

## **CEO-REPORT POTATO CERTIFICATION SERVICE**

Since my appointment as Chief Executive Officer of Potato Certification Service (PCS) in February 2008, I have realized that the seed potato industry is extremely dynamic and competitive.

Seed potato growers consider certified seed as the most important marketing tool contributing to their success. The certification personnel view the Scheme as a means of ensuring that high quality planting material is available to the potato industry in a sustained way. This implies that the Scheme is so much more than just a certification label on a bag. PCS and its personnel consider ourselves partners of the potato growers, assisting them to achieve the goal of pursuing a sustainable supply of healthy planting material to the industry. Caring for the environment by limiting the spread of soil borne diseases to other areas is but one of the aspects that are taken into account.

It is the responsibility of the Independent Certification Council for Seed Potatoes (ICCSP) to ensure that the Scheme is applied efficiently and attainably in the interests of the total potato industry. As the agent appointed by the ICCSP, PCS has to report to the Council on all aspects of certification.

The Scheme has been carefully evaluated in the past two years and dispensations and amendments have been made in order for us to comply with the Scheme. Dispensation has been requested for the planting of *Round-up Ready* Soya beans as part of the rotation with potatoes as well as for the planting of *Brassica* crops. These crops are listed in Table 1 of the Scheme as hosts of bacterial wilt and can therefore not be planted in rotation with potatoes. These practices have been ongoing for decades. Results obtained from these dispensations will be used to motivate the amendment of the table in 2012.

The voluntary regrading of seed has been requested since 1999. The application of voluntary regrading in other countries has been investigated and at the June 2009-meeting, the Council approved the voluntary regrading of seed. The PCS database was amended to make provision for the tracking of regraded seed.

The seed industry has not been without its challenges. PVY<sup>NTN</sup> is currently seen as one of the biggest threats of the potato industry due to the fact that the necrotic ring spots that could develop as a result of such an infection, makes the yield unmarketable. PCS has been proactive with regards to this. In June 2009 tolerances for visual symptoms of Potato Tuber Necrotic Ringspot Disease (PTNRD) on seed potatoes at tuber inspection was approved by the Registrar of the Plant Improvement Act. Gladdening to say is that to date it has not been necessary to apply these tolerances as the virus field sample result was the determining factor.

It is envisaged that 2010 will be the year in which the whole Scheme will be revisited and improved where necessary. Impractical regulations will have to be amended to make way for a Scheme that is practical, catering for the needs of the full spectrum of growers

of the total potato industry. Role players will be invited to contribute to improving an already great Scheme.

One of the highlights of 2009 was the World Potato Congress that was held in Christchurch in New Zealand. New contacts and networks were established. Following on the Congress, a certification workshop was held, which was attended by the certification authorities of Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand as well as South Africa. I once again realized that we have a great Scheme which is superior to a lot of other Schemes.

The 2008/2009 reporting year was one of the most challenging for the potato industry thus far due to the global financial crisis resulting in input costs skyrocketing. This was definitely felt as the number of hectares registered for the 2008/2009 reporting year plummeted to 9030 hectares in comparison with the previous three years of more than 10 000 hectares registered. This also had a significant impact on the income of the company. A huge effort was made to limit expenditure where possible, but to still deliver the necessary services to our clients.

Regarding the personnel, there were quite a lot of changes seen in the past two years. Chris du Toit retired and Frank Osler was appointed as the new Technical Manager of PCS. Three certification officials resigned and moved on to new challenges. This resulted in the appointment of 4 new trainee certification officials.

The development and training of all staff received a lot of attention in the past year. The in-house training of trainee certification officials was revised and the trainees are now authorized on each aspect of the certification process as they qualify after intensive training and evaluation. The training plan submitted to the AGRISETA includes training in computer skills, financial aspects, potato pathology as well as AVCASA-training. Continuous development of our personnel is of the utmost importance.

Without its personnel, PCS is nothing. A company cannot deliver a service if there are no personnel. The Board of Directors therefore acknowledged the scarcity of the certification personnel by addressing the structure of the salary packages as well as the remuneration. The total cost of employment principle is applied and personnel performance is taken into consideration.

In collaboration with Bayer CropScience, the main sponsor of the Seed Potato Grower of the Year-Award, the criteria has been changed in order to make it possible for growers to take part in the competition irrespective of the generations of seed they grow. The award is seen as the most prestigious award in the industry. The Top Ten-list of seed growers received a lot of attention in 2009 and we look forward with great anticipation to the announcement of the 2010-winner.

I would like to make 2010 the year in which “Service delivery with a difference!” will be our slogan. Let us put ourselves in the other person’s shoes before we decide how we are

going to react. Ghandi said: "Be the change you want to see in the world!" With that also comes a Boere-saying: "Woorde wek, maar voorbeelde trek!"

Thank you very much to every one, from the personnel to the Directors, who went out of their way to walk the extra mile. It is noticed and appreciated. Let us use 2010 to reach our full potential and to make the service we render indispensable.

Kind regards

Sanette Thiart