

Sopia shines the spotlight on the potato industry's resilience

By [Ursula Human](#)

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State of affairs addresses are not only hosted by and for local government. The South African potato industry recently hosted its very own State of the Potato Industry Address (Sopia), giving an overview of this vital sector and commodity.



Image by Author/ Dr Brylyne Chitsunge and Willie Jacobs.

This inaugural Potatoes South Africa (PSA) event was presented as a hybrid affair on 5 May 2021. A breakfast was hosted for media and industry role-players at the Woodhill Residential Estate and Country Club in Pretoria, which was also streamed live.



Potatoes SA campaign to unpack position of potatoes during pandemic

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Themed #WhenHopeWhispers, the initiative aimed to give a voice to the role-players (producers, distributors, informal and formal traders, and consumers) that continuously move the potato industry forward.

Female powerhouses praise potatoes

Dr Brylyne Chitsunge, commercial farmer and Pan-African Parliament's (PAP) ambassador for food security in Africa, highlighted the role of the potato in ensuring food and nutrition security in South Africa.

Dr Chitsunge said, as a crop that is relatively easy to propagate and has such high nutritional value, it is a crucial crop for small-scale and commercial farmers to produce. As a female farmer, she also emphasised the important role that women can play in driving food security in SA.

The second guest speaker of the event was another female powerhouse – Thabi Nkosi, agricultural economist of African Green Alpha. She gave an overview of the production of potatoes in the country and emphasised that potatoes have the potential to become an even bigger commodity, such as maize.



Image by Author/ Thabi Nkosi, agricultural economist of African Green Alpha.

Although potatoes are the world's fourth most significant food crop after maize, wheat and rice, its health benefits and ability to ensure food security means that the industry needs to expand even further, said Nkosi.

The humble spud and Covid-19

Willie Jacobs, CEO of PSA, delivered the official SOPIA speech and discussed the impact that Covid-19 has had on the industry, and how potatoes could contribute to recovering from the pandemic.

According to Jacobs, despite the chaos brought about by Covid-19, South African potato producers planted on approximately 51,000 hectares, produced a total crop of 2,6 million tons and delivered 263 million 10 kg bags of potatoes during 2020.

Jacobs also emphasised how the humble spud could contribute to stronger immune systems and improve the nation's resilience to the virus. Potatoes contain some vital nutrients such as potassium. In fact, they have more potassium than

most fruit and vegetables. A 150 g serving of boiled or baked potato, with the skin on, will provide 710 mg of potassium.

This little gem from the soil is also rich in other crucial immune-boosting nutrients, such as vitamins B6 and B9 (folate), copper, iron, magnesium, and zinc. It also contains other important minerals, including calcium, iodine, phosphorous and manganese.

The industry is looking forward to next year's SOPIA where role-players will hopefully have the opportunity of networking and convening face to face.

For more information, contact PSA at 012 349 1906 or www.potatoes.co.za.

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