

## RELEVANT

Groundnuts

# Dr Ntladi has great plans for groundnut breeding in SA

Karina Muller, SA Graan/Grain-medewerker

Since his appointment as researcher: Groundnut Breeder at the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) in August last year, Dr Solomon Ntladi has not let the grass grow under his feet. Being previously employed in the private sector – in companies like AB InBev – and working in several African countries, Dr Ntladi is well aware of the value chain and its impact on society.

First on his list was to tackle the depleted infrastructure at the ARC premises in Potchefstroom. Through various role-players he arranged for the glass house and cool rooms to be updated in order to run a proper commercial breeding programme.

*His dream is to see South African groundnuts competing on the international market*

He then met with stakeholders and producers in the South African groundnut industry to determine their needs.

One of the challenges emerging from these conversations, is groundnut's long maturity period of approximately 150 days. As the local production of groundnuts has fluctuated greatly over the past twenty years, steps also need to be taken to up the yield.

Other factors that need to be addressed in the cultivation of new breeds, specifically for South African conditions, are disease resistance, the shape of the nut (it should be round and not oblong) and high oleic acid\* content.

Dr Ntladi then obtained germplasm from the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in India, one of the foremost growers of groundnuts in the world. These are now planted in Malawi.

He obtained more germplasm from the Centre Régional d'Excellence sur les céréales sèches et cultures associées de l'Institut Sénégalais de Recherches Agricoles (ISRA/CERAAS) in Senegal and the University of Georgia in the USA. The plan is to start planting on

Dr Solomon Ntladi, researcher and groundnut breeder at the ARC in Potchefstroom, is passionate about breeding a cultivar that will lead to groundnut farming in South Africa becoming sustainable.



a large scale at the Makhathini research station in KwaZulu-Natal to evaluate the performance and adaptability of the germplasm. The best lines will then be used in a breeding programme to address the mentioned challenges.

As a village boy growing up in rural Limpopo, it is of extreme importance for Dr Ntladi to succeed in breeding a plant for local conditions. His dream is to see South African groundnuts competing on the international market and in the process create more job opportunities.

\*Oleic acid is a mono-unsaturated fatty acid which is known as a good fat, reducing the amount of LDL (bad cholesterol), whilst boosting the levels of HDL (good cholesterol). ●

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