

SUCCESSION

Thulani Investments

Extracts with permission of journalist LOUISE BRODIE

Mzo Makhanya began farming on his farm Thulwane Investments at Nkwalini in 2006. Since he has been farming with citrus, Mzo has established a career of involvement in organised agriculture. At an industry level he serves the industry as the chairman of the Citrus Growers' Development Chamber (CGDC). At a local level he is a member of the Nkwalini Farmers' Association which manages the local water resource management.

Mzo was well into his career as a mechanical engineer when situations forced him to change careers. At that stage there were suddenly opportunities in farming, which did not exist before and this was something that appealed to him. He had grown up near Mtubatuba where his family farmed with cattle, and so his affinity with

farming made him start looking for a suitable farm. He found the property, leased the farm, started farming and, after the initial very steep learning curve, Mzo has not looked back. The property is leased from the Department of Land Affairs through the Pro-Active Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS) and Mzo holds a 30-year lease with the option to buy the farm.

Initially, when he started farming at Thulwane investments the farm was a sugar cane and citrus farm. During the last four years he removed all the sugar cane and is undertaking a rapid citrus expansion project. "I have planted 65 ha of citrus since 2016 and the total number of citrus hectares on the farm is now 170," says Mzo. "The expansion project is continuing in 2019, when I plan to plant a further 50 ha of citrus made up of 30 ha of oranges, 10 ha of grapefruit and 10 ha of lemons." The farm is 280 ha in size and has water rights for 220 ha. Mzo explained that although he was expanding his productions, these will not reach 220 ha.

"Citrus farming has not been easy and although I have had some tough years, I can say that I have been lucky to have experienced more ups than downs over the seasons. New markets have opened up for the citrus industry and these have



Back: Phaniso and Mzo Makhanya; front: Sasasa with Mzo's wife Cindy and their other son, Sonqoba

Mzo Makhanya, Thulani Investments, Nkwaleni

generally delivered good returns. I see good opportunities continuing for the citrus industry in future, and this has motivated me to expand my productions. In 2015 I bought a share in the Nkwaleni co-operative and I am currently having my fruit packed there and I export my fruit through Lona. Thulwane Investments employs five permanent workers and an additional 80 seasonal workers during the harvest.

In 2015 Mzo bought and established a 250 ha farm for sheep and goats near Empangeni. This is an intensive animal feedlot business. "I see this as a diversification from my citrus business and as this serves the local market and thus spreads the risk from the citrus, which is marketed internationally," explained Mzo.

"Our eldest son Sasasa is 22 and he is studying Public Finance at the Berea College in Durban," says Mzo. "The second son Sonqoba is 16 and wants to be a doctor. He is a boarder at Durban High School. The youngest son, Phaniso is 13 and he has just started as a boarder at Northwood College, and we now have an empty house. Phaniso is keen on the farm and when he is home, he calls himself my right-hand man and loves to spend time in the orchards with me. Right now he is very keen on golf and has a nine handicap. This is occupying him a great deal these days, but I would imagine that as time goes on, of the three sons, he would be the most likely one to take an interest in the farming business. If he wants to farm in the future, it is important that he needs to get an appropriate qualification."

"My wife Sindi did not want to move here initially, but now she loves living on the farm. Our three sons have been exposed to farming and while they love the lifestyle, they have seen how tough farming is."

Mzo has been something of a role model to other aspiring black farmers. He has had enquiries about the possibility of starting citrus farming businesses from some quite prominent business people in KZN. "I do encourage people to enter the farming sector, and say that what should motivate you to be a farmer is if you love to see things grow." ❀




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