

SPEECH BY MEC NAKEDI KEKANA: MARKET INFORMATION DAY – BLOUBERG POTATO DEVELOPMENT

30 July 2025

Programme Director,
Traditional Leaders present here today,
Representatives from De Beers Venetia Mine and the Agricultural Development Agency,
Officials from the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development,
Leadership from Potato South Africa,
Representatives from Land Bank, PEPSICO, NTK/VKB, and other financial institutions,
Our valued farmers and cooperatives,
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,
Good Morning,

It is both an honour and a pleasure for me to join you today here in Blouberg for this important occasion – the Market Information Day – a platform that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of our farmers, particularly those involved in potato production, a commodity that has become a backbone of agricultural transformation in this province.

As President Cyril Ramaphosa has said in his recent From the Desk of the President letter: "Agriculture has proven to be a resilient and growing sector in our economy." Indeed, even when other sectors wavered, agriculture remained steadfast, contributing positively to GDP in several quarters and serving as a key lever for inclusive growth, food security, and job creation.

In Limpopo, agriculture is not just an economic activity – it is a way of life, a source of identity, and a beacon of economic emancipation.

According to the recent Statistics South Africa GDP data, agriculture continues to be one of the few sectors that consistently contributes to positive growth. The Capricorn District – and Blouberg in particular – is emerging as a critical node in this agricultural value chain, thanks to the vision we have jointly pursued over the past decade.

Since the inception of the Potato Belt Development Programme in 2015, 742 hectares of land have been developed for potato production in the Capricorn District. Here in Blouberg alone, 8 projects have been supported with irrigation infrastructure, and 6 with marketing infrastructure, including two full pack houses at Sollys Boedery and Raletjena Farming.

To date, we have invested over R140 million, sourced from conditional grants, to develop infrastructure and empower farmers with the tools they need to thrive.

In the current 2025/2026 financial year, R14.9 million is committed to complete 3 more critical projects – one each in Polokwane, Molemole, and Blouberg.

This investment is already bearing fruits: over 162 permanent jobs created, up to 4500 seasonal jobs annually, and a collective estimated annual gross revenue of R399

million. These are not just numbers – they represent dignity restored, families supported, and futures built.

This success story is not one written by government alone. It is a result of strong collaborations between the Department of Agriculture, commodity groups like Potato South Africa, and private sector players like De Beers Venetia Mine, through their implementing agency AGDA.

We applaud De Beers for their forward-looking initiative to develop an Agri Services Hub for Blouberg Potato Producers Secondary Cooperative. This hub, co-funded with the department, will provide services such as mechanisation, training, post-harvest facilities, and support for a 4-year potato production rotation cycle – a game changer for productivity and sustainability.

Our gratitude also goes to Land Bank, PEPSICO, NTK/VKB, and others who continue to make financing accessible for smallholder and emerging farmers. We cannot do it alone. The future of agriculture lies in these multi-stakeholder partnerships.

We also appreciate the work of Potato South Africa, whose mentorship, training, and enterprise development programmes have helped graduate 19 farmers from subsistence to smallholder level, with three now commercial producers. This is tangible evidence of impact.

Despite all this progress, we acknowledge that challenges remain. Limited access to mechanised equipment, reliance on selling unwashed potatoes in the informal market, inadequate harvesting tools, and insufficient financing to expand land under cultivation and achieve optimal rotation cycles are hurdles we must overcome.

These are not insurmountable problems, and today is about finding joint solutions. Together with our partners, we aim to improve mechanisation access, promote value addition through washing and processing facilities, expand training and mentorship, and strengthen market access through initiatives like today's Market Information Day.

We are particularly proud that two Blouberg-based producers – Raletsena and Mazeli farming – have secured off-take agreements with SIMBA (Pty) Ltd, covering a combined 100 hectares and over 5,000 tonnes of potato supply. This is the kind of progress we wish to replicate across the district, and ultimately the province.

None of this would be possible without the support of our Traditional Leaders, especially Kgoshi Seakamela, who not only released land for individual farmers but also for the Agri Services Hub. Development is only possible where land and leadership intersect for progress. Re a leboga kudu, Kgoshi.

We also thank Food for Mzansi for shining a light on the stories of our farmers – the real heroes of this journey. Your platform has become a bridge between rural realities and national policy conversations.

As we gather here, I want to issue a call to action.

To our farmers – organise yourselves into strong cooperatives. You are stronger together.

To our private sector partners – let us deepen our collaboration. Agriculture is not charity; it is a smart investment. To our government officials – let us continue to capacitate and walk hand-in-hand with our producers from the first till to the final harvest. To our young people and women – agriculture is your future too. Join this wave of transformation. And to all stakeholders – let us anchor agriculture as a pillar of rapid and inclusive economic growth in Limpopo and beyond.

Let today serve not just as an event, but as a renewal of our shared commitment to build an agricultural economy that leaves no one behind. Let the potato belt of Blouberg become a symbol of rural prosperity, black farmer empowerment, and economic emancipation for generations to come.

I thank you.