

Challenger Type: The People's Champion

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Standing up for those who have historically been excluded to create meaningful, sustainable change.

The Umthunzi Farming Community is a marketplace for seasonal, organic #VegWithAnImpact grown by small-scale farmers in Cape Town in the Western Cape. The organisation was started in 2018 following the observation of a crisis among low-income farmers across the Cape Flats: these farmers had grown hundreds of brinjals, which were ripening rapidly, yet had nowhere to be sold, resulting in a significant loss of income.

This wasn't simply an issue about food being wasted – although that is a huge challenge in South Africa, where up to a third of the food produced in the country, or 10 million tonnes, is wasted each year. This issue was – and still is – a symptom of a highly dysfunctional food system that has resulted in the economic and social exclusion of hundreds of farmers simply because they didn't have access to conventional routes to market, which have long been dominated by larger players.

Connecting a community of farmers, volunteers, consumers and other stakeholders, Umthunzi has created an e-marketplace that is slowly transforming not just the lives of the individual farmers, but also transforming the local food system to be more sustainable, ethical and transparent.

Restoring power to the people

The People's Champion stands up for those that have been short-served or exploited by the establishment for too long – often because the dominant players in the market have been putting their needs first.

Video source: [House and Leisure](#)

Making change happen

The People's Champion is not simply a protestor, but is an active agent of change. It aims not only to give a voice to the unheard, but also create new models and systems that give power back to the people rather than have it stay in the hands of the few. Solutions from The People's Champion are created with the people's interests at heart.

Importantly, The People's Champion doesn't always have to be a big superhero who swoops in to save the day. A People's Champion can be a smaller group of individuals, getting their hands dirty – in Umthunzi's case, quite literally.

Umthunzi economically empowers urban farmers by facilitating access to new consumer markets, assisting with the marketing, sales and distribution of their seasonal produce. The produce is sold weekly through the Umthunzi Harvest Bag, which is full of seasonal, organic produce that is sold at local collection points throughout the city of Cape Town. Umthunzi also offers a subscription-based option that provides even greater stability for farmers by enhancing planning and planting of local produce.

1. [Averda, FASA](#)

Letting people lead

The People's Champion advocates for the interests of these short-served individuals, their needs and perspectives, which have historically gone unheard and have been deprioritised.



Image source: [Umthunzi Farming Community](#)

Umthunzi's empowerment of farmers extends beyond creating market access. It also includes enabling and encouraging these farmers to take ownership of the fresh produce value chain through skills development and training, as well as helping farmers become responsible for their availability list. Further still, Umthunzi has conducted extensive research on pricing across the region to ensure that their farmers receive fair compensation for their produce.

In doing so, Umthunzi is driving the sustainable growth and provision of high-quality, local, seasonal, organic produce, creating jobs and supporting healthy, prosperous communities by giving the farmers access to markets that they wouldn't ordinarily have access to. It has given a voice to those that otherwise would not be heard through the power of collective scale, sharing their message in organic and friendly ways. They share their message persuasively not through preaching but through dialogue and storytelling, giving the people they serve

the space to share their personal stories of success.

They call this #VegWithAnImpact.

This is achieved through a model that doesn't just promote the empowerment of farmers, but also through a concerted effort to improve consumer consciousness through education and awareness of the local food system.



Image source: [Umthunzi Farming Community](#)

For Umthunzi, when the farmers win, they win – and so does broader society.

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