

# “Without agriculture, we are a dead nation”

John Mudau was born in Pretoria and moved to a village called Tshakuma in Thohoyandou at the age of five with his parents. On arrival, he was introduced to herding cattle, which he enjoyed. He fell in love with life in the rural areas that drew him back home while working at the place of gold, Gauteng.

**Nomvuyo Matlala**  
SUBTROP

**J**OHAN COMPLETED HIS secondary education in 1982 at Tshiemuemu Secondary School and qualified as a teacher in 1985 at Tshisimani Teachers College. He started teaching at Masakona Higher Primary School and moved to Realugile Secondary School in Alexandra, now known as Ekurhuleni Municipality. Being raised in a farming family where his father, uncles and brothers are maize farmers and his aunt and sisters grow cash crops, he decided to resign in 2001 to be a full-time farmer.

John's father, who was his technical advisor at a time, got him land from the local Chief at the head of the Tshakuma Mountain and encouraged him to invest in it. John's dream was to have a classy restaurant on top of the mountain where people could relax and refresh viewing the beauty of Venda. That dream was washed away by the 1995 floods when all the bricks he had bought were flooded in heavy rain.

In 1997 he met an extension officer, Mr. Mulaudzi, who advised him that the area is more suitable for macadamias or avocados which are in demand and have good returns. He visited five nurseries in Levubu to learn more about macadamias and selected the best trees. He bought trees from Dr. Dries Alberts in Levubu and planted 4 ha of macadamias and 1,5 ha litchis in 1998. More than half the litchi trees died due to heavy rain at that time. That encouraged him to plant even more. It all paid off in 2000 when he harvested 3 tonnes of litchis.

In 2001, John was introduced to bee farming by the Bee Foundation and went for training in 2004 at the Agricultural Research Council in Levubu.

That helped him with the cash flow as the litchis were alternate bearing. He supplied Spar and other companies in Polokwane and Pretoria with honey.

He said that the demand gets so high in the local community that he occasionally fails to supply his customers, as it is used for skin treatment and weight loss.

With his first macadamia harvest of 1,5 tonnes in 2007, he bought a knapsack sprayer and Roundup to control weeds, applied fertiliser and hired two permanent workers. The harvest increased yearly until 2012. He has been harvesting 3 tonnes for the past five years, because of a lack of water. John believes with an irrigation system he would be producing at maximum potential. He has sought support from the government many times without any success. He has approached financial institutions but is not getting anywhere because he does not own the farm. He is committed to loaning money, and will repay the debt if someone is willing to assist him to buy a tank, pipes and a sprayer to control stink bugs.

John's children are involved in the business, especially during the holidays. As the macadamia orchard is on a steep

slope, his younger boy presented the strategy to use a pipe to move nuts from the top of the mountain to the shed house at the bottom. The four boys help him to dehusk the nuts using a hamer, and spread them in the shed to dry. He would like to build a bigger store room with a dehusking machine, dryer bins and a house for his workers to prevent theft and vandalism. John plants 100 trees every year to extend his orchard. He is training his young trees and pruning the older ones to keep them at the right level. He learned these techniques from the 2015 Emerging Growers' Information Day at ZZZ.

John says if the government can come in full force and subsidise farmers instead of giving out everything for free, more jobs will be created. He says there is corruption in the criteria used to select farmers to fund and most of them don't have a passion to farm. "If you receive government support every year, then you are not a real farmer."

"Agriculture is life and without it, we are nothing. Even the Bible is clear about that. Without agriculture, we cannot survive. A nation that fails to produce and feed its people is a dead nation," John says. ♦

**Macadamias, litchis and bee farming, all part of a hard working John Mudau's farming enterprises, for the love of agriculture.**

