

POTATO CERTIFICATION SERVICE

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The potato seed industry is controlled by the Independent Certification Council for Seed Potatoes (ICCSP) which has appointed Potato Certification Service (PCS) as its agent to administer the South African Seed Potato Certification Scheme promulgated in terms of the Plant Improvement Act, 1976 (Act 53 of 1976).

PCS has in turn recommended that ICCSP accredit the Coen Bezuidenhout Seed Testing Centre as the controlling laboratory to carry out all diagnostic tests required in the seed industry. They in turn have accredited four regional laboratories to assist in these diagnostic tests. The laboratories will be dealt with separately in this issue and do not fall under the ambit of my Chairman's report.

I believe that some regional background will help to understand the seed industry in South Africa and enable readers to formulate a picture of the respective regions in which certified seed is produced. The respective seed production regions each function under a Seed Potato Committee with a chairman who serves on the National Seed Potato Committee and the Board of Directors of PCS.

Without the current regional emphasis, our seed industry would be very fragmented and this would be detrimental to the commercial farmer. I believe that the current structure and its rules of engagement with regard to certification provide the commercial farmer with a level of confidence that the seed which he buys does conform to a very high standard. The seed grower in South Africa measures himself against other seed growers and is proud of the fact that he is capable of producing certified seed potatoes. The seed growers are annually ranked and scored with a view to their being acknowledged as the Seed Grower of the Year – a sought after award. We have had three different winners of the Seed Grower of the Year competition since the new ranking system was implemented.

South Africa produces nearly six million bags of certified seed in all the regions and these are certified by a dedicated personnel corps consisting of 15 certification officials backed up by an office compliment of 10 people. The certification officials travelled 352 488 kilometres during the year under review to ensure that we are able to keep to our mission statement and to ensure that the commercial potato farmer has a source of good quality certified seed potatoes originating from a wide variety of growers and seed companies from which to choose. The seed is produced throughout the year and South Africa is one of a few countries in the world that can produce seed potatoes throughout the year.

I also wish to avail myself of this opportunity to emphasise that the seed growers are also clients of other seed growers in that they purchase their early generation material from other seed growers. It is not only commercial farmers who are clients. We are also clients of seed growers.

I believe that the number of varieties available to seed growers, processors, commercial farmers and the consumer is indicative of the seed growers' quest to produce a potato for different environments and not just to try to adapt an existing cultivar to the environment. We owe a great deal of gratitude to the Incas who developed today's potatoes from the biodiversity of the wild potatoes at their disposal in the Andes mountains – potatoes brought to the new world by the Spanish Armada.

I am pleased to report that PCS had a successful financial year. The company has adequate reserves and resources to carry out its primary function of providing certification services to the seed industry and to successfully carry out the mandate given to it by the Independent Certification Council for Seed Potatoes.

As we are a service-based organization, we are always faced with a manpower shortage. In order to address the problem we have implemented a training program managed by Frank Osler to ensure that we are always able to provide the good quality service for which we have become known. The fact that our personnel are sought after in the potato industry as well other industries bears testimony to the good quality of training which our certification officials receive, as well as our quest to only appoint the best person in the post.

I believe that it would be amiss of me not to thank the following people who have made PCS such a huge success: Firstly, the seed growers of South Africa who annually plant 10 000 ha for the production of seed potatoes. Without your continued success and support PCS would not have a reason to exist.

Secondly, the employees of PCS without whose dedication and sense of duty we would not be able to provide the service which we do.

Thirdly, the commercial potato farmers of South Africa, the clients of our clients: Thank you for buying certified seed and contributing to our success.

I must also thank our Managing Director, Sanette Thiart, for her dedication and the long hours which she has sacrificed and hard work which she has done for this organization. I am sure there were a few people who had their doubts when we appointed her as the Managing Director, but I wish to congratulate her on the thorough way in which she works. She has proved that we made a good choice when appointing her as the Managing Director.

I am grateful to Gavin Hill and KwaZulu-Natal: Thank you for sending Gavin as your representative. He is an exceptional vice-chairman and is always willing to give up his time in the interests of this organization – even at times of trying circumstances back home on his farm.

The following directors resigned: Mr Tiekie De Kock and Mr Van Zyl van der Merwe. We thank them for their service. The Board of Directors now consists of 9 directors from the main seed growing regions.

From a personal perspective I believe that the seed potato industry is at present strong, healthy and in good hands, although the lack of new upcoming seed growers as well as the lack of black commercial potato farmers is perturbing. There is also a lack of black seed growers. I believe that our industry has probably not done enough to ensure its own long-term survival by assisting new growers to become competent seed potato growers.

For as long as I have been in agriculture the potato industry has always remained unregulated with regards to varieties, hectares and marketing. It has survived on the free market principle and may it long still do so. Many other regulated agricultural industries which were deregulated found it very difficult to survive the past 15 years of our democracy. I am happy to say that the seed potato growers have really seized our new democracy and have supplied our industry with GOOD QUALITY SEED POTATOES.

DESMOND HYMAN
CHAIRMAN: POTATO CERTIFICATION SERVICE