

## **POTATO CERTIFICATION SERVICE**

### **MANAGING DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

In the year under review the seed producing sector of the industry saw a remarkable recovery after the global financial crisis hit the South African seed potato industry very hard in 2008/2009. The crisis brought the number of hectares registered in 2008/2009 down to the lowest level in seven years, namely 9 030. I have come to learn that the South African seed growers have plenty of resilience and love what they do. The number of hectares registered in the year under review was eventually higher than the 10 000 upper benchmark, namely 10 222.

#### **Finances**

This resulted in a very good year for Potato Certification Service (PCS) financially. PCS is currently in a very sound financial position as the assets (R5 312 648) exceed the liabilities (R1 260 404) by a total of R4 052 244. The loan to Potato House (Pty) Ltd is R1 072 329 in respect of which 8% interest is earned annually. An interest free loan from the seed growers to the value of R1 159 683 is a long-term commitment. The reserves of the company were boosted in order to act as a safety net in the lean years.

I am proud to say that the administration of the company is done very effectively. The financial year-end was not any different from any other month-end. My thanks go to all my staff and Reinet van Staden of Messrs Fourie & Botha who is so meticulous in her work. Without all of your effort and cooperation this would not have been possible.

We have seen 14 new entrants to the seed production arena. A total of 163 hectares was registered by the new entrants. We wish all the new entrants all the best and a successful career in seed production. This brings the present total number of active seed producers to 255 of which 159 registered plantings in the year under review.

#### **Corporate identity**

Owing to the good financial position of the company, some of the available funds were spent on the establishment of the corporate identity of the company. Custom made soccer shirts boosted the morale of the personnel. The directors as well as personnel also received shirts reflecting the company logo. Beautiful banners to be used at all meetings were printed and are used whenever the opportunity arises. Magnetic name tags for the personnel also add to the professional image of the company.

#### **Administration**

At this point I would like to thank the administrative section of Potatoes South Africa for the service which they rendered to PCS regarding personnel administration. PCS will, however, be handling its own personnel administration in future. I would also like to especially thank Clive Trent for his role as company secretary. His minute writing skills are rarely seen. It testifies to utter professionalism and accuracy. Congratulations on a job well done.

## **Personnel**

This brings me to my personnel. I would like to salute each and everyone in the company for embracing the changes which have been implemented in the past three years. It has been a steep learning curve for everyone in the company. Each and every person has been challenged to participate in the training plan submitted to the AGRISETA. The saying is: There is no learning in comfort and there is no comfort in learning. It has been amazing to see the increase in your confidence as a result. The development of each person is important.

Thank you to every certification official who was willing to walk the extra mile in order to render the necessary services to the seed growers. Two personnel members were lost owing to disciplinary action. This really placed the personnel under huge strain. Every request for assistance was met with the greatest cooperation ever seen. I would like to extend a special word of thanks to Jamie Jansen van Vuuren who was willing to be transferred to Christiana again. This is much appreciated.

I would also like to welcome three new certification officials in training to the staff. Murray Sanders was appointed in the Pietermaritzburg regional office, Marius Uys in the Piketberg regional office and Driaan Conradie in the Christiana regional office. From what we have seen so far, I believe that you fit in well with the company profile and that you have a great future with us. Thank you to all the growers who welcomed these certification officials. We assure you that they will receive the best training in the shortest time possible.

I am proud to say that Frank Osler, our Technical Manager, has done an excellent job in designing a custom-made training program which will not only give all our trainee certification officials the best exposure, but will also challenge our experienced certification officials. Part of the training program entails a practical test. Plantings with seed potatoes infected by various diseases and being of various degrees of mixing will be done. These training plots will then be used to evaluate the certification officials with regard to their practical skills.

Thank you to every certification official who was willing to help out in other regions. There are rewards for overcoming every challenge. The fact that certification officials from various regions had to help out in other regions showed us where we had to improve our service and what we needed to address in order to have the same standard of service in every region. I do, however, believe that this will not be necessary in the coming year as our trainees qualify for the different aspects of the certification process.

The PCS workshop has become an annual event which is one of the highlights on our calendar. Once a year the personnel get the opportunity to get together and discuss mutual challenges and victories. This year's workshop was held at Club Mykonos on the West Coast. The workshop bore testimony to how everything is done in certification. We work hard and play hard. It was heartening to see the passion which the personnel have for the seed potato industry.

## **Collaboration**

I am proud to say that there is excellent collaboration between PCS and Potatoes South Africa. Here I would like to especially mention the support which PCS receives from Dr Ben Pieterse, Manager:

Research and Development. Ben's passion for the industry rubs off on everyone around him. He has been a valued partner in the protection of the South African potato industry against new emerging diseases. Thank you for all the research done on aspects which could have a huge impact on the seed industry.

I would also like to thank Estelle Theron for the way in which she has been performing her job as editor of the *Chips* magazine. Thank you for your cooperation and inputs. This is much appreciated.

### **Seed growers and other clients**

Without your putting good certified seed in the soil, this company would have no right to exist. Keep on doing what you have been doing for ages. We have an excellent Scheme which is there to protect your interests and your future sustainability. Sure, we do have challenges. Disease pressures, water quality, availability of land are but a few of them. The world population is growing by the day and we as South Africans have a huge role to play in food security in not only South Africa, but in Africa as a continent as well. Keep on planting as we have nations to feed.

### **Committees and Forums**

I would like to extend a word of thanks to each member of the National Seed Potato Committee, the Council members of the Independent Certification Council for Seed Potatoes (ICCSP) and the Board of Directors of the company. You play a pivotal role in sustaining the future of seed production in South Africa. I would like to especially thank Ms Joan Sadie, Registrar of the Plant Improvement Act, for the way in which she has taken time to become acquainted with the seed potato industry and her commitment to and interest in the Certification Scheme.

I would also like to extend a special word of thanks to the chairmen of each of the committees. Dr Dave Keetch, chairman of the ICCSP, is willing to serve for another term. Gerhard Posthumus was appointed as the new chairman of the National Seed Potato Committee and the Forum. I wish you all the best with the old challenges the seed industry will bring in your new position. A big thank you goes to Van der Spuy Botes who chaired these committees before. It was great working with you.

Lastly, but definitely not the least, I would like to thank my Executive Committee of the Board of Directors, namely Desmond Hyman, Chairman of PCS, and Gavin Hill, Vice-Chairman of the company. Thank you for the interest which you take in the company affairs. Thank you also for the passion which you have for the seed potato industry. I have learnt a great deal from you and no thank you can be enough to show my appreciation for the time and effort which you have put into this company. It is commendable.

In conclusion, I would like to wish you a prosperous, happy and healthy new year. Remember, the only seed to plant is certified seed!

Sanette Thiar  
Managing Director: Potato Certification Service