



HOW THIS KZN AGRICULTURAL ADVISOR IS BRINGING TECH TO RURAL FIELDS.

From herding cattle in Greytown to graduating as a pioneer learner of Zakhe Agricultural College, Nhlakanipho Nzama's life has always been about the soil. Now, as a KZN agricultural advisor, he is helping local farmers adopt smart tech to thrive.

<https://www.foodformzansi.co.za/how-this-kzn-agricultural-advisor-is-bringing-tech-to-rural-fields/>

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KZN agricultural advisor Nhlakanipho Nzama is on a mission to make modern technology and climate-smart farming accessible to smallholders and rural communities. Photos: Supplied/Food For Mzansi

Growing up in Greytown, KwaZulu-Natal, Nhlakanipho Nzama spent his boyhood herding cattle and helping his family grow imifino and amadumbe. When his father bought a tractor to help local communities plough their land, Nhlakanipho jumped right in. Today, that village grit guides him as a KZN agricultural advisor.

Watching his dad leave the taxi industry to help the community brought him closer to the land, but the real shift happened in 2001 when he was in grade 7.



“My mom was listening to Reggie Khumalo on Ukhozi FM’s *Cobelela* Falaza,” Nzama recalls. “There was an advertisement for a new agricultural college opening in Baynesfield, outside PMB [Pietermaritzburg]. They wanted learners who would start the following year in grade 8.”

His mother grabbed the opportunity. That November, they went down for the open day at Zakhe Agricultural College, which was a brand-new school for boys.

Learning the discipline of farming

Nzama became one of the 24 pioneer learners at the school. The boys did classroom work from 07:30 to 13:00, then went straight into heavy farm practicals.

“If you were in animal production that week, you started your practicals at 4 am before class,” Nzama says. “We rotated every week to make sure we worked in all spheres of the farm.”

After matric, he took that discipline to the University of Zululand, graduating with a BSc in agricultural economics. A department of agriculture bursary led to a permanent job after his studies, and he officially stepped into his advisor role in 2012, working hands-on with farmers across Vryheid and Zululand. He later completed his master’s in sustainable agriculture at the University of the Free State in 2018.



A vital part of Nhlakanipho Nzama’s daily routine involves visiting farmers on their land to inspect crop health and provide direct, practical solutions. Photo: Supplied/Food for Mzansi



He tells *Food For Mzansi* that his primary focus is crop production, specifically grains and vegetables.

“As a project officer, I also implement local initiatives and use my agricultural economics background to write business plans for our clients.”

The daily grind

“My day-to-day work is to provide hands-on advisory services,” Nzama says. “I visit farmers on their land, check their produce, and advise accordingly.”

This includes running monthly grain study groups and introducing soybean production alongside Grain SA. He also launched a pilot seed project with Capstone and participates in community ‘war rooms’ to tackle local challenges with targeted field training.

When the seasons shift, his duties adapt. “In the dry season, I take yield records and maize samples and help transport crops to the market.”



During the dry season, Nhlakanipho Nzama assists local grain growers by taking yield records, collecting maize samples for testing, and helping to coordinate transport to markets. Photo: Supplied/Food For Mzansi



Breaking barriers to innovation

Nzama has noticed a common misconception among upcoming farmers that new technologies are too complicated or only meant for large commercial operations.

He champions accessible, user-friendly tools, from mobile weather forecasts and the O-VELD WhatsApp tool to precision farming and drones. Introduced correctly, he says these technologies drastically improve productivity, but shifting old mindsets remains a challenge.



By introducing precision farming technology to rural smallholders, Nzama is helping to break down the myth that agritech is only meant for massive commercial operations. Photo: Supplied/Food For Mzansi

“Adoption is slower with climate-smart and conservation agriculture,” he notes. “Some farmers still view climate variability as temporary rather than a long-term reality requiring new practices.”

To accelerate this, he advocates for hands-on demonstrations, engaging tech-savvy youth, and partnering with the private sector.



“Farmers need tangible evidence that innovations are practical, profitable, and suited to their local conditions,” he emphasises. By uniting government researchers, agricultural officers, the private sector, and farmers, Nzama believes the sector can build a resilient, food-secure future for rural communities.

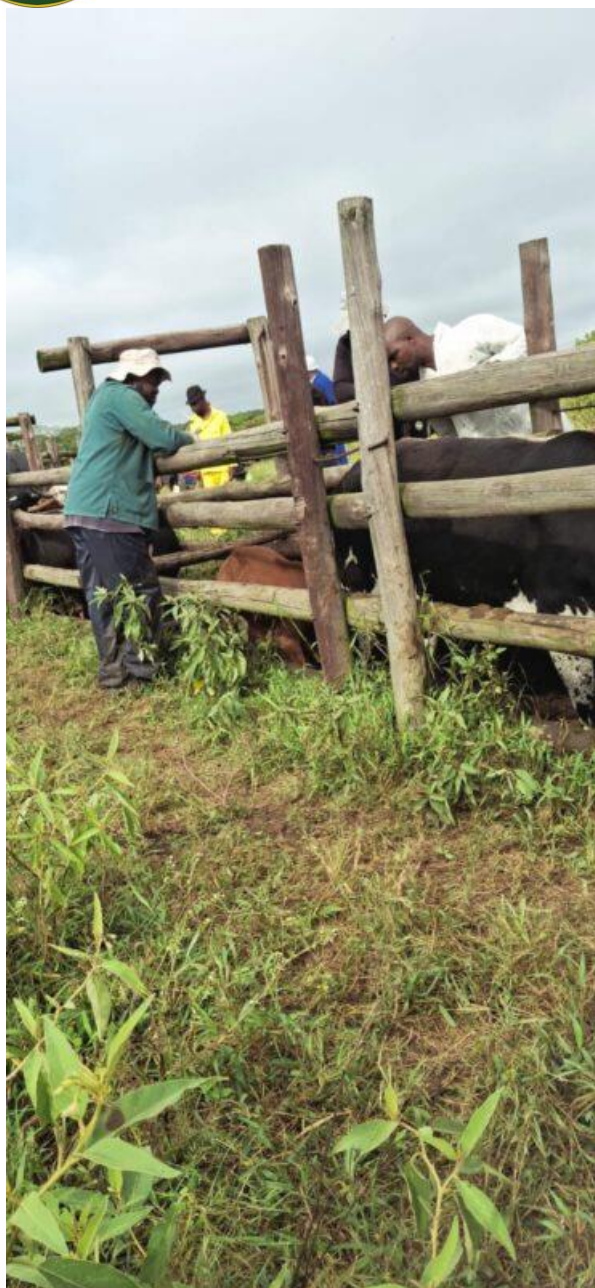




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