**Mamello Interview notes**

**INTERVIEW INFORMATION**

Date: October 2020 – present

Location: Middlekloof, 10kms from Tzaneen on the Deerpark road

Interviewer: Makhanana Malungane

1. **PERSONAL INFORMATIONS**

Name/pseudonym: Mamello

Age: 70

Sex: Female

Highest Level of Education: Masters

Role in agro-food system: Farmer (including hydroponic)

Do you have other occupations? Nurse, SA Co-ordinator for an international feeding programme.

How long have you been involved in the business? Since 2004

1. **FARMER**

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| Where do you farm? | Middlekloof,10kms from Tzaneen on the Deerpark road |
| What do you grow? Which of these are your main products? | Sweet potato (for vines, sugars and flour)  Cabbage  Babby Marrow  Butternut  Cucumber  Green beans  Lettuce  Spinach  Peppadew  Robot peppers |
| How many hectares do you farm on? |  |
| How did you obtain this land and under what tenure arrangements? | I bought the farm in 2011 after selling my farm in Nelspruit when my mother got sick. In Nelspruit, I specialised in poultry production |
| Have you always produced and sold the same thing? | No. I used to specialise in poultry, mushroom and strawberry production  I also grow to produce based on the advice of market agents I work with. There are even times when I have direct orders from a buyer facilitated by the same market agents. |
| How did you start farming? How did you learn the business? Where did you obtain the capital? | My parents are farmers. So, I was introduced to farming from an early age, and I enjoyed being outdoors. I am also married to an agricultural extension officer so getting into farming came too easy to me.  But the real push for me to join farming full-time came about when I was still a public health practitioner where I taught woman the benefits of good nutrition and eating a balanced diet. My students would ask for help, telling me how there did not have food. It is was there I realised the role of food and how I can play a part in the food system. I could teach my students by example how to grow their food and rear their life stock and become more food secure. |
| How many people are employed full-time and how many casual or seasonal workers? | 10+. During the harvest period, I can employ more than 20 people as seasonal workers |
| What are your main inputs | * Seedlings * Water * Electricity * Greenhouses * Hydroponic A-frames * Cold storage * Packaging and boxing * Tractors * Irrigation systems * Employees |
| Where do you obtain your inputs? | Equipment  I was able to buy most of the equipment from profit from the sale of my farm in Nelspruit. Anything else that I bought from there on I got from the local NTK or bigger stores in Gauteng. I also import some of my equipment for the hydroponic part of the business  Seedlings  Nursey in Tzaneen and Moeketsi. Sometimes I buy a specialised blend from the local horticulturist based in Harmony in Ofcalaco  I also use the seedling I get from the organisation, but I don’t sell that produce it goes into the feeding network |
| Where do you sell, which markets, to who? | * Johannesburg Fresh Produce Market * Nelspruit Fresh Produce Market * Tshwane Market * Springs Market * Cape Town Fresh Produce Market * Polokwane * Local communities close to the farm * Exports: Angola, Botswana |
| What do you supply? |  |
| How often? | Every day, depending on the produce. I prefer that we send the produce the same day we pick them from the field. But when cannot send them in time we put them in the cold storage |
| How did you get/find your market? | My husband helped. Because of experience, I was able to conduct correct research. |
| Are produce sold collected or delivered? | It depends on the destination. I do not have my truck so I use the local agriculture logistic company based in Tzaneen and Letsitele for my large orders that are going to the big markets |
| What quantity or value of each crop/produce sold? | I generally sell everything I sent to the markets. In the beginning, it was not easy, I use to operate at a loss and not be able to cover my transport costs but then I found the right market agents in all markets. They look out for my stock and always may sure I get the best price. |
| Which markets are working best for you? | Currently, it is the Springs market, for some odd reason demand has grown in that market during Covid. But Johannesburg Fresh Produce Market my main market in most cases my produce is sold out before it even reaches the floor because the ladies from Mozambique love my brand. I also don’t send the stock to just one market agent on the floor so that I can get the best price |
| What could be improved to make markets work better for you? | Price visibility |
| Have you sold elsewhere before? | Yes. I used to sell all the Spars in Nelspruit and various hotels, lodges and communities in Mpumalanga |
| Are you part of any association or organisations | Yes. I am just part of the farmer security association and the feeding scheme programme |
| Do you have any collaborations? | Yes. I collaborate with farmers in the area in the feeding programme. I also worked with various government departments |
| Since this time last year, has there been any changes in your farming, and if so what changes and when and if there was a change what caused the changes? | 1. **What do you grow?**   No   1. **The availability and prices you buy inputs for?**   No. The price is determined by the market, so prices fluctuate all the time   1. **The sources and prices you pay?**   Yes. I have started buying from a black seedling producer now. This was the first time I was trying it out.   1. **What do you sell?**   Yes. I have started selling herbs like mint and basil and spinach since the lockdown began   1. **The prices you sell for**.   Prices for lettuce have gone up because of the bad weather. So, I have taken advantage of this, but I have had to drop prices for my friends and family. I started selling 1 head for R5 ahead.   1. **In the cost of doing business.**   Yes the transport has gotten up quick a lot I saw a rise in my electricity costs especially for the hydroponic farm side but I supplement that with solar energy   1. **The quantity sold.**   Yes. There were heavy rains earlier in the season that damaged some of my open fields produce like cabbage. But it did not have a big effect on my bottom line   1. **Customers**   Yes. My local customer base has increased among informal traders in the communities nearby So, I went back to my normal suppliers.  Also, a lot of market agents called to ask if I had produced for them although they thought my produce was inferior before Covid   1. **Suppliers?**   No   1. **People you collaborate with.**   Yes. More farmers joined the feeding scheme network.   1. **The number of workers?**   No. The farm is quite spacious and most of the farmers stay on the premises so I did not have to ration any of the staff   1. **The government regulations or taxes or other government interventions**?   We have put in place Covid pre-cautionary measures, especially for the people, produce we export. We even got protection seals and changed some of our packagings so it would be easier to sanitize   1. **Space where you sell?**   No   1. How you travel to sell produce or to get inputs or to get inputs and the transport used?   Yes. I had to change one of the truck delivery services I was using because of upfront payments   1. **What has the biggest impact of Covid-19 on your farming? (Short & long term)**   There has been little no to no impact on the business. Yes, business dipped a bit due to bad rain and things like that but demand remained stable. In some cases, demand grew more than anticipated before the big lockdown. Local suppliers were asking us to fill their orders but we were already operating at capacity   1. **What are the impacts of the lockdown on your farming, including the markets you supply?**   I am quite elderly and take care of my elderly mum she is 98. So Covid meant I had to be more cautious. I also have increased my vitamin intake to ensure I don’t get sick and infect my mother   1. **Have there been any other changes (outside the farming) impacts in your life from Covid?**   I lost a few close relatives to Covid during the second wave. |

H. COVID-19 and COVID measures

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| What do you know about government responses to Covid? | We are in lockdown. The government is trying to curb the spread of the virus. The law says we must sanitize and observe social distancing so as not to spread the virus |
| How did you hear about Covid and the government responses to it? | I heard about it over the radio. I also read some of them over the news. My husband also informed me about the interventions available because he is an agricultural extension officer |
| How have these responses affected you? | Because of my work as a health practitioner, I was always cautious even before Covid |
| How have Covid and Covid measures affected your household and reproductive work? Any effects on economic activities | Covid made it easy for people to steal at my farm. Because of this, I could not make the money I use to make. Life is tough. My husband is a full-time pastor, so because we could not physically be at church it becomes hard for us to survive |
| How have you responded to the changes brought by Covid? | We have changed our packaging to something easier to wipe down [sanitize]. We bought various PPE for employees and introduce measures inside the packing house |
| Have you benefitted from any Covid related government or non-government support? If so, what support was received? | No |
| How have you responded to the changes imposed by the government? | 1. What did they do in response (probe any innovations, changes in equipment or technology)?   No   1. Participation in any associations? Has the role of that association changed?   Yes, the farmers feeding network   1. Have you been part of or had any discussion with any government officials or leaders? If so with who/which level of government? Did you get any benefit or see any change from that discussion?   Yes. I was in some discussions with the Limpopo Department of Social Development. |
| Has there been any change since Covid in what you and your family eat? | No. My mom is elderly so we tended to go around as much |

**Additional Notes**

**October 2020 | 12:00pm**

Online

Aside from her farming business, Mamello serves as the country representative for an international faith-based feeding programme based in the US. Mamello coordinates feeding programmes in the country by requesting farmers to grow seeds, sent by the organisation, that help supply local feeding programmes, she also educates households in poorer communities about the benefits of good nutrition by eating a balanced diet and helps these communities grow vegetable gardens of their own. In addition, Mamello’s work in South Africa led the organisation to send her out into the rest of Africa doing the same work she does at home.

The week before the national lockdown started, the feeding programme handed out food and dignity (hygiene) packages to over 1000 households in rural and poorer communities in the Greater Tzaneen and Giyani areas. Mamello said people were relieved because the lockdown started towards month-end – a few days before normal grant payments that would be delayed due to the outbreak. She even said that people who had snuffed the seeds, they hand out as part of the programme, we're asking for seeds so they too could grow gardens to feed their families. By October 2020, the programme had undertaken its fourth round of packages deliveries. According to Mamello, the number of recipients increased considerably as the lockdown intensified and more people came back home from Gauteng after losing their jobs, but more farmers joined the network and brought excess produce to help with the food needs of the community.

Similarly, the feeding scheme network assisted and partnered with the provincial department of social development to address the shortfall in feeding projects during Covid