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27 schools. 118 farmers. 44 award categories. 10 Royal Honourees.



...Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week gave farming a national stage.

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27 schools. 118 farmers. 44 award categories. 10 Royal Honourees. ...Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week gave farming a national stage.

By Topollo Tlali

Twenty-seven schools took part. One hundred and eighteen farmers were recognised across 44 award categories. Ten Royal Honourees were celebrated.

Over four days, Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week filled the 'Manthabiseng Convention Centre with the people, ideas and work behind Lesotho's food production. Organised by Seahlole Newspaper under Newsday Media, the 2026 event brought together hundreds of participants from farming communities in Lesotho and South Africa.

Producers stood alongside young agro-processors, agricultural experts, organisations, businesses and high school learners.

Company branding, exhibition stalls and musical performances added colour and movement to the venue.

Agriculture was visible everywhere: in the products on display, the conversations between farmers and experts, the learners presenting their projects and the applause for award recipients.

The week combined practical knowledge sharing, student participation, public exhibition and recognition of agricultural excellence. It gave farmers a place to discuss the obstacles they encounter in production and marketing, while allowing the public to celebrate the people whose work supports food security and rural livelihoods.

The first two days focused on the National Farmers Knowledge Exchange.

On day one, the conversation focused on livestock and poultry.

Farmers and experts exchanged ideas on feed management, animal health and productivity, including the need for local feed production and stronger support for livestock farmers.

Opening the programme on behalf of Agriculture Minister Selibe Mocho-boroane, Mabusetse Makau urged participants to use the gathering to find practical solutions.

"This gathering came at an important moment for Lesotho, when the country continues to face food insecurity, climate variability, declining soil fertility, pressure on rangelands, limited access to finance and markets, and dependence on imported food," he said.

Makau argued that farmers alone could not solve any of those challenges. "The challenges facing farming in Lesotho require farmers, researchers, development partners, businesses, financial institutions, media and communities to work together for improved value chains."

He also recognised Seahlole's role in convening the sector. "I recognise Seahlole Newspaper, Lesotho's premium agricultural publication under Newsday Media, for taking the initiative to convene the agricultural sector through a national platform. It is encouraging to see a media institution moving beyond reporting on agriculture and actively creating space for farmers, ex-



perts, policymakers and agricultural institutions to share knowledge, confront challenges and identify practical solutions."

For Makau, the platform's value depended on keeping farmers central. "Discussions about agriculture should not happen far from the people who work the land and carry the risks of production, and with Farmers' Pitso 2026, all are included to be in one room."

He called for reliable extension services, quality inputs, appropriate technology, affordable finance, effective insurance and access to markets, backed by policies that respond to the realities of production. He also appealed to development partners to see agriculture as an area for serious investment and lasting partnerships.

"Farmers, this platform exists because of you. Your knowledge, resilience and experience must guide today's discussions," Makau said before formally opening the programme.

On the second day, the Knowledge Exchange moved from livestock and poultry to grain and horticulture under the theme "From Field to the Market."

Panel discussions followed the agricultural value chain beyond production. Speakers examined how farmers could improve post-harvest handling, reduce losses, aggregate produce, obtain finance and reach markets that offer sustainable returns. Better storage and technical support emerged as recurring

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needs. Assistant FAO Representative and Head of Programme, Mokitinyane Nthimo, urged participants to assess whether investment supports national agricultural priorities. “If livestock production is declared a priority, then farmers should not still depend heavily on imported fodder when they have land that could be used to produce it,” he said. He added, “Most of the time we have normalised producing food for us, forgetting that animals also work hard in producing such food, so we need to choose our priorities

wisely and stick to them. Animals should not eat leftovers.” Nthimo questioned whether annual budgets reflect stated policy priorities and whether spending reaches farmers in useful ways. “Agriculture discussions should move beyond statements of intent and focus on practical solutions that align policy, investment and implementation.” The exchanges highlighted interventions farmers could feel on the ground: fodder production, extension services, irrigation and access to inputs. They also made clear that an agricultural budget’s success

should be judged by what it enables producers to do, particularly as they contend with climate shocks and low productivity. The third day brought a different kind of excitement to the convention centre. The National Schools Agriculture Challenge drew 27 high schools, whose learners presented projects, competed in quizzes and explained agricultural ideas and innovations. They spoke about farming with the curiosity and confidence of young people being given a platform of their own. Their participation showed how schools can help students see agriculture as a field where they can create, solve problems, and build a future. On the fourth day, exhibition stalls brought products, services and businesses into direct contact with farmers and visitors. The public could move between displays and conversations that showed how many people and enterprises contribute to agriculture beyond the farm itself. Musical performances added to the celebratory atmosphere as the week moved towards its awards ceremony. There, 118 farmers were recognised across 44 categories covering work from livestock and crop production to agribusiness. The awards placed producers in the spotlight and acknowledged achievements that can otherwise pass with little public notice, despite their importance to food production and community resilience. The celebrations concluded with a gala dinner attended by His Majesty King Letsie III. Ten Royal Honourees were celebrated for their contributions to agriculture and rural development, bringing the four-day programme to a close with recognition of service and lasting impact. Minister Mochoboroane used the gathering to stress that raising food production requires more than farmers’ commitment. Knowledge and skills, he said, must be shared widely and applied to the conditions of individual farms.

“Many farmers in Lesotho struggle not because they lack commitment, but because they lack proper training and practical guidance,” he said. The minister suggested that training even 300 farmers could have a wider effect if they returned to their villages and passed what they had learned on to others. He also called for experts to work directly with farmers in their fields, where advice could respond to the land, crops and challenges in front of them. “Lesotho used to perform strongly in farming because the soil was naturally fertile, but today the land needs better methods, improved inputs and more careful management. Working directly with farmers would help them make better decisions on seed selection, fertiliser use, crop care and harvesting,” he said. Mochoboroane also cautioned that mechanisation requires planning and proper support. “Agricultural growth depends on practical support, knowledge transfer and solutions rooted in the realities of the farm.” Farmers’ Pitso began in 2012 as a training session intended to equip farmers with basic skills. Awards were introduced in 2018 to celebrate excellence. Over the years, the initiative became a place for farmers to connect and showcase their work. In 2026, it grew from a one-day event into four days that brought learning, schools, exhibitions and recognition together. Applause for farmers was part of what made the week a success. Another was the sight of the wider agricultural community gathered around them: experts sharing knowledge, learners testing ideas, businesses presenting opportunities and institutions being asked to turn their commitments into practical support. Farmers’ Pitso Agriculture Week gave agriculture a national stage. Its next achievement will be measured by how far the knowledge, connections and momentum travel beyond it.





Beyond counting animals, farmers encouraged to build livestock businesses that last

Agriculture experts linked animal nutrition, breeding, healthy rangelands, and financial records to a question that matters across rural Lesotho: Is livestock ownership delivering a sustainable return?

By Topollo Tlali

A large herd can be a source of pride, but the number of animals a farmer owns does not, on its own, reveal whether the enterprise is productive, profitable or capable of supporting the next generation.

Profitability requires a closer look: at what the animals eat, how they grow and reproduce, the quality of their products, the condition of their grazing land, and the money spent keeping them alive.

At the livestock session of the National Farmers Knowledge Exchange, held during Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week, specialists urged Basotho producers to make those connections.

Their message was that livestock’s cultural importance should be matched by management that protects its economic value. The discussion brought together expertise from the National University of Lesotho (NUL), government departments, agricultural support programmes and accounting professionals.

It examined how research and everyday farm decisions can strengthen an industry central to rural livelihoods.

Moderator, Maoala Khesa, urged farmers to take practical lessons from the exchange.

“Farmers, to gain practical value from today, listen to research-backed steps you can apply on your farms; science-based changes accumulate into greater profits and resilience,” he said.

The discussions offered a way to assess livestock production: breeding, feeding, health, grazing, and finances, which must all work together. Weakness in one can undermine investment in the others, the experts stressed.

Professor Setsumi Molapo, Dean of the Agriculture Faculty at NUL, said research must play a stronger role in agricultural decisions, particularly as Lesotho seeks to strengthen local production and reduce dependence on imported products, including animal feed.

“A recurring problem we have observed is that our practices are not research-backed. Consequently, our agricultural sector continues to struggle; we need to invest in research and adapt to contemporary approaches,” he said.

He added, “It is equally important for us to understand genetics and the components of feed before distribution. This understanding can only be achieved through research.”

Molapo argued that sound management matters even where a farmer does not initially regard livestock ownership as a commercial venture.

“Although many do not farm with commercial intent, understanding that livestock is a business is key to maintaining good farming practices. We need to acknowledge climate change and recognise that institutions exist to help us progress from one level to another.”

The discussion returned repeatedly to nutrition. Buying a promising animal is only the beginning, but its performance also depends on the feeding and care that follow.

NUL animal science senior lecturer, Motselesi Mahlehla, said farmers must understand the relationship between feed and the quality of livestock products.

“We must ensure that what we feed our animals is appropriate to produce high-quality output. For this reason, our farmers must adopt strategies that align with proper animal nutrition. For our livestock to flourish, we need to ensure they receive a balanced diet.”

Mahlehla encouraged farmers to adapt their practices, using evidence to support changes in production conditions.

“My message is that adaptability is key for our farmers’ growth,” she said.

“To increase food production, the livestock value chain must be managed correctly, based on research conducted by institutions like universities and researchers.”

A veterinarian, Dr Mookho Ntiea, from the Ministry of Agriculture, connected feeding directly to animal health, saying diseases caused by a lack of nutrients in animal feeds can weaken an animal’s immune system.

She also warned that neglected animal care can affect offspring.

“With what other experts have said, I want to stress that in livestock farming, farmers need to treat nutrition and veterinary attention as continuing responsibilities, rather than waiting until an animal’s condition becomes visibly serious, and I highly encourage farmers to immediately report any signs of illnesses to their resource centres and the ministry; being proactive goes a long way for the country,” she said.

For grazing livestock, however, feeding also depends on land that many producers share. An individual farmer’s decisions therefore sit within a community’s management of its rangelands.

“Communal land requires clear regulations to allow pastures to recover and sustain future herds,” Khesa pointed out, and Mofihli Motsetsero, from the Ministry of Environment, argued that inherited livestock practices need to be examined alongside their effect on grazing resources.

“For too long, Basotho have viewed animal rearing as a hobby passed down through generations.

“The vital importance of these animals has been overlooked, leading to a lack of clear pasture management, specifically when, for how long and how many animals should graze a particular area,” he said.

His remarks placed rangeland protection within the livestock business itself: the land’s ability to provide forage helps determine whether herds can remain productive.

“We must ensure the quality of forage for livestock, which means our communities need to care for the land for the benefit of all,” Motsetsero said.

Itumeleng Pule, from the Ministry of Agriculture’s Small Stock Wool and Mohair Production Department, linked breeding decisions to the market.

Farmers, she said, should select animals with the products and customers they in-

tend to serve in mind.

“Farming is a business; to measure its productivity, a farmer must invest in good breeds because they contribute significantly to the animals’ value.

She stressed, “Farmers with quality breeds consistently achieve better market prices, which in turn increases demand for their products.”

Pule emphasised that breeding cannot be separated from nutrition and health.

“After selecting a good breed, master nutrition because animals are products of what they eat. Quality fodder enhances animal productivity. Following nutrition, prioritise animal health by seeking veterinary services and understanding your animals’ needs.”

She also raised an institutional question: how will farmers continue to receive services when time-bound agricultural projects end?

Pule called for stronger ministry systems and more efficient digital services, rather than dependence on information held by individual programmes. She welcomed providing tablets to veterinary personnel assisting communities as a step toward more accessible services.

Her concern extended beyond technology, noting farmers need continuity, “...institutions that know who they are, understand their enterprises and remain able to serve them after a project closes.”

Agricultural economist Moleboheng Bohloa turned the discussion towards the decisions made when establishing and running an enterprise.

“Farming is a business, and when first entering into animal rearing, careful consideration is paramount. Select the right breed, ensure proper animal nutrition, purchase appropriate feeds, and maintain thorough records to track progress.”

Bohloa said sheep and goat production can offer opportunities to farmers who manage it commercially. She challenged the habit of measuring achievement mainly by herd size.

“Basotho often fall into the negative stereotype of boasting about owning more animals than others. This approach is ineffective if the animals are not properly cared for, but with proper animal care, a business can genuinely flourish,” she said.

“We should prioritise investment in value above all in order to achieve higher returns. Understanding those returns requires records. Money received from sales can look encouraging while concealing expenses accumulated throughout the production period,” she said.

Brandon Nkwuelle Ekole, speaking from an auditing perspective on behalf of Esoning Firm of Chartered Accountants, urged farmers to record expenditure from the beginning of an enterprise.

“You might report a profit that, in reality, you haven’t made. Why? Because you haven’t comprehensively accounted for all the expenses you have incurred,” he said.

Good records help farmers understand past performance and plan what they can afford next.

“If you possess detailed records from a previous period, budgeting becomes straightforward, as records inherently inform the budgeting process. One can then accurately determine the costs required to run the project, at what capacity, and intentionally decide whether to increase capacity or not.”

Ekole said records also give an accountant or auditor useful information when assessing the business and advising on its future. But farmers need not wait for professional assistance to begin.

“Record-keeping is not a complex process; sometimes we get intimidated, wondering, ‘How am I going to do it?’ But it is easy: simply write down what you spend and what you earn, and we understand you are not an accountant, but write simply and clearly,” he said.

The livestock session made the case for changes farmers can begin themselves, alongside support that requires research, veterinary services and collective land management. Farmers can review feeding, seek credible advice and start recording expenditure. Universities, government and communities have responsibilities in making those decisions easier to carry out.

Closing the discussion, Khesa urged producers to use available services and question assumptions.

“Transform farming into a business, actively seek information, discard assumptions, and utilise available services to expand your enterprise,” he said.



National farmers knowledge sharing on livestock production panelists

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The cheapest feed can cost a poultry farmer more

Experts linked balanced feeding, disease prevention and food safety to stronger poultry businesses—and challenged researchers to bring their findings closer to farmers.

By Topollo Tlali

A cheaper bag of feed may seem like relief to a poultry farmer facing rising production costs. But if birds grow slowly, take longer to reach market weight or produce fewer eggs, the saving can disappear before the farmer makes a sale.

That was one practical lesson from the poultry session at the National Farmers Knowledge Exchange during Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week. Farmers and specialists examined how feeding, disease prevention, and everyday management affect both farm income and food safety.

“The cheapest bag is not always the cheapest feed, because it can lead to delays in production time and a failure to reach the target market,” said Reentseng Thakabanna, a feed formulator from Lesotho Flour Mills.

His message connected an immediate purchasing decision with the performance of the entire enterprise. Farmers need to assess what feed delivers, alongside what it costs.

Moderated by Refiloe Ranthamane, the session brought producers into conversation with specialists from the National University of Lesotho (NUL), the Ministry of Agriculture, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and Lesotho Flour Mills.

High feed costs, preventable disease, weak records and access to research were among the concerns discussed.

“This gathering aims to create a space where farmers can share experiences and learn practical solutions from experts to improve the poultry industry, management, and market access. Let’s all work together and be able to voice out most of the challenges facing us,” Ranthamane said.

The exchange reflected Agriculture Week’s purpose of connecting technical knowledge with the realities of production. For poultry farmers, that means understanding what happens between buying chicks and delivering birds or eggs to a customer.

Animal nutritionist Motselisi Mahlehla challenged feeding practices that rely on unmeasured quantities of maize, sunflower seeds or household leftovers without ensuring a balanced diet.

“Our farmers still employ unprofessional methods of feeding chickens; their approach to feeding chickens to reach their maximum potential is inadequate,” she said.

Mahlehla explained that feeding must match the birds’ age, type, and stage of production. Giving more feed does not automatically deliver better performance, while inadequate feeding can undermine growth.

“Underfeeding can stunt growth and weaken birds, while overfeeding wastes expensive feed and can also hinder their full production potential.”

She also cautioned against treating maize as a complete ration.

“While maize provides energy, it lacks the

complete nutrient profile necessary for healthy development, strong immunity, egg production, or quality meat. Feeding unmeasured amounts of plain grains like maize and sunflower seeds leaves birds deficient in essential daily nutrients,” she said.

The discussion emphasised the different requirements of chicks, growing birds, broilers approaching market weight and laying hens.

“Feeding decisions must suit those requirements if farmers are to manage costs and achieve consistent output.”

Thakabanna explained that commercial feed formulation brings ingredients together to meet nutritional needs.

“When formulating, we use many raw materials because we aim for chickens to receive different nutrients,” he said.

He urged farmers to consider feed quality and suitability when purchasing, rather than choosing solely by the price printed on a bag.

Appropriate phase feeding, he said, also helps producers plan their operations around the birds they intend to sell.

“For farmers aiming to compete in the market, correct feeding makes it possible to manage costs, estimate production timelines, and deliver birds when buyers need them.”

The conversation then followed poultry beyond the farm gate. Chicken meat and eggs become household food and enter informal markets, school meals, and retail outlets. Production decisions therefore carry responsibilities towards consumers as well as the enterprise.

FAO nutritionist, Kekeletso Mabeleng, said food safety begins long before cooking or sale.

“Food safety begins when farmers decide what to feed birds, how to manage medication, and how to maintain cleanliness on the farm. As FAO, we examine food from production through to the later stages when people consume it; the main issue is the food environment, where we consider the value at which food arrives in the human body in terms of accessibility and affordability,” she said.

Mabeleng urged producers to consider safety and quality throughout production, handling and preparation.

“In poultry, I would like to focus on safety and quality; if chickens fail to meet safety standards and reach people, such meat harms people’s lives. It is crucial for farmers to prioritise public health throughout the entire food preparation process, from the initial stage to the final product.”

Her message placed feed, water, medication, housing, slaughter hygiene and storage within the same food-safety chain. Failures along that chain can affect consumers and confidence in local products.

Ministry of Agriculture veterinarian Dr Mookho Ntia turned attention to preventing disease from entering poultry houses.

“Farmers must take precautions to prevent disease from entering poultry houses instead of waiting to respond after birds become ill.”



Motselisi Mahlehla animal nutritionist

She urged producers to ask suppliers about the origin and vaccination status of chicks before buying them.

“It is risky to acquire chicks without knowing their disease history or vaccination status; farmers should always seek this information from their suppliers,” she said.

Ntia also highlighted the movement of people and equipment as a concern. Visitors, footwear, clothing, crates and vehicles can introduce disease-causing organisms into production areas.

“As farmers, we must restrict access to poultry houses by limiting unnecessary visitors to prevent disease transmission. People can also be carriers of disease, so sanitisers should be readily available on farms,” she said.

“Farmers should sanitise egg trays, equipment, and vehicle tyres before they enter farm premises.”

The session also addressed responsible medicine use, observance of applicable withdrawal periods before marketing treated birds or their products, and the wider concern of antimicrobial resistance. Ntia encouraged veterinary guidance rather than improvised treatment.

Safe disposal of dead birds and waste, along with removing spilt feed that attracts rodents and wild animals, formed part of the discussion on farm hygiene.

For farmers already struggling with costs, disease prevention can seem like another demand on limited resources. The session framed it in terms of production economics: protecting a flock helps protect the investment in chicks, feed and labour.

Professor Setsumi Molapo said NUL researchers were examining ways to make poultry feeding more affordable while maintaining performance and product quality.

“At the National University of Lesotho, many researchers are focused on poultry; research related to poultry feeding significantly impacts farmers’ costs, and our re-

search aims to lower feeding costs to a level that local farmers can afford,” he said.

He described work involving indigenous poultry breeds, alternative feed ingredients and substances being investigated for possible benefits to bird health. He also explained how researchers assess meat from birds raised on different diets.

“We are researching animal feeds that promote optimal chicken growth. As an institution, we take meat from chickens fed different diets, dry it, process it into a meal, and analyse it in the laboratory to determine which meat provides the best protein and quality for consumption,” he said.

That research raised another question: how do findings reach the farmers who could use them?

Ranthamane asked how Basotho producers could benefit directly from university studies. Molapo acknowledged that producing research and communicating it to farmers are separate responsibilities.

“That question is eye-opening, as I can now see the importance of information dissemination; we might be doing an injustice to the nation by not providing feedback after our research, and I would like to take this question as a learning point and explore how, as an institution, we can close that gap,” he said.

The exchange identified an opportunity for universities, extension officers, feed companies and farmer organisations to make technical information more accessible. Research must be explained in language and formats that help producers understand what is ready to apply and what remains under investigation.

The session also encouraged young Basotho to consider poultry as an enterprise, with opportunities across meat, eggs, chick production and other products. Pursuing those opportunities requires careful management and an understanding of the market.



A stronger grain harvest starts beneath the soil

Experts urged producers to connect soil health, seed choice, water and nutrient management before investing in the next crop.

By Lungile Maseela

Buying seed and fertiliser commits a farmer's money before there is any certainty of a harvest. Experts stressed that whether that investment pays off depends partly on conditions beneath the surface and on how well the crop's needs are met throughout the season. At the grain-production session of the National Farmers Knowledge Exchange, specialists from the National University of Lesotho, the Ministry of Agriculture and agriculture stakeholder businesses urged Basotho farmers to make those decisions together. "Suitable seed needs healthy soil, available nutrients and adequate moisture to reach its potential," Soil scientist Botle Mapeshoane identified declining soil health and fertility as major concerns. "While farmers often prioritise land suitability, greater attention must be given to the quality and health of the soil itself. We cannot increase grain production without fixing soil structure, water and seed," she said. Her message challenged the assumption that land traditionally regarded as productive will remain so without attention. Farmers need to understand their fields' present condition. "No matter where you are in the country, you should take care of soil and ignore the stereotype that in a certain area soil for planting is fertile," she said. Mapeshoane cautioned against applying fertiliser without first establishing what the soil needs. Both fertiliser and organic manure can support soil management, but the choice and application should match the field and intended crop. Soil acidity was another focus. She explained that soil pH influences nutrient availability, so testing is important before deciding whether corrective measures are needed.



Soil scientist Botle Mapeshoane speaking at the Grain Panel discussion at the 2026 Farmers Pitso

"Farmers need to work towards correcting soil pH where necessary, and soil testing is an essential first step," she said. Mapeshoane pointed farmers towards testing services at the Ministry of Agriculture's Department of Agricultural Research and the National University of Lesotho. Testing, interpreted alongside appropriate advice, can guide nutrient management and help farmers avoid spending on unsuitable applications. "Soil testing is an essential first step, and farmers can have their soil tested through the Ministry of Agriculture's Department of Agricultural Research for M30, while testing at the National University of Lesotho is more expensive, but soiltesting services are available in the country," she added. According to Mapeshoane, soil testing gives farmers crucial insights into their soil's condition, helping them choose appropriate fertilisers, suitable crops, optimal application times, and the best planting season. "Soil testing will also detect the pH, guide on using lime to adjust pH, and specify the required quantities," she concluded. NUL agriculture professor Peter Toyin explained that even a well-managed soil cannot compensate for every other production constraint, stressing the importance of irrigation. "Irrigation is very important if you want to achieve the desired yield because sometimes

rain does not come, and this could be at the most crucial stage when crops need water," he said. He connected water with the crop's ability to obtain nutrients. "Water dissolves the nutrients in the soil, creating a solution that our crops can absorb; without these nutrients, the crop cannot yield as expected," he said. Toyin urged farmers to seek assistance when choosing seed and fertiliser, particularly as changing climatic conditions complicate production decisions. He also emphasised that irrigation must respond to the crop being grown. "Different crops have different water requirements, meaning farmers need to manage irrigation according to the crop being produced rather than applying the same amount of water across all crops," he said. His remarks placed efficient water management alongside the need for sufficient supply. "Farmers must understand when water is needed and use resources carefully." Marankoe Selikane, a Ministry of Agriculture research officer, turned attention to seed. She described it as the backbone of food security while cautioning that farmers must understand what they are purchasing or saving for another season. "Farmers should understand the type of seed they are using

before deciding whether it can be reused in subsequent seasons because we have different types of seeds, and reusing seeds depends on which seed variety was used," she said. "Farmers should know if a particular seed can still produce effectively when reused and what yield they can reasonably expect from it." Location also matters, "Seed and crop choices must suit the conditions in which farmers intend to produce. "Farmers must consider their location when selecting crops because different crops perform better under different conditions," Selikane said. She returned to the session's central connection. "Yield does not only rely on good seeds, but also on good soil, on irrigation, fertilizers, planting seasons, and many more factors." For Lesotho's grain farmers, the discussion offered a reason to begin planning before inputs are bought and fields are planted. Understanding the soil, selecting appropriate seed and considering water availability can help producers make better-informed investments. It also identified a responsibility for agricultural support services: make testing, interpretation and practical guidance accessible. Stronger harvests require farmers to have both the knowledge to make decisions and the support to carry them out.





Protecting the value of Lesotho's harvest

Horticulture discussion connected soil, water and crop selection with storage, handling and the market relationships that turn produce into income.

By Lungile Maseela

A tomato can survive weeks of careful tending and still lose its value between the field and the buyer.

Harvesting at the wrong stage, rough handling, unsuitable packaging or delays in transport can undermine the work and money invested in growing it.

For Lesotho's horticulture farmers, that journey matters as much as production itself. A crop must reach the consumer in a condition that earns a sale, meets expectations and protects the farmer's reputation.

At the National Farmers Knowledge Exchange during 2026 Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week, specialists followed the journey from soil and irrigation through to preservation and formal markets.

Their contributions showed how decisions made before planting can influence produce value long after harvest.

Dr Peter Toyin of the National University of Lesotho (NUL) began with the growing environment; he explained how irrigation and protected production can help farmers manage risks associated with open-field farming.

"Horticulture covers a wide range of food crops; vegetable production can particularly benefit from protected environments such as tunnels, net houses, plastic houses and greenhouses," he said.

Toyin identified drip irrigation as an option for using water efficiently.

"Drip irrigation has very high water-use efficiency," he said, explaining that it delivers water close to the crop, allowing producers to manage applications more precisely.

That control matters when rainfall is uncertain, and farmers need to maintain production.

"With irrigation and protected production, farmers can have greater control over growing conditions and continue producing even when rainfall is inadequate," he said.

Protected growing structures, he added, can help reduce exposure to some production risks. But the discussion also made clear that horticulture's purpose extends beyond increasing the quantity harvested.

Dr Lisemelo Chenene, a human nutritionist at the Ministry of Agriculture, brought the consumer into the conversation.

"Horticulture gives us fruits, vegetables, herbs and indigenous vegetables," she said.

Chenene emphasised responsible use of agricultural chemicals and attention to soil fertility. Her contribution connected production practices with the quality of the food people eventually eat, placing nutrition and safety alongside yield.



Dr Peter Toyin at the Horticulture panel

For a farmer, that means seeing the crop as both a product to sell and food for a household's table.

When to pick that crop is another important decision. Mamoipone Sebitia, Laboratory Technician in the Department of Crop Science at NUL, used tomatoes to explain the relationship between maturity at harvest and the time available to sell.

"A tomato can be harvested at physiological maturity, meaning it has reached a stage where it can continue ripening after being picked. Harvesting at this stage can help extend shelf life compared with waiting until the tomato is fully ripe," she said.

The point was particularly relevant to smallholders facing transport delays, limited storage, or uncertainty about buyers. Understanding maturity can help farmers plan harvesting around the journey their produce must make.

Moderator Limpho Matlakala asked where producers should begin when resources cannot stretch to every improvement.

"Variety selection, harvesting, packaging, cooling and transport all affect quality, but each can require money or specialist knowledge. For smallholder farmers with limited funds, investing in every part of the process at once may not be realistic," Matlakala said.

Sebitia explained that the stages work together, saying, "Unfortunately, all stages work interchangeably; you cannot have one without the other," she said.

She identified variety selection as one practical starting point.

"Different tomato varieties have different characteristics, including skin strength and tolerance to handling. Choosing a variety with the intended market and journey in mind can form part of a strategy to reduce losses," Sebitia said.

Mphethenyane Ranyali of FIGORR Lesotho then turned attention to what buyers expect when produce arrives.

"A primary challenge is ensuring the in-

tegrity of farmers' products, especially when seeking access to formal markets," he said.

His concern was the gap between successfully growing a crop and supplying it in the condition a formal buyer requires. Temperature-sensitive produce needs proper post-harvest management, and handling and packaging must protect its quality.

"Temperature-sensitive products should go straight to cold rooms to preserve their quality, and that is where most of the money goes," Ranyali said.

He added, "Preservation quality is where that issue of long shelf life arises, and the handling and how we are to pack them. The cost of maintaining that chain can be difficult for an individual smallholder to carry. Yet without suitable systems, farmers may face deterioration before they reach a customer.

"Packaging, handling, adherence to standards, and other components of the value chain all influence a farmer's success in supplying formal markets and all those components in the value chain intrigue the mind," Ranyali said.

He also challenged buyers to do more to explain their requirements.

"You find that a lot of times the formal market does not want to teach them about standards or how the products should be."

Ranyali stressed that clear requirements can guide decisions before farmers plant a crop.

"Farmers need to understand what buyers want, how produce should be presented and what conditions must be met for a delivery to be accepted."

Ranyali proposed investing in farmers who already have production experience and established market relationships, so that their systems could help bring smaller growers into organised supply.

"These farmers could then help integrate smallholder farmers into their established systems and the initiative will accelerate the inclusion of the small-

holder farmer into the supply of formal market, but cutting the frustration," he said.

His proposal connected infrastructure with cooperation.

"Experienced producers could help create a route through which smallholders contribute produce, learn market requirements and participate in more dependable supply arrangements."

Alongside those larger investments, the discussion considered possibilities for farmers with limited access to storage.

Relebohile Mojaki, from NUL's Agricultural Extension programme, said researchers were examining ways to maintain quality using materials more accessible to producers.

"The university is researching methods to maintain produce quality using materials farmers already possess," she said. She described work involving botanical extracts such as garlic, cinnamon and rosemary.

"These have antimicrobial effects that can kill microorganisms on plants and reduce spoilage, and the aim is to develop and disseminate this knowledge to farmers," she said.

The research points towards potentially affordable preservation approaches. Turning it into farmer guidance will require clear, tested methods that explain where an approach is suitable and how to apply it. The presentation did not provide an application protocol.

Toyin also encouraged participants to consider knowledge already held in communities.

"We need to learn from our mothers and fathers; they had a way of preserving food," he said.

He discussed evaporative cooling and the importance of understanding moisture when handling and preserving agricultural products.

"Moisture is a critical factor farmers must understand when harvesting and preserving agricultural products. Moisture is money," he said.

The contributions addressed different stages of the same commercial journey.

Toyin connected production with water management and preservation knowledge. Chenene placed nutrition and food quality within that process. Sebitia focused on variety and harvest timing, while Ranyali examined infrastructure and buyer requirements. Mojaki brought research into potentially accessible preservation methods.

Together, they showed why developing Lesotho's horticulture sector requires attention to the whole route from field to market and how farmers can improve production decisions and handling practices.



By Topollo Tlali

Iketsetseng Horizon High School emerged as the agricultural champion at the 2026 Farmers Pitso National Schools Agriculture Challenge, taking home the M10,000 first prize sponsored by Seahlolo Newspaper. Its victory crowned a year of preparation that brought teachers, learners and parents together around a shared goal: understanding agriculture and putting that knowledge into practice. The school was among 27 high schools from eight districts that participated in the challenge held on 11 September as part of Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week. Through oral competitions, quizzes and project exhibitions, learners demonstrated their agricultural knowledge and the practical skills they were developing at school. The schools' day had a deliberate place in the four-day programme. Between the National Farmers Knowledge Exchange and the public exhibition and farmers awards, it gave young people a stage of their own. The intention was to build interest in agriculture early, connect learning with production and show learners the opportunities across the food value chain. For Iketsetseng Horizon agriculture teacher, Tlotliso Selibo, the result reflected sustained effort rather than preparation for a single competition.

"The path to this victory was paved through intensive preparations and careful skill development among all teachers, students and parents," Selibo said. She explained that the school works throughout the year to connect the syllabus with practical activities. "Classroom lessons are followed by opportunities for learners to apply what they have been taught. Our students spend 80 minutes hands-on, applying real-world techniques to key target crops including cabbage, peas, onion, carrots and beetroot." Selibo stressed that working with different crops exposes learners to different growth cycles and management requirements. "It also gives them a practical reference point when discussing agricultural concepts: the lesson is something they have worked through themselves. Preparing for the competition required another kind of discipline. Learners practised answering questions accurately and pronouncing technical terms clearly so that judges could understand their responses." Selibo said that process was demanding, requiring attention to both knowledge and presentation. "Parents also contributed to the school's preparations. Through their support, we managed to bring the

Iketsetseng Horizon Crowned Schools Agriculture Challenge Champion

...Wins Seahlolo's M10,000 prize in a competition designed to connect classroom knowledge with practical farming and the next generation of agriculture.

award home, and as they are playing their part correctly, we would like to thank them," he said. The competition required schools to demonstrate what learners knew and how they could apply it. Iketsetseng Horizon's performance earned it the overall title, giving Selibo a moment to reflect on the work behind the result. "I am very proud as a teacher, recognising that my work is really perfect and students managed to understand my teaching," he said. The achievement came at a significant point in the school's development, as its first Grade 12 cohort prepared to sit examinations. "This win is bigger than a person can think, as it will be our first time students will be sitting for Grade 12, and the win reflected the work we have put in for the past four years." Selibo said the prize would help the school address challenges, although he did not specify how the money would be used. "To Seahlolo, we would like to pass our appreciation as a school because through their sponsorship our chal-



lenges will be solved." Presenting the award, Seahlolo founder and Newsday Media Managing Director Lerato Matheka congratulated the school and linked its achievement to the wider purpose of bringing learn-

ers into Agriculture Week. "Congratulations to Iketsetseng. Handing you this M10,000.00 is our commitment as a publication. We want to be part of the progress when agriculture becomes a fashion and

with a wider sector of farmers, researchers, businesses and institutions. It gives learners an opportunity to see where agricultural knowledge can lead, in production, science, processing,

young people enjoy," she said. Her message addressed an image of farming that the schools' challenge sought to change. "Gone are the days when farmers were viewed as old and uneducated; children need to be encouraged at a young age to see agriculture as the future." Matheka said schools have an important role in making agriculture attractive to young people and building the knowledge needed for Lesotho's food sufficiency and sustainable production. Her ambition extends beyond encouraging learners to grow crops. Placing their competition within Agriculture Week connects school agriculture



technology and enterprise. Molapo Shakhane, a member of the schools' competition organising team, said Seahlolo's sponsorship had helped strengthen their initiative as the Lesotho Agriculture Teachers Association (LATA). "We thank Seahlolo for helping our journey be very attractive. With less than three years of hosting the schools' competitions, the 2026 edition is not only attractive but very successful. We have 27 schools from 8 districts and over 1000 learners here. This is beyond vibrant; it is amazing and definitely national. "I remember our conversation with Mme Lerato about hosting the competition at a national level. We could see her passion, but we didn't understand what she was talking about; today paints a very clear picture. With Seahlolo, we don't only have a best sponsor but a heartfelt partner. With what this first event looks like today, we are looking forward to the 2027 edition," he said. "I want to congratulate Iketsetseng Horizon High School for winning the first prize and to all who participated, and I would like to see schools being more dedicated next year." Alongside the celebrations, Shakhane acknowledged organisational difficulties that would need attention before

the next competition. Communication between school structures in different districts had been uneven, leaving some participants uncertain about the requirements. "We met some challenges of lack of communication among school organisations in different districts, as some members did not have a clear picture of what was supposed to happen, and we made a resolution that for next year we will hold meetings before awards in order to have a clear competition structure." Time management also presented difficulties. Shakhane said organisers would work to improve scheduling and strengthen the assessment of exhibitions. He raised concerns about whether some displayed products reflected agricultural work actually undertaken at the participating schools. "Other schools exhibited non-existent products in their schools, and that became a challenge; for next year, we will make strict ways of assessing and analysing exhibitions from different schools," he said. Those improvements matter to the challenge's educational purpose. Exhibitions should give learners a chance to explain work they understand and have participated in, while clear rules should allow every school to prepare on equal terms.



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By Topollo Tlali

The knowledge shared during Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week needed to go beyond the conference room. Farmers who could not attend, communities facing production challenges, and audiences trying to understand Lesotho’s food system also needed access to accurate, useful information. That purpose shaped a specialised agricultural journalism training hosted by Seahlolo Newspaper during the week. Twenty media professionals participated in sessions led by South Africa’s Food for Mzansi, alongside cybersecurity training delivered by T-Connect.

The programme connected agricultural knowledge with the people responsible for explaining it to the public. Participants explored how to report across the food value chain, build stronger relationships with audiences and protect their work and sources in an increasingly digital environment. For Seahlolo founder and Newsday Media Managing Director, Lerato Matheka, the training formed part of Agriculture Week’s wider ambition to connect farmers with knowledge, institutions and opportunity.

“Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week was designed to bring the agricultural value chain together, and journalists are a part of that chain because they help knowledge travel beyond the venue to farmers and communities who were not in the room,” Matheka said.

“We want agricultural reporting that follows the farmer from production to the market, explains the science, examines the policies and asks whether support is reaching the people who need it. Agriculture deserves informed, consistent coverage throughout the year.”

Opening the training, Food for Mzansi news editor and agricultural journalist, Tiisetso Manoko, challenged the idea that agriculture belongs at the margins of news coverage.

“Agricultural journalism is often treated as a niche beat, but agriculture impacts almost every aspect of society.”

“If you ate today, thank a farmer who produces food. As journalists, farmers know about new developments in agriculture through us, so we have to be very accurate and professional in our storytelling,” he said.

His message placed responsibility alongside opportunity: ‘Reporting can introduce farmers to new developments, but inaccurate or poorly explained information can leave audiences confused about decisions affecting their livelihoods.’

Manoko urged participants to look beyond announcing events and describing activities, saying a useful agricultural story should explain causes, consequences, and the people affected.

“As agricultural journalists, our role is to inform by presenting facts, not emotions. We do not just report what happened in the farming sector; we help readers understand what happened, why it happened, who is affected, and why it matters.”

That approach requires reporters to understand the subject they are covering. “Agriculture reporters must understand agriculture before reporting on it because it encompasses more than just farming; it includes food security, markets, climate change, animal health, policy, research, and community livelihoods,” he said.

The breadth of that coverage reflected the conversations taking place across Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week.

“Production, nutrition, research, finance, technology and markets are connected. A problem in one part of the system can

Seahlolo Equips Journalists to Carry Agriculture Story Beyond Farmers Pitso

Twenty media professionals joined training on agricultural reporting, audience engagement and digital security as part of Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week.



Meshaan Van Wyn social media manager from Food For Mzansi training Journalists

affect farmers and consumers elsewhere.”

Manoko also emphasised journalism’s role in scrutinising agricultural policies, budgets and programmes.

“As reporters, we are the mouthpiece of the masses, the voice of the voiceless; thus, agricultural journalism is public interest journalism because it affects all of us, and people eat every day.”

He encouraged participants to build stories around multiple perspectives, bringing farmers’ experience into conversation with evidence and institutional responses.

“A story with only one voice is not a journalism article; we need at least three sources: a farmer providing lived experiences, a researcher offering evidence and technical interpretation, and the government providing policies, programs, and official data.”

The sourcing discussion also covered businesses that can explain commercial conditions and markets, development organisations working on agricultural programmes, and communities, farmworkers, and labour unions whose knowledge adds context to a story.

For freelance journalist and farmer Thandiwe Kubere, the training exposed the limitations of covering agriculture mainly when something goes wrong, or a new product arrives.

“Reporting agricultural news, for most of us, is something we do only during breaking events like disease outbreaks or the arrival of new equipment. This training has been incredibly insightful,” Kubere said.

Mathe Maboe, a journalist working in the agricultural information department, raised a different difficulty: securing publication for sensitive stories within a government institution.

“As a journalist in a government institution, even if I cover a story on affected communities, such stories are often not considered worthy by editors and are not published, as editors prioritise their own

preferences,” Maboe said.

Manoko encouraged reporters to discuss their story ideas with editors and explain their public importance.

“As a journalist, it’s important to discuss your story’s worthiness with editors and explain why it deserves publication.”

The training then turned from producing stories to ensuring they reach the people who need them.

Food for Mzansi social media manager, Meshaan Van Wyk, described community engagement as central to agricultural publishing. Farmers, agronomists, suppliers and policymakers, she said, need information that is practical, timely and trusted.

“Community engagement is the cornerstone of editorial credibility,” she said.

“Media houses engaging with social media audiences transform a media organisation from a distant publisher into a vital industry partner.”

Van Wyk encouraged participants to use formats suited to their audiences, including short videos, practical discussions, newsletters, WhatsApp channels and infographics. The aim was to make reporting easier to access and encourage interaction around issues that affect producers.

“Firstly, a media house can host a practical discussion on a current regional challenge, allowing viewers to interact easily,” she said.

She also urged media organisations to make newsletters useful in their own right. “Avoid simply dropping article links into emails. Instead, provide digestible market digests, personalise content by sector, and maintain a conversational tone.”

Longer reporting, she explained, can be adapted into several formats to extend its reach, support website and app audiences, and strengthen newsletters and messaging services. A detailed story can become the starting point for a short video, a visual explanation or a conversation with readers.

T-Connect’s Keiso Mohloboli completed the programme with a session on cybersecurity, highlighting the risks of digital journalism.

The session addressed device security, verification, source protection and the steps journalists should take when responding to an incident. Mohloboli outlined a sequence of practical actions: know the device, lock it, verify information, protect sources, and prepare to respond, recover, restore and document what happened.

The discussion recognised that journalists continue to face censorship and physical threats while also encountering risks to their accounts, communications and unpublished material. Digital security therefore belongs within newsroom practice and professional training.

Mohloboli encouraged participants to consider Signal for sensitive communications and to take a more deliberate approach to the tools they use.

“As cyber threats to journalism grow more sophisticated, the need for tailored cybersecurity solutions has become more pressing than ever,” Mohloboli said.

Together, the sessions linked reporting quality, audience access and journalist safety. Each matters if agricultural information is to reach communities consistently and retain their trust.

The training also strengthened cooperation between agricultural media organisations in Lesotho and South Africa. Food for Mzansi’s participation gave local journalists a chance to learn from another newsroom’s experience and explore approaches they could adapt for their own audiences.

For Seahlolo, that exchange extended the purpose of Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week. Farmers had a platform to share challenges and achievements; journalists had an opportunity to improve how they reported those experiences.







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THE NEW FACE OF SOUTH AFRICAN AGRICULTURE





Econet brings technology to the Farmers Pitso stage

Introduces EcoFarmer AI, a mobile agricultural tool to help farmer understand soil conditions ahead of planning farm operations.

By Topollo Tlali

A field may look uniform from one end to the other. Beneath the surface, however, moisture and acidity can vary, differences that matter when a farmer decides what to plant, how much fertiliser to apply and when to irrigate. At the Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week National Farmers Knowledge Exchange, Econet Telecom Lesotho brought those decisions into focus.

Its representatives from Econet Wireless Zimbabwe presented agricultural technologies designed to help producers understand their fields and get timely advice on their mobile phones.

The grain-production session paired technology with discussions of soil health, seed quality and water.

For farmers facing unpredictable rain-fall, rising input costs and disappointing harvests, the presentation explored how better information could strengthen the experience and hard work already invested in production.

Central to that conversation was Eco-Farmer AI, an artificial intelligence-powered agricultural platform developed by Econet Wireless Zimbabwe.

The company representatives describes it as a service providing guidance on crops, livestock and weather, with location-based weather updates, voice and text questions, and the ability to upload photographs of crop problems. Its published App description identifies English and Shona as supported languages, with development of Sesotho in its final stages.

The technology specialist, Ignatious Chitekedza, argued that agriculture must adapt as new tools become available.

“Our grandparents started farming in the Stone Age, moved to the Iron Age, then to the Computer Age, and now we are in the Artificial Intelligence Age. We must use this age to strengthen agricultural productivity and resilience,” he said.

Chitekedza explained that farmers may assume an entire field has the same soil conditions and apply identical quantities of fertiliser and water throughout, yet conditions can differ even within a relatively small area.

“One might assume that a small piece of land has the same quality, but in reality, pH levels are different, and moisture levels too can differ, so, we need a solution to determine where the moisture and pH differ before proceeding with working the land.”

He described soil sensors as one way of gathering information that cannot readily be seen from the surface.

“These sensors can be placed in the soil to gather information on moisture levels, pH, and other factors that affect crop growth.”

The resulting data, he said, could help farmers and agricultural specialists make more targeted decisions.

“Those sensors can generate data that we can analyse and tell us that at point A of



Ignatious Chitekedza and Kundayi faith Mazonda from Econet brought technology to the grain panel discussion

the field, the pH is different, and determine how we need to apply a certain amount of fertilisers and irrigation,” Chitekedza said.

Econet’s wider agricultural technology offering includes a separate precision-agriculture sensor solution for monitoring soil moisture, crop health and environmental conditions. The company also offers weather intelligence and farm-management tools, placing EcoFarmer AI within a broader range of digital agricultural services.

For grain farmers, Chitekedza said, collecting information helps them use resources more efficiently and improve crop performance.

“When farmers practice farming without technology, the yield often becomes poor, but aligning with technology can increase the yields,” he said

He also discussed monitoring approaches that could help farmers judge when irrigation is needed, including methods that do not require sensors in every section of a field.

“In some sections, sensors are not even needed to tell a farmer when to irrigate, what quantity to use, and to detect problems early,” he said.

Chitekedza’s presentation considered the potential for technology to flag crop problems before they spread.

“There are sensors that determine diseases, like the IoT sensors can determine plant health as well as diseases at an early stage.”

He added that information about soil conditions could guide crop selection, helping farmers assess whether their preferred crop suits the land available.

“Sometimes a farmer is passionate about producing a certain grain, but the soil does not allow it. With technology, we can help farmers to know which crop is suitable in a certain field depending on the type of soil.”

The discussion then moved from understanding the field to obtaining advice. Moderator, Maoala Khesa, asked how agricultural innovation could improve soil preparation and post-harvest grain management.

Kundayi Faith Mazonda, speaking on agricultural innovation, presented EcoFarm-

er AI as a way to bring guidance closer to farmers who may struggle to reach an extension officer or agronomist when they need assistance.

“As Econet, we are actively closing the gap in agriculture. With our product, Eco-Farm AI, we have transformed every phone into an intelligent advisor, providing farmers with real-time agronomy advice.”

Mazonda said farmers could use the platform to access farming calendars, weather information, and crop-management guidance to support decisions from land preparation through harvesting.

“Farmers can easily access any required agronomical information through their devices with Eco-Farm AI,” she said.

The Zimbabwe launch offers further context for the service presented at Farmers’ Pitso. According to launch coverage published by TechnoMag, the platform was unveiled under Econet AI and uses farm coordinates to generate localised weather information, soil insights and crop-specific guidance. The report says its weather projections extend up to 100 days; this is a reported platform capability, not a demonstrated guarantee of forecast accuracy.

Speaking at that launch, Econet AI Chief Executive Officer Navdeep Kapur said: “EcoFarmer AI also helps farmers understand soil conditions and apply the right inputs at the right time.”

The launch coverage described the aim as helping farmers plan planting, irrigation, and harvesting using information specific to their farms. Kapur also outlined an ambition to double productivity through better decisions throughout the farming cycle.

At the Manthabiseng Convention Centre, Mazonda demonstrated the relevance of another feature: using photos to get guidance on crop problems.

“The application’s visual intelligence allows a farmer to take a photo of a crop, and the AI will advise on implementable practices to prevent challenges,” she said.

For a producer observing discoloured leaves, pest damage or unfamiliar symp-

toms, such a feature could offer an initial route to information. Mazonda said the platform also seeks to tailor its advice to the farmer’s circumstances.

“It localises information, offering precise advice on weather suitability and what actions a farmer should take,” she said.

Language was another part of the discussion. Advice must be understandable if farmers are to use it.

“I am pleased to say the App also uses local languages, bridging the information gap to address literacy issues,” Mazonda said.

She described the App accessibility through USSD services for basic mobile phones, alongside voice features, and explained that connectivity requirements vary between functions.

“Some modules can be accessed even when offline, but for specific features, an internet connection is fully needed,” she said.

Mazonda also presented a marketplace component of the App intended to connect producers with agricultural suppliers and service providers. The purpose, she explained, is to help farmers move from obtaining advice to finding the inputs and support needed to act on it.

“The App also has a marketplace that brings various players together in one application.

“Service providers are available for crop chemicals, irrigation, and more, while customers ready to purchase ready products can also be reached.”

Her central message was that information could help farmers make decisions more precisely.

“Through technology, we are able to transform agriculture from a game of chance, where people are assuming, to being precise,” Mazonda said.

Econet’s contribution reflected the wider purpose of Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week National Farmers Knowledge Exchange of bringing producers into conversation with experts, businesses and institutions offering approaches to agricultural challenges.





The King honours people sustaining Lesotho’s food system

Ten Royal Honourees brought farming, veterinary care, community nutrition, agricultural heritage and rural development into the spotlight at the closing gala of Farmers’ Pitso Agriculture Week.

By Topollo Tlali

“I know farming is not easy, as it requires patience and dedication, which contribute toward food production.”

With those words, His Majesty King Letsie III recognised the daily commitment behind Lesotho’s harvests and agricultural livelihoods. Addressing the Farmers’ Pitso Honour Awards Gala Dinner at Avani Maseru on 12 September 2026, he praised farmers’ persistence and urged them to keep applying knowledge to the challenges they face.

The evening honoured 10 individuals, families, businesses and institutions whose contributions reach across Lesotho’s food system. Their work connects production with veterinary care, fresh produce markets, community nutrition, conservation, indigenous innovation and culinary heritage.

It was a fitting conclusion to Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week. Over four days, the programme brought farmers together with experts, learners, businesses and development partners through knowledge exchange, a schools agriculture challenge, public exhibitions and awards.

Organised by Seahlolo Newspaper under Newsday Media, led by Lerato Matheka and, the expanded programme gave agriculture a national stage. The Royal gala placed lasting service alongside the achievements celebrated during the week.

His Majesty acknowledged the uncertainty accompanying agricultural production. Farmers commit time, labour and money before they know what weather and other conditions will allow them to harvest.

Speaking about fears of drought, he encouraged producers to remain determined.

“Despite widespread fears of El Niño drought, with all the struggles, it is good to continue and remain persistent,” he said.

He connected that persistence with practical action.

“The issue of El Niño should not be a cause for retreat, but a reminder to implement agricultural knowledge and soil moisture management techniques.”

His message also placed responsibility on the nation as a whole. Farmers need recognition, but they also need the knowledge and means to sustain their work.

“Those who work the land are key to our country’s future,” His Majesty said. “Honouring them must mean equipping them.”

Agriculture Minister Selibe Mochoboroane linked domestic production with national independence.

“Self-sufficiency must be in front of everything; he who feeds you controls you,” he said.

“The revolution cannot be made with an empty stomach, so we must produce first, then consume.”

His remarks gave the evening’s celebration a wider economic purpose. Building the capacity to produce food requires sustained attention to the conditions under which farmers operate, from inputs and technical support to infrastructure and markets.

Guest speaker Dr Mmatlou Kalaba, an agricultural policy analyst from South Africa’s Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy, encouraged the audience to consider Lesotho’s prospects within the wider continent.

“I am deeply honoured and grateful to have been invited to serve as a guest speaker at his



his majesty king Letsie III honoring outstanding farmers

majesty king Letsie III’s honour awards, and I thank Miss Lerato Matheka for this opportunity,” he said.

Kalaba argued that smaller countries make an important contribution to Africa’s food security.

“From an African perspective, Lesotho’s story mirrors that of the entire continent; Africa’s food security depends on the contributions of its smaller nations.”

He pointed to Lesotho’s position within regional and continental trading arrangements as an opportunity to look beyond its domestic population when planning agricultural development.

“Lesotho’s agricultural potential should not be assessed by its population size, but rather by its strategic location, positioned within SACU, SADC, and the AfCFTA, Lesotho gains access to a market of 1.4 billion people a huge opportunity for its farmers.”

Those arrangements, he argued, create possibilities that producers should prepare to pursue.

“The African Continental Free Trade Area offers Lesotho an unprecedented opportunity, one that was unavailable a decade ago: to cultivate wool, mohair, grains, and high-value horticulture in its mountainous regions and distribute these products across the continent.”

Realising those possibilities requires producers to understand markets and manage their enterprises with discipline.

“As Africans, we must transition from viewing agriculture merely as a means of survival to recognising it as a viable business, and we need to move beyond farming based on assumptions and embrace precision agriculture, supported by meticulous records, modern technology, and a keen awareness of market demands.”

Kalaba linked that commercial approach to employment, rural prosperity, opportunities for young people, and inclusive growth.

The experiences shared by community representatives showed how those ambitions are already taking shape.

Speaking on behalf of the Farmgirls Network, Mantoetsi Rantooa described women who first connected through Facebook and discovered a shared love of farming.

“We feel deeply honoured to stand at His Majesty’s honorary awards in the presence of his majesty and fellow farmers and stakeholders and share our journey; our journey began when women who did not know each other met on social media, Facebook, united by a shared love for farming and today, we are able to feed the nation.”

Their relationship grew into a collective effort, although the journey remained difficult.

“It has not been an easy journey; we faced many challenges, but we are still standing and continuing with what we love,” Rantooa said.

“This union is about more than producing food; it is about empowering women, creating jobs and completing the food production.”

She thanked supporters and called for partnerships to help the network grow further.

“As farm girls, we are grateful to everyone who has supported us, shared spaces, and we appeal for further partnerships to help us grow into a sustainable national operation.”

Among the Royal Honourees, Manapo Makhele placed her recognition within the community work that made it possible.

“I am humbled and deeply honoured to be recognised by His Majesty,” she said. “This recognition is not only for me; it represents every Basotho who wakes before dawn to plant and cares for the soil.”

“When our work is noticed by the nation’s leaders, it gives us courage to keep going.”

Makhele acknowledged the farmers and nutrition clubs she works with.

“I thank all organisers of the event; our work will now be more noticed not by Basotho only but even international organisations. It was not possible without the farmers and nutrition clubs I work with.”

For Chef Ska Moteane, the evening delivered an unexpected tribute. She had attended to celebrate farmers and found herself receiving recognition for her contribution to indigenous food heritage.

“I honestly have no words as I went to the Farmers Pitso Excellence gala dinner to celebrate our farmers, and instead, I received a surprise I will never forget,” she said.

“Being presented with His Majesty’s Honour

Award for Indigenous Food Heritage and Culinary Excellence by His Majesty King Letsie III is an honour that touches me deeply.”

Moteane connected her culinary work with the people who produce and preserve local ingredients.

“My journey has always been about celebrating our food, our indigenous ingredients, our culinary heritage, and the incredible people who grow and preserve them.”

“I accept this honour with immense gratitude and as a reminder that our food heritage deserves to be celebrated, protected, and carried forward with pride,” she said.

The full roll of Royal Honourees reflected that breadth of contribution. Mampho Thulo was honoured for her lifetime contribution to rural agricultural development, while the Machobane family received recognition for agricultural heritage and indigenous innovation.

Mokotso Fruits and Vegetable was honoured for enduring service to the fresh produce market, and Manapo Makhele for community nutrition and food security. Dr Lineo Bohloa received recognition for distinguished veterinary services, while Chef Ska Mirrian Moteane was honoured for Indigenous Food Heritage and Culinary Excellence.

The Southern Mountain Association for Rural Transformation and Development was recognised for rural transformation and community empowerment. Growing Nations received an honour for excellence in conservation agriculture.

Mr Elia Lenyora Mokuoane was honoured for lifetime achievement in poultry farming, and Likhothola Fruit Farm for excellence in commercial horticulture.

Together, the recipients illustrated the many kinds of work required to sustain a food system. Farmers produce; veterinary practitioners protect animal health; markets connect produce with consumers; community initiatives strengthen nutrition; and custodians of agricultural and culinary heritage preserve knowledge for future generations.

Their recognition gave expression to Agriculture Week’s theme: “Celebrating Excellence. Advancing Agriculture. Transforming Lives.”







Agriculture cannot grow in silos



Lerato Peggy Matheka
Founder, Seahlole Newspaper;
Managing Director and Managing
Editor, Newsday Media

Some projects you deliver; others change how you understand the work.

Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week 2026 did both.

Across four days, 27 schools participated, 118 farmers were recognised across 44 award categories, and 10 Royal Honourees were celebrated. Those figures tell part of our achievement. The fuller story, however, lies in the people who came together and what their encounters made possible. I came away convinced that Lesotho has people who care deeply about agriculture. We met farmers determined to improve, experts willing to share knowledge, businesses prepared to participate, and young people curious about their place in the sector.

Our task was to connect that commitment.

Agriculture cannot grow in silos.

A farmer's work is shaped by decisions and services far beyond the farm gate. Research influences production methods. Water and infrastructure determine what can be grown and preserved. Finance affects whether an enterprise can invest. Buyers influence quality requirements and planting decisions. Public policy shapes the conditions in which all of this happens.

When these parts work separately, farmers are often left trying to bridge the gaps. That is why, as organisers through Newsday Media's Seahlole Newspaper, we expanded the Farmers Pitso Awards into a programme that connects knowledge exchange, schools, exhibition, and recognition.

We wanted farmers to meet people who could help them address practical challenges. We also wanted those institutions and businesses to hear directly from producers.

A scientist should understand what happens when advice reaches a farm with limited resources. A financial institution

should hear why an agricultural enterprise struggles to meet funding conditions. A buyer should explain what it requires. Government should hear how communities experience services. A learner should be able to see a future in agriculture.

The National Farmers Knowledge Exchange created space for those conversations. Across livestock, poultry, grain and horticulture, speakers returned to the connections between knowledge and practice.

Soil testing matters, but farmers need access to the service and help interpreting the results. Better genetics matter, but animals also need appropriate nutrition and veterinary care. A good harvest matters, but handling, storage and a dependable buyer determine how much value reaches the farmer.

Putting those issues together was one of the most important things we achieved. It showed why agricultural development needs coordinated support.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition, under Honourable Selibe Mochoboroane, deserves recognition for its support. The ministry's endorsement helped bring institutions into the platform, while the minister's emphasis on practical knowledge, appropriate mechanisation and stronger market connections reinforced the purpose of our expanded programme.

His call to bring knowledge to farmers in their communities is one we must carry forward. A useful lesson shared in Maseru should live beyond the venue. It should reach the field, the village and the producer who could not attend.

That responsibility also belongs to us as a publication. This issue of Seahlole is part of the work of carrying the conversation forward: explaining what was shared, recording farmers' experiences, and identifying questions that still need answers.

The farmers gave the event and platform its meaning. They brought their time, stories, criticism and trust. They spoke about what they needed: knowledge, markets, practical support, and partnerships. Their participation reminded us how much responsibility comes with convening a national gathering in their name.

We must respect that trust by being honest about what an event can achieve. The Agriculture Week created opportunities to learn and connect. Whether those opportunities become stronger enterprises depends on what follows.

Our private-sector partners helped make the programme possible and showed how businesses can support that ongoing work. Jandrell Stores brought South African brands like Africa Tanks, Afrivet, WAVET, STARKE AYRES, Bata, Willard, KOMBAT, KYRON and Mealie Brand into the gathering. Together, those brands represented products and services connected with agricultural production and rural enterprise, linking South African Service provision and Lesotho's Agricultural development.

Ntate JC brought advanced drone technology from South Africa to share what our neighbours are doing to progress.

Their participation helped make the value chain visible. Farmers need infrastructure, animal-health support, inputs, equipment and services. Companies supplying those needs also benefit from understanding the farmers who use their products.

There is room to deepen these relationships. Businesses can contribute technical knowledge, distribution, technology, finance, infrastructure and market connections. They can help producers understand products, plan investments and solve operational problems.

For corporates in Lesotho, agricultural partnership offers an opportunity to build lasting commercial relationships while strengthening production. A farmer who develops a viable enterprise can become a reliable customer, supplier and employer. That is why we stay engaged throughout the year; we thank our sponsors and partners for adding value.

His Majesty King Letsie III and the Royal Palace gave the week's conclusion significance, for which we are deeply grateful. His Majesty's participation affirmed the importance of the people sustaining Lesotho's food system.

The 10 Royal Honourees brought different forms of service into view: rural development, agricultural heritage, fresh produce markets, nutrition, veterinary care, culinary heritage, community empowerment, conservation agriculture, poultry and commercial horticulture.

Their recognition showed the breadth of contribution behind the food on our tables. It also reminded us that excellence can be built over a lifetime, through work whose value is felt quietly in communities long before it receives public applause.

Our gratitude extends to Food for Mzansi. Their team brought specialist agricultural journalism experience and helped equip local media professionals to report the sector more effectively. Their coverage also carried Lesotho's agricultural stories to a wider Southern African audience.

That matters because how agriculture is reported shapes how it is understood.

Farmers are entrepreneurs, employers, innovators and custodians of land. Their experiences belong in reporting about climate, trade, technology, finance, nutrition and economic development. Journalists need the knowledge to explain those connections and the independence to examine whether promises and programmes are delivering.

The media training was therefore part of Agriculture Week's purpose. Useful agricultural knowledge needs people who can communicate it accurately and consistently.

The schools' challenge carried another part of that purpose. Twenty-seven schools brought learners' knowledge and practical work onto a national stage. We wanted young people to see agriculture

as a field in which they could build skills, businesses and careers.

That interest deserves continued encouragement. Learners need opportunities to practise, meet professionals and understand how classroom knowledge connects with real enterprises. Their participation gave us reason to invest further in that work.

I am particularly grateful to my team. Behind every visible moment were conversations, adjustments and problems that participants never saw. Expanding the programme meant undertaking activities we had not delivered in this form before. We kept asking what the platform could offer: practical learning for farmers, stronger connections for businesses, a place for learners, better reporting and recognition worthy of the people receiving it. My team carried those questions into the work.

Most times they looked at me like a madwoman, saying what we wanted to achieve was suicidal, but we survived and came out victorious.

We should also learn from what needs improvement. Clearer communication, stronger coordination and reliable follow-up will make the next programme better. Celebrating our achievement gives us the confidence to examine those responsibilities openly.

The next stage requires specific action. Institutions should identify how they will share knowledge beyond the event. Businesses should stay in touch with the producers they met. Researchers should make findings accessible. Farmers' organisations should help carry information through their networks.

As organisers and journalists, we must also keep asking what became of those connections. Which advice was applied? Which opportunities developed? What prevented progress? What support is still missing?

Lesotho has experience to contribute to wider conversations about resilient food systems and agricultural enterprise. Our farmers know the challenges of producing here. Our researchers are examining local questions. Our young people bring ideas and energy. Connecting those strengths can help us develop approaches suited to our circumstances.

Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week gave us a place to begin that work together. We are proud of what we delivered, and grateful to everyone who helped us deliver it.

Now we must keep the relationships active and the knowledge moving. Agriculture belongs at the centre of our discussions about livelihoods, nutrition, employment and national development.

The week showed how much becomes possible when people meet across their usual boundaries. Building on it will require the same willingness to listen, cooperate and act.

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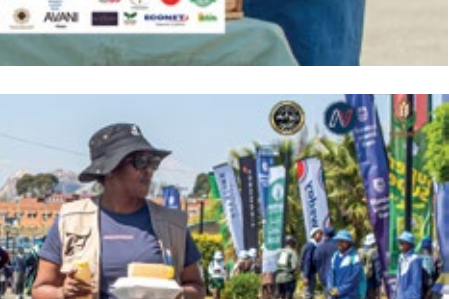
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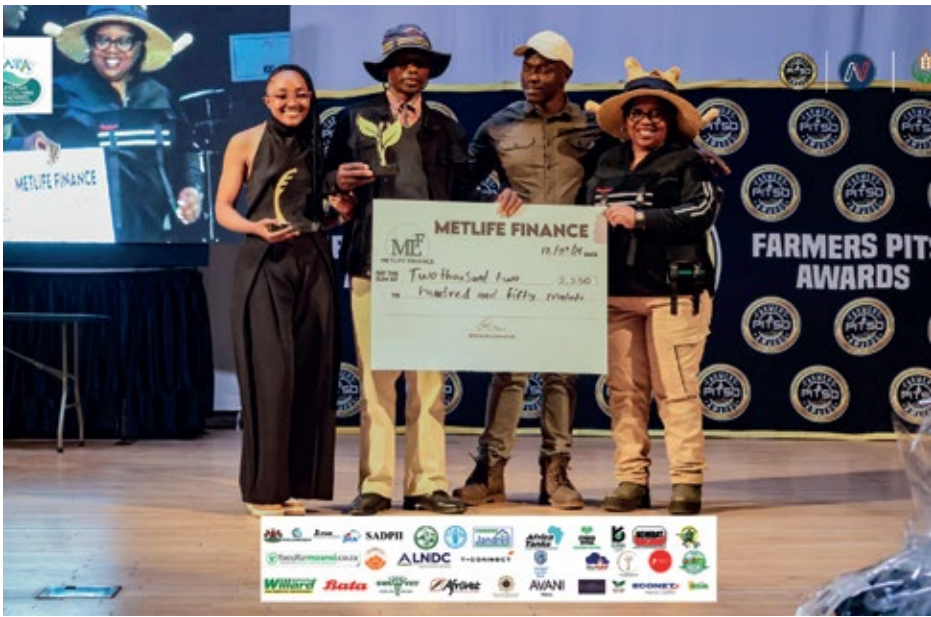


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The magic team

27 schools. 118 farmers. 44 award categories. 10 Royal Honourees. ...Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week gave farming a national stage. Meet the team who made it all happen.



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Building farms that sustain livelihoods

SADP II’s contribution to Farmers Pitso connected farmer recognition with investment in climate resilience, commercial production and stronger routes to market.

By Lungile Maseela

For Lesotho’s smallholder farmer, growing an enterprise requires more than the ambition to produce. It takes access to water, suitable equipment, technical knowledge and buyers, and the ability to keep operating when weather or rising costs put the business under pressure.

At Farmers Pitso Agriculture Week, those needs formed the foundation of a call to strengthen Lesotho’s agricultural enterprises. The Smallholder Agriculture Development Project II (SADP II) urged farmers to embrace climate-smart production, commercialisation and collective approaches to markets, while outlining interventions intended to support that transition.

The message also celebrated producers already demonstrating what is possible.

Held under the theme “Celebrating Excellence. Advancing Agriculture. Transforming Lives”, the 2026 programme brought farmers together with government, development partners and businesses to recognise achievement and discuss the conditions needed for further progress.

Speaking at the Farmers Pitso Agricultural and Excellence Awards, SADP II Project Director Mpaki Makara described the gathering as a place where shared challenges could become a basis for collective action.

“A pitso is more than just a meeting. It is a place of truth, unity and shared progress,” he said.

Makara acknowledged the pressures facing the sector: food insecurity, climate change, high production costs, limited finance and market access, and the need to attract young people into agriculture. Erratic weather, drought and soil erosion complicate production, while spending on seed, fertiliser and animal feed puts pressure on farmers before they earn a return.

Against that background, he said, SADP II seeks to help smallholders move towards more commercially viable and climate-resilient enterprises.

The project, funded by the Government of Lesotho, the World Bank

and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), is meant to support agricultural productivity, commercialisation and resilience.

Makara identified its matching grant programme as a key intervention, supporting farmers and agribusinesses to invest in productive assets and technologies.

He described investments involving tunnels, shade nets, livestock development, irrigation and other climate-smart approaches.

“We are not here for temporary handouts. SADP II is here to deliver sustainable solutions,” he said.

The distinction puts an enterprise’s performance over time at the centre of support. Equipment and infrastructure must help farmers produce effectively, manage risk and sustain an income.

Makara encouraged farmers to use irrigation schemes being rehabilitated through the project and adopt production methods that could help them withstand climate-related shocks.

He also connected production with the infrastructure and relationships needed to sell.

“Market linkages and growing premium crops or raising quality livestock is only half the battle,” he said.

SADP II, he explained, was working to strengthen commercial infrastructure and aggregation centres that could connect farmers with buyers. The project also encourages collective approaches to markets.

For smallholders, working together can create opportunities to assemble larger volumes and meet supply requirements that may be difficult for one farm to fulfil. Making that work requires coordination between producers, reliable handling systems and clear relationships with buyers.

Makara urged farmers to take ownership of the opportunities being created.

“Let us work together to restore our soil, commercialise our soil and build a food-secure Lesotho,” he said.

Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition Minister Selibe Mochoboroane reinforced the importance of practical support during Farmers’

Pitso. He called for farmers to share their knowledge and for agricultural experts to work directly with producers in their fields.

His emphasis on field-based guidance recognised that advice must respond to actual conditions: the land available, the crop or livestock being managed and the difficulties a farmer encounters. He also highlighted appropriate mechanisation and properly planned infrastructure, including aggregation centres.

Those contributions connected the week’s discussions with the services farmers need after returning home.

For Seahlolo founder and Newsday Media Managing Director Lerato Matheka, the expanded event resulted from a partnership developed over several years.

“Our journey with the Farmers Pitso Awards started three years ago as sponsors, and they later approached us to work with them,” she said.

Matheka thanked the Farmers Pitso Foundation for entrusting her organisation with hosting the awards. She said the 2026 programme began with a clear vision and grew into four days connecting knowledge exchange, schools’ participation, public exhibition and recognition.

Delivering that expansion required substantial work.

“It was not easy organising it, especially because we were introducing a lot of things that we had not done before,” she said.

Matheka reported that organisers received 285 applications, with an independent panel of judges assessing entries. The final awards recognised 118 farmers across 44 categories.

She thanked the farmers who participated, acknowledging the commitment involved in presenting their work for scrutiny. Their entries brought the achievements of agricultural enterprises into public view and demonstrated interest in a platform dedicated to recognising excellence.

Matheka also acknowledged the Ministry of Agriculture, Minister Mochoboroane, ministry officials, SADP II and the companies that supported the programme.

“These are companies that heard me when I pitched the vision I had for the Farmers Pitso Awards,” she said.

Businesses from South Africa joined local sponsors, broadening the initiative’s support. Matheka viewed their participation as an indication of the potential to attract wider attention and investment to Lesotho’s agricultural sector.

The partnership with SADP II also saw the project’s excelling beneficiaries celebrated at the event, placing agricultural excellence recognition alongside a development agenda.

The project honoured its beneficiaries, highlighting support intended to improve farmers’ access to assets, technology, infrastructure and markets.

Farmers Pitso brought producers onto a national stage, where their achievements could encourage others and their challenges could be heard, while the ambition is an agricultural economy in which smallholder enterprises can grow, withstand shocks and provide dependable livelihoods.



SADP II PROJECT DIRECTOR MPAKI MAJARA

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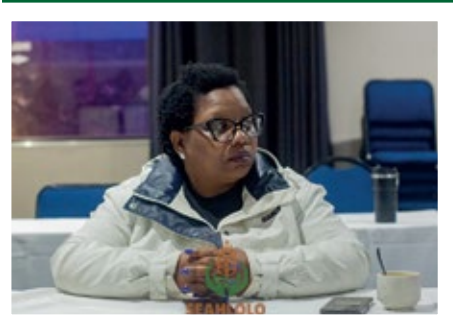


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