**WERHU’S BUSINESS FOOD FLOWS**



**Werhu Interview notes**

**INTERVIEW INFORMATION**

Date: 15 February – present

Location: Online

Place of operation: Sky City Housing Development, Midvaal Gauteng Cnr R550 & Garthview Rd

Interviewer: Makhanana Malungane

1. **PERSONAL INFORMATIONS**

Name/pseudonym: Werhu & Mom

Age: 24\50

Sex: Male\Female

Highest Level of Education: Matric\Studying

Role in agro-food system: Processor (D)

Do you have other occupations? Sales manager\Office manager

How long have you been involved in the business? Less than 1 year (business became operational June/July 2020

D. **PROCESSORS**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| 50) | What do you process? | Cabbage, potatoes, onions, butternut, spinach (ginger and garlic earlier on but it got very expensive) |
| 51) | Is this the only thing you process? | Yes |
| 52) | Have long have you been processing this? | 10 months |
| 53) | Have you always processed here? | Yes |
| 54) | How did you start this business? How did you hear and learn about the business? | My mother she also been interested in helping out the community. She was also entrepreneurial. The business idea comes about due to Covid. We live in a new housing development on the Midvaal (in the outskirts of Alberton), there is only one shopping complex there – Sky City Mall. It has one grocery store – Shoprite. Besides the mall, there is no other place to buy food, not even a spaza shop. In level 5 there were long queues at the Shoprite. My mom was familiar with Joburg Market because of the cooking she does with her society and family events. So, we decided to stock from there |
| 55) | Where do you source the products, you process? | Joburg Market, City Deep |
| 56) | What machinery and other inputs do you use? Do you own or hire inputs, such as packaging, electricity use, repair services needed such as sharing? | Equipment  Werhu’s private car.  Packaging  We repackage the goods into plastic bags and some woven sacks we buy at the market  Input  Electricity costs have remained the same because we run the business from our home |
| 57) | How often do you source the different produce? | Every Monday or Tuesday |
| 58) | Why source from these places? | Because my mom is familiar with the place. It is the only place we know that sells bulk fresh produce |
| 59) | To employ any people and if so how many? | No. It is just me and my mom |
| 60) | Who do you sell to (probe wholesale/retail ratios) | To the households of Sky City |
| 61) | Are you part of any association or organisations? | No |
| 62) | Do you have any other collaborations with others | No |
| 63) | Since this time last year, has there been any changes, and if so what changes and when and if there was a change what caused the changes, in |  |
|  | 1. *What do you sell?*   Yes. We had to stop selling garlic and ginger. It was just too expensive and only a few people bought from us   1. The prices you sell for?   Yes. To drum up customers we sold soup packs with 1 tomato, onion, green pepper, and potato at R 5. When we had enough customers, we started to price the products separately. People placed their order via WhatsApp and we delivered the produce   1. In your cost of doing business?   Yes. The door-to-door deliveries because quite expensive, especially since I was using my car   1. Frequency of purchasing inputs.   No   1. People you collaborate with   Yes. We are looking to source from local farmers after finding out there were farms in the area   1. The number of people you work with?   No   1. The organisation of the market   No   1. The government regulations or taxes or other government interventions?   Not applicable   1. How you travel to get your inputs and the transport used?   No   1. What has been the biggest impact of Covid-19 on your business? Do you think this is a short-term impact or long-term?   When there is a new wave demand goes down significantly, but the change is generally for a short period   1. What were the impacts of the lockdown on your business? Have you recovered from this?   Small losses during the second wave of the virus are   1. Have there been any other impacts in your life from Covid-19 and lockdown?   I have not contracted Covid but I lost some friends |
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**H. COVID-19 and COVID measures**

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| 103) | What do you know about government responses to Covid? | I know that it spreads easily and can transfer easily in crowded places |
| 104) | How did you hear about Covid and the government responses to it? | It was all over the news and the radio. It was explained at work |
| 105) | How have these responses affected you? | I am more cautious now, especially after coming back from the market. You interact with a lot of people when you are there. Imagine if I contracted Covid it would mess up the business because I live where the business is |
| 106) | How have Covid and Covid measures affected your household and reproductive work? Any effects on economic activities | Since it is just me and mom in the house nothing much has changed. It has affected how many times a week I go to work |
| 107) | How have you responded to the changes brought by Covid? | Yes. We ensure people sanitize before they enter the [house] yard. All visitors must wear a mask. We also make sure that no one enters the house. People need to place their order on WhatsApp before they come so we can have their order ready for them  We also sanitize the boxes when we come back from the market. |
| 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)?   No   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? | Yes. We have so many leftover veggies so we are eating healthier these days |

**Additional notes**

I got Werhu’s contact through a work friend. She lives in the same housing development as Werhu. Werhu and I have had 3 conversations over the phone. Key observations from the conversations are covered in the paragraphs below.

Werhu is a bubbly young man. He works as Sales Manager for a company based in Ormonde.

Werhu and his mom moved into Sky City in February 2020. They used to live in Zola, Soweto. When they were living in Soweto, his mom used to buy from the market whilst living in Zola especially for family functions such as funerals. He says his mom has always been quite entrepreneurial.

After seeing the long queues at local Shoprite (the only grocery store) in the housing development during Alert level 4 and 5, Werhu’s mom decided to start a business selling vegetables. She would go to Joburg market to stock her goods because she was familiar with the place. Her son will accompany her to help with the heavy lifting and they could use his private car to bring back the stock they bought. The business began in June/July 2020.

The first time they went to the market they spent 3 hours scoping the market floor; looking for the best products and prices. They arrived at the market at 6 am and left 3 hours later at 9 am. He finds going to the market frustrating, especially in the early mornings and bargaining with the market agent because he still has to go to work after going to the market. Werhu sees his mom business as distractions and does not seem invested in it.

After offloading the stock, Werhu and mom repackage them into soup packs, with 1 tomato, green pepper, potato and onion. They sold this soup pack for R5 each door-to-door in Sky City. The idea was to alert the community about the business. Thereafter people could contact them using WhatsApp to place their orders (including other products such as beetroot and butternut) and Werhu would deliver the orders.

In the beginning, business was doing well and they had more and more people buying from them, but the petrol costs were too much. He also found the entire exercise “so annoying… people who stay 3-doors from us wanted me to come and deliver some stuff at their doors. People did not want to leave their houses they wanted people to come to them. Even when the lockdown became less strict”. He says the other problem was the packaging. Because the product was pre-packaged in plastic bags the produce rotted much quicker. So, they decided to stop home deliveries and pre-packaging produce.

Instead, Werhu and his mom suggested that customers come and collect their orders from their house. He says because they were the only other place to buy vegetables besides Shoprite, their customer base remains the same, especially because their prices were lower than Shoprite. When the customer arrived, the customer would select the products they wanted and then Werhu or his mom would package it on the spot. This meant the produce stayed in the same packaging it was in when they bought it from Joburg market. According to Werhu, the change minimized wastage a lot.

Now Werhu and his mom restock every Monday or Tuesday. “Depending on his mood”, they can be at Joburg market as early as 6:30 am. Werhu admits that his mom does most of the work all he does is drive her around. She does the packaging and interacts with the customers; he is generally at work.

When asked about how the second wave affected the business, he said there was a big disturbance in their demand, but they made a loss. However, the produce they were buying was not the same quality as before especially potatoes, garlic and ginger. He says they could not afford to buy the usual cultivar they were used to buy in the beginning – prices were just so expensive. For example, we use to buy 10kgs of potatoes for R70 and the price rose to R80 during December. But now (15 February 2020) we are buying the same 10kgs for R40 or R50. Werhu exclaimed, “Even onions were expensive! Imagine 7kgs of onions for R80”. He says he doesn’t know why the price had gone up. But he says market agents said the prices were high because of seasonality and because the rand was low. He is not sure whether he believes it or not.

Another interesting observation was they could not find lemons at the market. “They were very scarce, them garlic and ginger. If you were lucky to find them, they would cost an arm and a leg, so we stopped buying them”. He said surprisingly people didn’t mind the price increases for garlic, ginger and lemon especially for those that had the virus because they could not find them anywhere. Also, he thinks demand remained stable because a lot of people didn’t go home for the festive season.

Going forward, Werhu expects the business to continue growing because they only fresh produce seller in Sky City. He says the only issue could be that they have other jobs. However, his mother is considering quitting her job to invest in the business full-time. According to Werhu, she had found a stand next to the mall where she can sell more vegetables. Werhu is not happy about the expansion, he says it will be too demanding for him.