

# From farmworker to farm owner

## A young woman's inspiring journey

When Khulile Mahlalela's dream of becoming a geologist was no longer possible due to her poor matric results, she was forced to make tough decisions. She went to find employment as a general worker on a farm in Mpumalanga. After completing her Grade 12 studies, Mahlalela (32) found work at a large-scale pig production business in Middleburg, Mpumalanga, where she worked for five years, learning everything she could about piggery. Growing up in a farming community often means limited opportunities for young people, and farmworkers are at a particular disadvantage due to the circumstances under which they work, including low wages and no prospects for growth.

However, Mahlalela defied the odds and is one of a few exceptions, who became a successful farmer. She credits the experience she gained while working as a farm worker and as an apprentice at the Kanhym Estates Piggery Business, for the development of her skills and love for pig farming. Mahlalela founded, Legend Piggery in 2010, after obtaining a Diploma in Animal Production from Mangosuthu University of Technology in KwaZulu-Natal. She ventured into farming with baby-steps, first operating on a leased 0.5-hectare plot, with only three pregnant pigs, which she later increased to 271 pigs.

The drive to succeed led Mahlalela to apply to the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) for additional land, to expand her operations.

Her application was successful, and she was granted a 30-year lease on 123 hectares of arable land early this year. The leased farm includes 10 hectares of peach trees planted by previous owner and a fishing dam. "I was so excited to receive this farm, the Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development has blessed me with this land, I see so much potential, I feel like I am sitting on a gold mine, and all it needs are my hands," she said. Mahlalela plans to diversify her business in future by venturing into the fruit business and fishing.

Her knowledge and passion for the piggery business has not gone unnoticed; she has won several awards, including Mpumalanga's 2019 Female Farmer of the Year, with prize money of R300,000 to further bolster her business. Despite setbacks, including swine flu and the Corona Virus pandemic, her business is growing from strength to strength and her 10-pigs-a-month supply to an Abattoir in Bronkhorspruit, and a Pretoria-based market are continuing. The business is also anchored by community purchases. Legend Piggery contributes to job creation and food security in the country, thereby realising two objectives aligned with the mandate of DALRRD.



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