**AMUKELANI’S FOOD FLOWS**

**BELEZWA’S BUSINESS FOOD FLOWS**

**Amukelani Interview notes**

**INTERVIEW INFORMATION**

Date: 28 October 2020 – present

Location: Ophir, Agricultural Holdings (AH), Meyerton

Interviewer: Makhanana Malungane

1. **PERSONAL INFORMATIONS**

Name/pseudonym: Amukelani

Age: 32

Sex: Female

Highest Level of Education: 2x honours degrees

Role in agro-food system: Farmer

Do you have other occupations? Writer & media consultant

How long have you been involved in the business? Since 2019

1. **FARMER**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| 8) | Where do you farm? | Ophir AH, Meyerton, Gauteng |
| 9) | What do you grow? Which of these are your main products? | * Green Peppers * Tomatoes * Spinach * Beetroot * Sweet potatoes, potatoes * Pumpkin and butternut * Mealies * Watermelon * Herbs (Basil, Thyme, Parsley, lavender) |
| 10) | How many hectares do you farm on? | 2 hectors |
| 11) | How did you obtain this land and under what tenure arrangements? | We bought the plot in 2018. My husband and I own the land. |
| 12) | Have you always produced and sold the same thing? | No. We have been going through a trial-and-error process trying to figure out what we are good at. |
| 13) | How did you start farming? How did you learn the business? Where did you obtain the capital? | A family friend, who owns a successful packhouse, introduced us to farming. He showed us how to find affordable land and some of the places to source supplies.  My husband and I used our savings and took out a bank loan to fund the surplus |
| 14) | How many people are employed full-time and how many casual or seasonal workers? | We have 2 casual workers that help twice a week, but my husband and I do most of the work when we are not working. Sometimes my family assist because they don’t live too far from us in Orange Farm |
| 15) | What are your main inputs | My inputs are seedlings, water, electricity, packaging, storage boxes, organic fertilizers (like grass and tobacco) and transportation |
| 16) | Where do you obtain your inputs? | We buy our seedlings from a local farmer in the Vaal or Bertrams. But they have become expensive, so we go as far as Pretoria to get seeds.  The storage boxes we bought at the local Spar and buy our packing from a local packhouse or in Alberton.  We get water from the borehole we dug when we moved here  We use the same electricity we use in the house. We mainly use the electricity for our admin very little farm-related tasks. |
| 17) | Where do you sell, which markets, to who? | 1. Spar and Pick n Pay in Meyerton as fillers for usual suppliers 2. Bakkie Traders 3. Informal Traders 4. Grasmere and Orange Farm (informal settlements and townships) 5. Freeling Vereeniging |
| 18) | What do you supply? | Green pepper, tomatoes and spinach |
| 19) | How often? | Every 4 to 12 weeks depending on the type of produce. |
| 20) | How did you get/find your market? | We approached managers at Spar and Pick n Pay  The order markets we got through people we know and our neighbours. We help them fill orders at times. |
| 21) | Are produce sold collected or delivered? | My husband delivers the orders in the bakkie. Sometimes I go along when I am not business homeschooling our daughter |
| 22) | What quantity or value of each crop/produce sold? | We generally sell our spinach for R12 a bundle, green pepper R16 for a packet of 6, and R10 for tomatoes. But prices fluctuate based on demand. The prices I am talking about here are what we sell the produce for at Spar and Pick n Pay.  Like with Freshlinq we take what we get. |
| 23) | Which markets are working best for you? | Selling out of the bakkies in Grasmere and Orange Farm. |
| 24) | What could be improved to make markets work better for you? | Public knowledge of prices. It seems we are price takers, especially with the supermarkets. They buy our products for cheap but end up selling them for almost double what they bought them for. |
| 25) | Have you sold elsewhere before? | No. |
| 26) | Are you part of any association or organisations | Yes. Farming God’s Way and Living seeds and other unofficial associations among farmers in the area and young black farmers |
| 27) | Do you have any collaborations? | Yes. I help most of my neighbours out when they can’t fill an order on their own. We don’t have a formal agreement, but it works out well for us. |
| 28) | 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. Our first harvest was during alert level 3, so we started seriously selling our produce during Covid   1. **The availability and prices you buy inputs for?**   NA. But prices change a lot during the different lockdown levels. Also, bad frost during winter badly affects farmers in the Vaal   1. **The sources and prices you pay?**   No.   1. **What do you sell?**   Yes. We used to be able to sell all our produce in the market we service but recently people don’t buy as much as before. So, we have begun processing some of the leftover produce into beetroot ice cream, tomato sources and baby food which we also sell.   1. **The prices you sell for**.   Yes. We had to increase the price we were selling to the supermarkets. It was not profitable especially considering how high growing the produce had become. We had a crop in that we could not salvage so we had to recoup some of the costs   1. **In the cost of doing business.**   No. There has been no change.   1. **The quantity sold.**   Yes. The number of the quantity we sell in the Grasmere and Orange farm has gone down. People just don’t have money.   1. **Customers**   Yes. We started selling produce to Freshlinq in early 2021 after the second Covid-19 wave and a disagreement with the local supermarkets overpricing.   1. **Suppliers?**   Yes. We found a cheaper supplier in Pretoria whose product is even better than what we find here   1. **People you collaborate with.**   No.   1. **Several workers?**   Yes. As the business grew, we had to find more casual workers to help especially with harvesting and packaging   1. **The government regulations or taxes or other government interventions**?   No   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?   No   1. **What has the biggest impact of Covid-19 on your farming? (Short & long term)**   Changes in demand and pricing. I think we are at the mercy of big corporates. Because of Covid we no idea where we stand. But there has been an upside, the lockdown allowed me to focus on the farm and the growth of the business. I would have not been able to do that before Covid because I use to work full-time   1. **What are the impacts of the lockdown on your farming, including the markets you supply?**   The markets change based on the different Covid waves. The other thing is we don’t know who our real market is because the people are unemployed.   1. **Have there been any other changes (outside the farming) impacts in your life from Covid?**   Covid has improved communication in my family. We are so much closer now. My husband even helps out with homeschooling our daughter |

H. COVID-19 and COVID measures

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| --- | --- | --- |
| 103) | What do you know about government responses to Covid? | I know the government has promised to help people and businesses that are affected by the pandemic. There is some sort of Covid-19 relief fund that came about through a social compact between the private sector and the government. There is also an awareness campaign about the virus, it is everywhere. The government has even gone as far as sending SMSs warning citizens about the virus. |
| 104) | How did you hear about Covid and the government responses to it? | I had about Covid-19 from a former colleague I had while working in the [United] States and a few others working on the continent. I heard about government responses on the iXhosa news and through a WhatsApp chain message. |
| 105) | How have these responses affected you? | Yes. But not all of them. There responses relating to being vigilant when outside and so on. But have not been affected at the business level both for the farm and media company I own |
| 106) | How have Covid and Covid measures affected your household and reproductive work? Any effects on economic activities | I cannot say how Covid affect my household and reproductive work because I had just given birth when Covid started. Also, I was working from home before the outbreak |
| 107) | How have you responded to the changes brought by Covid? | I was always conscious of my health before the outbreak. I am an advocate for natural remedies to any problem and unprocessed food. So, when Covid started I started finding out more about alternatives (natural) for sanitiser options, non-pharmaceutical prevention measures. But overall, there was not much of a change at a social level because we live in a plot with limited activity. |
| 108) | Have you benefitted from any Covid related government or non-government support? If so, what support was received? | No |
| 109) | 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)?   Natural sanitiser made with natural ingredients   1. Participation in any associations? Has the role of that association changed?   No   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?   No |
| 110) | Has there been any change since Covid in what you and your family eat? | We communicate more as a family. My husband has taken some of the house chores because he is working from home. |

**28 October 2020 | 14:00pm**

Ophir AH, Meyerton, Vaal

I was alerted about Amukelani’s farm through a friend. She knew Amukelani from her varsity and attends the same church as her. Amukelani is a published author, and her books are used as prescribed books across South African high schools. Amukelani lives on the farm with 6 other people that include her 2 children, 3 foster children and her husband. She co-own’s Amu’s Cabin, based in the Vaal, with her husband

Amukelani and her husband settled at North Ridging agricultural holdings after getting married. Amukelani says the area brought back fond memories of her upbringing in the rural Eastern Cape where farming was just the norm. It also made her long for the “simple” farm life especially in the fast-track life of the city.

After a visit from a friend, who is also a farmer in Bertrums, Amukelani realised it was possible to live the simple farm life in the city. A year later, Amukelani and her husband decided to reallocate to a 2-hectare plot in the Vaal. There would “live off-the-grind and be one with nature”. Once settled, she and her husband began to dabble into farming for domestic use and see which crops were good for the soil at the farm. They went to the local agricultural goods shop and bought green pepper, tomatoes, cabbage, and spinach seedlings. The seedlings grew more than they expected leading them to give away extra produce to friend and family. Amukelani says the performance of the first crop made her see that she could farm at a commercial scale and she decided to become “serious” about farming. From then on, she researched organic farming methods and selected the types of crops to grow. She used personal savings to buy what she needed and took it from three. The first harvest was pitiful because of poor weather conditions and limited farming know-how and could not be sold on a commercial basis. Again, Amukelani and her husband shared excess produce with friends and family, but they were also approached by a bakkie trader that noticed they farm while driving past. The bakkie trader was their first serious client.

The second harvest was better. Amukelani joined a black farmers forum, neighbourhood groups and other associations which helped to improve her farming and introduced her to possible markets where she could sell her produce. She heeded the advice and from there Yami’s Cabin was born. Amu’s Cabin started off to supply local supermarkets and branched into selling to nearby townships, Freshlinq (a fresh produce market in the Vaal) and informal traders.

She credits Covid for opening up a market for Yami’s Cabin among the supermarkets in her area. According to Amukelani, when her husband initially approached the local supermarket (before Covid0 he was told that they already had suppliers. But when her husband went there a second time (during Covid) to ask to supply the same supermarket the manager was more than willing because his usual supplier was having trouble meeting orders. He agreed to take on Amu’s Cabin as a filler but a month later they became the main suppliers requiring that they supply more produce than before. At first, they welcomed the increase in demand but after a while, it was hard to keep requiring Amu’s cabin to rely on the neighbourhood association to help fill their orders.

Similarly, during the same time Amu’s cabin started to sell their produce themselves in nearby Grasmere and Orange Farm – just like bakkie trader do. The move has garnered more customers and has led to more informal traders buying their stock from them. According to Amukelani, the method is more effective because they set the price and cannot be hackled by supply and demand.

However, during the second wave, Amu’s Cabin and the supermarket’s relationship turned sour due to pricing disagreements. Now Amu’s Cabin sells at the local Freshlinq, township residents and several bakkies and informal traders. Also, the business has started processing excess produce into organic products such as tomato sauces, essential oils, beetroot ice creams and baby food.

Looking ahead, Amukelani feels thing could get tougher as food prices rise especially for the informal markets they service. However, she feels the enough room to grow with the right strategies.