

Called by the land

by Hanlie du Plessis



With enough passion one can overcome almost any hurdle in life. Tshepe Thabang, a farmer from the Maluti district in the Eastern Cape is living proof of that. His parents were subsistence farmers on a small piece of land. They could not afford for Tshepe to attend school after standard 5 for a proper education. This young, semi-illiterate man was forced to leave the area to find employment in the mines.

Years went by, but his passion for farming made him return to the area about ten years ago. He started off by leasing about three hectares on which he planted vegetables and kept some livestock. Next, he opened a shop from where he could sell his cabbage and potatoes as well as various other agricultural products. With his earnings he could eventually buy a decent tractor and implements. About three years ago, he leased more land and put about 70 hectares under maize.

Today, Tshepe has 100 hectares planted with Pannar 6777 maize. It is estimated that he will harvest about seven tons per hectare. No wonder that he was nominated for the Grain SA competition for the small scale farmer of the year!

Marketing of his maize is still a huge problem for Tshepe. He sells to a wholesaler in Kokstad and also to local people in bulk. He knows that the price he gets for his maize needs to improve to cover his input costs.

Tshepe told the *Ubisi Mail* on a recent visit to his farm, that the secret of his success lies in the passion he has for the land and the wonderful people that were willing to guide him over the years.

He met Tiny Walker, a representative of Kynoch fertilizers and Voermol for the district about ten years ago when he started farming. Tshepe stated that Tiny Walker has been a role model and a wonderful mentor to him over the years. Tiny also helped Tshepe to start dairy farming. He gave him ten cows to start with and two years in which to pay them. Currently, Tshepe owns 35 Jersey cross Friesland cows for the purpose of fresh milk, and his parlour is equipped with a modern milking machine.

Pondi Hombile, his extension officer, says that Tshepe is an example to other farmers in the area. He is serious about farming and you will always find him hands on, on the tractor, in the fields or with his livestock. He is also willing to listen and follow her advice.

Pondi introduced Tshepe to Harry Matabese, the Pannar Seeds representative for the district. Harry knows all about selecting the right cultivar for specific areas and conditions. He suggested that Tshepe plant the Pannar 6777 white maize cultivar. This resulted in the increase of Tshepe's harvest from just over four tons per hectare last year, to the estimated seven tons per hectare this year.

Petrus van Rooyen, Pannar's manager of market development said: "Pannar Seeds as a company is involved in various projects focussing on assisting and educating the developing farmer. We are proud to be associated with Tshepe and wish him only the best for the future." He is very happy with Harry's involvement in the local communities and supports all initiatives, such as farmer's days, that assist with the upliftment of farmers that are eager and willing to learn.

Tshepe is married and the father of three sons. Mrs Thabang looks after the shops and she is also the proud owner of a flock of about 80 sheep. Unfortunately not even one of their sons is interested in farming. They chose to become a lawyer, a doctor and a reverend. But who knows, maybe one day they too will be called by the land. **UM**



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Tshepe proudly shows of his mealies to Petrus van Rooyen, Pannar Seeds manager of market development, Pondi Hombile, extension officer and Harry Matabese, the Pannar Seeds representative for the district