

# Farmer2Market programme unlocks market opportunities for small farmers

Using digital solutions to enhance inclusion in the agricultural value chain, the European Union, in partnership with the Department of Environmental Affairs, together with Solidaridad, LIMA Development Foundation and ICCO has today announced the launch of the Switch Africa Green, Farmer2Market programme on International World Food Day - a programme that will unlock access to market opportunities for smallholder farmers across South Africa.



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The SWITCH Africa Green Farmer2Market programme will run for three years and is in the process of recruiting 750 farmers from Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, the North West, the Eastern Cape and Gauteng. The selection criteria for the programme includes applicants having no less than one hectare of land with irrigation, availability of fencing, existing interaction/ linkage with the market and the possibility of expanding the enterprise.

South Africa's unemployment rate of 26.5% is at a 14 year high with agriculture playing an essential role in the South African economy, representing 2% of total GDP and a key absorber of the labour force. This sector has immense opportunity to grow by embracing new technology solutions, such as smart farming through agriculture-based apps, Internet of Things (IoT), and data analytics.

While these technologies have long been available for commercial farmers, they are yet to be used in smallholder farms. Farmer2Market aims to overcome this technology gap by supporting emerging farmers in socially responsible, climate smart production that meets the market stipulated quality standards and simultaneously supporting the fight against food insecurity and contributing toward job growth.

## Capacitating emerging producers

In 2016 Solidaridad Southern Africa established the South African Smallholder Farmer's Market Access Platform, together with a number of social partners such as the World Wildlife Fund. The platform congregated key market actors and stakeholders such as farmer organisations, major retailers, government, finance institutions, development partners and academia, seeking to address challenges that smallholder producers face in accessing formal markets.

These stakeholders jointly concluded that the current emerging producer support initiatives are too fragmented; necessitating a more integrated approach where issues related to emerging producer sustainable production, quality and food safety, commercialisation and market access could be addressed collaboratively and concurrently.

The dialogues at the Smallholder Farmers' Market Access Platform resulted in the development of the Farmer2Market programme whose primary objective is to help capacitate emerging producers with Good Agricultural Practices within their farming operation, using smart farming, in order to create a market orientated environment and produce quality yield that the retail, fresh produce and agro-processing market can absorb.

## Increasing efficiency, yields

With technology being a major enabler in how agricultural activities are going to expand on the continent, the Farmer2Market programme developed two applications, namely **Farming Solution** and **Business Solution**, which will be used to increase efficiency, quality of yield and gather actionable insights about smallholder operations.

The applications are designed to meet the smallholder producer at their point of need, Farming Solution Application has been developed to help farmers make everyday farming decisions from an informed perspective by giving agricultural insights and helps producers produce better.

The primary objective of **Farming Solutions** is to incentivise the farmer to follow good agricultural practices such as the correct use of fertilisers and sprays, to advise farmers on good harvesting techniques relating to specific crops ultimately helping farmers to reach their expected yield. Market players have said to have a challenge in working with smallholder producers due to their lack of credible track record.

This is the challenge that the **Business Solution** application is designed to address, by incentivising farmers to keep necessary records like farm diary and financial records which is the biggest deterrent to farmers from accessing finance and better markets. Business Solution will help smallholders to move beyond subsistence farming and start operating their farm like a business.

These sustainability applications promote quality and safety assurance benchmarks, adapted to smallholder conditions and support the business transition of smallholder farmers. The insights gathered via these digital solutions will help the farmer identify specific areas of improvement through data recording and will help farmers to furthermore improve social, environmental and food safety compliances, as well as help multiple stakeholders such as funding institutions, insurance and input companies, engage better with smallholder farmers.