

Some KZN farmers are full of beans

Farming edamame beans has many advantages for province, writes Clinton Moodley

IT'S been hailed as the new super food. Now the humble edamame bean is about to burst on to the local agricultural scene. And this prime protein soya bean may soon become a staple in many Durban households.

At the edamame agribusiness and food nutrition seminar at the Durban ICC on Friday, international and local industry experts came together to promote the effectiveness of the plant and the possible boost it would have on the economy.

Phakamile Mbonambi, programme manager for eThekweni Economic Development and Investment Promotions Unit, said the programme had been introduced five years ago by a group of researchers who wanted to explore the possibility of growing the beans in KwaZulu-Natal.

"We are confident the research by the Edamame Development Programme (EDP) is sufficient to grow a successful niche industry. From the city 'strategic point of view, we are looking at promoting agribusiness, which is prioritised in terms of creating jobs."

She said the programme would create 507 new permanent jobs, 3 925 temporary jobs and train 3 625 people.

Since its inception in 2011, it has produced 81 farmers cultivating edamame on part of their land – six hectares are

under cultivation.

The director of the project, Walter Coughlan, said it was an opportunity to meet national demand and compete internationally. He said it had developed a variety that emerging farmers could grow, and established a small processing facility to take advantage of the value-adding opportunities.

"We are at our early development stage. The demand is exceeding supply with South Africa importing from Taiwan, Thailand and Kenya. We will produce about 60 tons this year and hope to grow production, particularly now we better understand growing and processing requirements.

"Soon we will be in a position to move into the market in a larger way. Emerging contract farmers will be able to grow a higher value niche crop with improved returns. Around 2 000 small-scale and homestead farmers have planted edamame this season for home consumption."

He is confident national consumption will increase which will create opportunities for farmers.

He said Woolworths and select Food Lover's Market stores, would sell edamame, and the programme would build on existing processing partnerships and seek further business partnerships.

Former director for the Asian Vegetable Research and

Development Centre, Dr Sundar Shanmugasundaram, said South Africa had the potential to become one of the largest distributors of the bean through the project.

"With the continued support of the government, private sector and industry, there is lots of scope for future development to promote rural development, health, meet the domestic market and build the international market. It also provides food security."

He said the bean had many health benefits, from reducing the likelihood of a range of diseases like breast and prostate cancer, osteoporosis, heart disease and high blood pressure.

Deputy mayor and chairwoman of the economic development and planning committee, Nomvuzo Shabalala, said the initiative could be the solution to economic and food security issues. "This type of project can effectively help fight poverty and unemployment. It will contribute to job creation."

A number of challenges have been identified, including the current drought.

During a visit to the Edamame Research Farm near Mariannhill Monastery near Pietermaritzburg, agronomist Isaac Chata-pura said if farmers met the requirements, they would be shown how to plant edamame and would be supplied with seed. He said besides the nutritional aspects for communities, it would help financially.

Agronomist Sandile Bekwa, said for every farmer involved in the project, four people were hired. When the season was over, the EDP bought back the grown beans from the farmers.



Agriculture student Archie Ntombela shows two varieties of beans being grown at the Mariannhill Edamame research farm. Pictures: BONGANI MBATHA

Food and cash crop has chefs sprouting tasty new recipes

CLINTON MOODLEY

WHAT do the Kardashians, Oprah and the Beckhams have in common – apart from being recognised as some of the biggest stars in the world?

They are all firm believers in the nutritional benefits of the edamame plant.

At the edamame-agribusiness and food nutrition seminar on Friday guests were treated to tasty, wholesome meals created by Wesli Jacobs, sous chef at the Durban International Convention Centre.

The menu included mini burgers, bunny chows, soya bil-

tong and crème brûlée.

Jacobs said he spent a few weeks experimenting with flavours and combinations before he came up with out-of-the-box menus which had the sceptics in awe.

Menus

"I had not tried edamame before, but it's something I will definitely add to our menus in future.

"What's so great about it is that it is versatile and user-friendly. I would use it in my personal kitchen," he said.

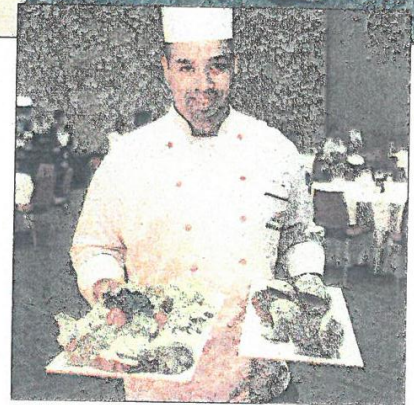
About three years ago when the Edamame Development

Programme started working with Food and Nutrition BTEch students of the Durban University of Technology, they were asked to create a recipe book inspired by the plant. The resulting book offers delicious recipes such as steamed bread, pasta and even ice creams.

Senior Researcher for the programme Dr Michiel Smit said they had supplied the students with the bean and challenged them to create out-of-the-box recipes.

"We worked with the students to look at ways of developing the plant further.

"Everyone can enjoy these



ICC sous chef Wesli Jacobs says his experiments with edamame have been hugely successful.

wonderful ideas.

"This is why we are asking for industry to come on board and sample our range of ideas and further develop them."

said Smit.

The recipe book can be found on DUT's food and nutrition website.

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