

New TV show puts Mzansi's new era farmers on the map

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A brand-new show saluting the unsung heroes of Mzansi agriculture hit the small screen on Thursday evening and, the producers say, it's raw, real and cutting-edge - a first for local television.

Vir die liefde van die land (For the love of the land) is a 10-part series highlighting the journeys of South Africa's new era farmers, mostly Black, who continue to farm against all odds.



Television presenter Ivor Price and Samson Mahlaba, a Free State farmer featured in the first episode of *Vir die liefde van die land*, a new agricultural TV show. Photo: WYRD Films

The show is hosted by award-winning presenter Ivor Price and Piet Potgieter, a KwaZulu-Natal-born farmer who trades his life of extensive cattle farming for one in front of the cameras. The first episode, broadcasted this evening at 6pm, features the 73-year-old Samson Mahlaba who worked as a labourer for 50 years before transitioning to a commercial farmer five years ago.

"Often their lives aren't pretty. Their farms aren't glamorous. Their journeys are painful, and yet these up-and-coming and newly commercialised farmers are going above and beyond to feed the nation," says Price.

In tonight's episode, Mahlaba, who farms just outside the Free State town of Reitz, says he was but a child when he first started working as a farm labourer. Although, at the time, there were no other Black farmers in his vicinity, he always believed that his day would come.

"I always dreamed of becoming a farmer because I loved the farm," says Mahlaba, who farms with his two grandsons. "Farming to me is like a disease that I was infected with. It's a disease that I do not know where it came from."

Mahlaba's dream of owning land came true after he partnered with the VKG Group, an agricultural enterprise. VKB formally assigned farmer Coenraad Fick (62) as his mentor although the two have known each other since childhood. Mahlaba spent most of his career working for Fick's father.

Potgieter has been actively involved in the upliftment of Black farmers since 1986 when his family was involved with the 1986 Ngotshe Cooperation Agreement in KwaZulu-Natal. In an earlier research article published by Gerhard Maré and Georgina Hamilton in the *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, the accord is described as "a pact between rugged Afrikaner farmers, conservative to the bone, and skinclad Zulu men".

"Doing development work in South African agriculture is like working for the welfare where you put in a lot, but don't easily see success. But, for me, it is enough to know that I am doing the right thing by advancing farmers who haven't had it easy in this country," says Potgieter.

Food For Mzansi co-founder Kobus Louwrens, who produces the show in partnership with VKB, says: "We find and tell the stories of ordinary South Africans working together for a better future. The people in these stories choose to emphasise what they have in common rather than what divides them. They do so for the sake of their own prosperity and that of their communities. I find that enormously exciting because it shows nation building and personal growth in action, all for the love of the land."

- Catch *Vir die liefde van die land* on Thursdays at 6pm on Via (DStv channel 147), with further repeats on Saturdays at 10.30am, Sundays at 8pm and Mondays at 8am. The show has English subtitles and was filmed in parts of the Free State, Western Cape and Limpopo.

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