of loss income. |
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Observation: Articulate, confident with ideas. He walks 15 km each way to the project. Critical of management, worried about the lack of a signed contract puts his future in doubt. Thinks a mentor will help, but he prefers a black mentor “White mentors are prejudiced against black farmers, they think we cannot farm”. He learns a lot from U-tube.

* Department managers in cahoots with connected individuals who want to take over the project. During my next visit was told a white man inquired about the project.
* The House looks run down, with pipes on the ground, ventilators not working, and fertilizer and seedlings on the ground. Blames this on the Covid-19 lockdown and officials.
* Insist that they were not allowed into the Agripark, despite not being under lockdown.
* Lost his full pre-ordered harvest due to lockdown (Showed me impressive pictures of the lettuce on vertical hydroponic).