KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE
AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

KZN female entrepreneur revolutionises South Coast agriculture with mushroom farming

https://thestar.co.za/business-report/entrepreneurs/2025-03-23-kzn-female-entrepreneur-revolutionises-south-coast-agriculture-with-mushroom-farming/



The sun-drenched hills of the KZN South Coast, known for their rich agricultural legacy in sugar cane, bananas, and macadamia nuts, are witnessing an inspiring transformation.

At the forefront of this agricultural evolution is Oatlands Oyster Mushroom, a pioneering enterprise that's tapping into the region's unique potential for an unexpected produce – mushrooms. Established by enterprising local entrepreneur Asanda Mkhize in 2018, Oatlands is a proudly 100% black, female-owned business located in KwaNositha.

With no prior experience in agriculture, Mkhize ventured into mushroom farming, motivated by the significant income that agriculture generates in the community. “When I started, I didn’t have any background in agriculture, but I knew that was the industry I needed to be in because it’s where so much local income is sourced,” she said.

Oatlands Oyster Mushroom grows fresh oyster mushrooms for local supply. The ongoing success of this farming venture has seen investment opportunities extend into alternative mushroom families, with owners looking to sell king oyster mushrooms, tashik mushrooms, as well as yellow and blue oyster mushrooms – in both the fresh and dehydrated forms.

Mkhize told Business Report, “The Department of Agriculture trained us in how to grow oyster mushrooms, and I was intrigued by the fact that you can grow them almost anywhere, without needing a large space.”

Despite the challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on the local economy, Oatlands has continued to thrive, gaining support from South Coast Tourism and Investment Enterprise’s (SCTIE) Buy Local initiative. Members enjoy significant benefits including marketing, networking, and insight into options for local government support.

“We have continued to gain more customers through Buy Local, supplying more retailers, restaurants, hotels, and other tourism areas with our dehydrated oyster mushrooms,” the mushroom farmer said. “There is definitely more potential for expansion in this industry such as more dedicated mushroom production buildings to support the six-week growth cycle, and the option of expanding into the global market. We’re also looking at diversifying our mushroom selection to reach new markets.”

Dr Vusumuzi Sibiya, CEO of SCTIE, said agriculture remains one of the KZN South Coast’s key economic drivers, with significant potential for investors to explore.

“Those looking to leverage the favourable conditions for farming will discover the potential in various crops, as well as agritourism which is a growing industry on the

KZN South Coast. The region’s position also has logistical advantages, from its ease of accessibility along national networks to forming a component of the Eastern Seaboard Development that further opens up the domestic market. The nearby Durban Harbour also allows for increased access to a global market as well,” Sibiya said.

Mkhize, who is 32-years-old said that she supplies her crops to major retailers such as Food Lovers Market South Coast Mall, Food Lovers Market Scottburgh, Pick n Pay Scottburgh, Green Grocers Fruit and Veg ' Spar Port Shepstone and to households in the province directly.

Being a woman in a generally male dominated industry of farming, came with many challenges for Mkhize. She reflected on some of the challenges she encountered, "As a woman, I've faced numerous challenges that have tested my resilience and determination. Some of the most significant obstacles I've encountered includes, undermine my authority, intelligence, or capabilities, managing the weight of expectations while also meeting the demands of my personal and professional life. Very hard to get a mentor and be able to network for future business potential."

That did not halt her hopes and dreams, however, as she still has plans on expanding her business. She said, "Doing more is something on the cards for me. Growing different mushrooms such as shiitake, enoki mushrooms, which is like king oysters. I also want to get into mushroom processing, making powder and mushroom soup. We would also like to offer farm tours, workshops, or educational programs to attract visitors and generate additional income."

"Born in the South, in university I was in the commerce department and I didn’t study anything regarding agriculture. I only developed interest after job hunting and had to make a living and at home they had this piece of land. I come from a family of business-oriented people so I joined the club, with less working experience. I was a part of the Singatha incubation program for 18 months that brought change to the business. They provided me with mentorship, sponsorship and trainings that cater to your needs, got to meet other emerging farms/business that you get to share ideas and challenges with," Mkhize said.