



LENAFU SEALS DEAL WITH TASTY FOOD PACKERS

THE BEAN MARKET CASE STUDY



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Lesotho National Farmers Union (LENAFU) is the national and apex body for farmer organizations in Lesotho, representing small scale men, women and youth farmers and producers from the 10 districts of Lesotho. One of the primary objectives of (LENAFU) is to have capacity building of the farmers in various ways.

This includes ensuring that farmers especially those interested in agri- business are acquainted with necessary skills to enable smooth operation of their farming business; they know what to produce and for who to produce and in what quantities. The association guides and equips farmers with efficacious skills so that they should not walk in the dark while engaging in agricultural activities to sustain their livelihoods.

LEFANU translated one of its objectives into reality last year when farmers faced poverty following a collapse of their market with the World Food Programme (WFP). This happened after the country had a total national lockdown because of Covid- 19 that affected the global community where Lesotho was not an exception.

Local farmers had a business deal with WFP to sell their produce under the School Feeding Programme. But due to Covid- 19 pandemic, the schools shut down and the market automatically collapsed. Faced with the dilemma after the collapse of the market with WFP, LENAFU became restless and searched for a new market to save the desperate farmers from sinking into wretched poverty.

This saw the farmers' mother body approaching a locally owned business, Tasty Food Packers, in Maputsoe to ink a business deal. Tasty Food Packers is a local business that buys and packs the products for sale. The company buys both locally and abroad. With the coming of local bean farmers under LENAFU, Tasty Food Packers highly appreciated the move saying it would promote the local produce.

WFP used to buy the beans directly from the farmers so as to save them from hunger. Because of the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic last year, no transaction took place between the farmers and WFP. It is this desperation that forced LENAFU to move from pillar to post to find a new market for the bean farmers.

Most farmers had three varieties of beans, sugar beans, pinto and lebeta but sugar beans were most welcomed by the Tasty Food Packers. So this means the other two varieties were still struggling to get the market. Luckily, the government went out to buy Basotho's produce during the national total shutdown last year.

But the question still remains regarding the prospect of the other two varieties in the market. In July last year, LENAFU called on farmer representatives from its structure associations in 10 districts to have a discussion so that they could agree on floor price as a united force. They agreed not to sell a kg of beans with less than M17, 00.00. The price was also accepted by Tasty Food Packers and the beans commodities were sold for that in harvest season 2019-2020.

In April 2021, LENAFU and Tasty had a meeting to discuss the selling price for the beans. Now the price has increased to M20.00 a kg. Because of this lucrative deal, farmers from all over the country today take their produce to their new buyer. In December last year, 172 tonnes of beans were sold to the new buyer by the local farmers.

LENAFU is yet to see and assess the yields for this year since some farmers are still cleaning and sorting their beans for supply to the markets. Though, some farmers have already sold their produce to Tasty. In this period of two months (May and June 2020) Tasty has reported a collection of 85 tons of sugar beans from the local farmers.

This includes LENAFU members and other non-member farmers. Farmers are informed about this market opportunity through different communication platforms, LENAFU Facebook page, Whatsapp, Radio adverts and direct calling by LENAFU office. Thus the communication reaches both the members and non-members of the association. To help the farmers do better in agri- business, LENAFU has a project where it has prepared training manuals.



"Amongst other commodities, the project targets maize and beans farmers," LENAUFU Programmes Manager Khotso Lepheana said.

The project primarily helps the farmers to have an in-depth knowledge regarding the planting of beans and maize and to organize farmers into effective group that can easily link with the buyers of agricultural commodities.

LENAFU working collaboratively with the Department of Marketing in the Ministry of Agriculture organizes buyer seller meetings that bring the producers (farmers) and potential buyers together to discuss the development of agriculture business in Lesotho. The Department of Marketing in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security has to ensure that it advises the farmers with available marketing opportunities.

This department informs the farmers about the dynamics of demand and supply in the market. It torches a light on the farmers to inform them what is available in the market. This department usually holds sessions for the farmers so that they should know what the market demands. Also, it advises the farmers to know for whom to produce and in what quantities.

Director in the Department of Marketing in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security Lekhooe Makhate said they need data so that they can make plans. The department advises farmers not to produce for themselves but for the market. For this market, they should be clear of what the market needs them to produce. The database will help the department to decide if it could restrict certain farm produce to enter into the country to give the locals an opportunity to sell their produce in the market. Their advice to the farmers is that they should group themselves so that they know what they have in their respective areas. This would help the department to know if the farmers would be able to supply the demand of the market. And for how long that supply could last. Then the department would be in a position to tell consumers where to get the produce in demand. It is high time that farmers know the dynamics in the market.





Tasty Food Packers has always been buying sugar beans from Basotho farmers for years. But some farmers did not know this opportunity was available. It is only people from Maputsoe, Leribe and a few from Teyateyaneng who knew about this lucrative market opportunity. Since LENAFU has farmers all over the country, this means more farmers would be told of this existing opportunity. Tasty Food Packers is already getting supply from all over the country.

However, the company is still worried that the supply is fairly low because the farmers do not come as they are expected. Farmers could make a massive use of this opportunity so that the importation of beans from South Africa is banned. What is more interesting is that the Tasty and Food Packers buys in large quantities. The company is in high demand for beans in large quantities to feed the local market.

The company has some standards that it sets for those who supply it with the beans. It needs clean beans. On this aspect, the company does not compromise its quality. The beans should not be older than a year. It sells fresh produce to the buyers. The company could travel the whole country to buy beans if their suppliers do not have transport, in that way, making business simpler.

Though there are terms and conditions on this, basically the aggregated quantities should be at least 20 tons for the truck to go out and collect. This market is sustainable and needs more suppliers to bring their produce. So far 85 tonnes of beans have been collected from the suppliers. More beans are needed to satisfy the high demand of the market. She said they need more than that. The company said the produce has been fairly low this year as compared to last year because of the heavy rains that damaged the crops. Yet there is one farmer who managed to supply them with 25 tonnes of beans.

"We advise farmers to move swiftly to benefit from this market," 'Matseleg Keele from Tasty Food Packers said.

But this poses a serious challenge to some farmers who are not well- resourced. For an ordinary farmer, it is still a far-fetched dream to use machinery for threshing. This means some farmers could not meet some terms and conditions as set by the big buyers such as Tasty. Some farmers still use the old ways of threshing like using the sticks and bags to thresh. No doubt that this compromises quality of the produce. Farmers still have to be supported financially so that they could be able to meet all the conditions in the market.

The farmers know that they have to come to the Tasty to sell their produce on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This initiative has been highly welcomed by the farmers who say they were desperate after their market with WFP collapsed.

The farmers say they are happy because this market is not seasonal. They have to supply throughout the year non- stop. Undoubtedly, they have to produce more beans to stop Tasty and Food Packers from importing the beans outside the country. So farmers would need some form of capacity building on training regarding the best seeds they could plant. Financial support is also critical to empower the farmers to beat the problems of Climate Change.



It is the belief of the farmers that if they could be assisted financially, their problems would be a thing of the past. Some farmers have been planting for years but applying traditional methods which are no longer productive today.

"When our market with LENAFO crumbled, we were quite worried," said Lephoto Taoana, who has been a farmer since 1989.

It was a massive blow for the farmers to have their market with WFP coming to a halt. Soon after securing the new market, some farmers said they were quick to grab the market opportunity and tried to plant more land. The heavy rains have impacted negatively on some farmers' crops because part of their land was washed away while in some areas the soil was saturated until the plants died. These farmers are just grappling with the complexities of climate change. It is high time that the government through the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security holds intensive training on Climate Change.

This is so because Climate Change is here to stay. So farmers have to be able to produce amid the grave challenge. Because of Climate Change, there could be a massive drought and sometimes great floods thereby hampering food production.

"We need efficient interventions to deal with climate change," Mantoetsi Jobo, a mixed farmer said.

Make farming a business enterprise
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LESOTHO NATIONAL FARMERS UNION

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