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Demeter PGS Group Members Share Thoughts for Global Campaign

Following the successful uptake of the Demeter PGS certification system in South Africa, the Biodynamic Federation Demeter International (BFDI) recently requested content for a campaign to raise awareness of and support for the global biodynamic movement.

BDAASA conducted video interviews with Gerard Frater, who farms herbs in Paarl, Nomsa Mngcita and Xoliswa Magutywa, both from Moya we Khaya Community Garden.

From three Demeter certified farms in South Africa for decades, there are now nearly 80 farms working to Demeter standards and aiming for Demeter PGS certification. Previously, Demeter certification was only really viable for exporters. Demeter PGS makes it possible for small farms to become certified to distribute their products in the local market. The plan is to grow the BD Harvest Hub which sources produce for distribution directly to consumers.

Click on the links below to see key take-outs from the video clips

Gerard Frater

<https://youtu.be/-OFAMq4s3E0>

Nomsa Mngcita

<https://youtu.be/L58Yrh7UgZM>

Xoliswa Magutywa

<https://youtu.be/X-gLcbg9y6c>





Gerard

Farmers can concentrate on growing while the Demeter PGS takes care of the distribution of the crops.

Establishing a seed bank with seeds that are acclimatised to the local environment is important for the growth of Demeter PGS.

Nomsa

Since joining Demeter PGS and using biodynamic preparations, there is a very big difference in our plots and vegetables.

The market gardeners have been taught about the preps and we can now make our own.

The mix of farmers that make up the Demeter PGS is 'like a rainbow' bringing together different communities.

Nomsa's group wants to share their knowledge with other gardeners in Khayelitsha to help them harvest healthy food.

Being part of the Demeter PGS group helps Moya we Khaya get their produce to market through the Harvest Hub.



Xoliswa

We know that when we are Demeter PGS certified we will be able to sell our produce at a higher price.

BD farming is the way of the future as it is a good way of farming - saving money on fertilizer and other inputs this group used to bring in.

It is natural and enables us to bring back the health of our people.



Meet Khotso Taetso who is introducing BD farming methods to the Cape Flats vegetable growers

Khotso Taetso, the field worker supporting the growers, tells us about his journey and the training he is providing.



I began working with the Cape Flats community farmers in 2022 when I joined Abalimi Bezekhaya as a field worker. My role was to visit farms and provide on-site training in organic farming.

My journey into this work began after I completed my Biodynamic Farming training in 2020. I was fascinated by the method and wanted to share it with others, so I started looking for the right platform to introduce it. Abalimi Bezekhaya was perfect, as the farmers there were already practising organic farming.

In 2024, working together with BDAASA and Abalimi Bezekhaya, I started a small project to raise awareness of biodynamic farming in the Cape Flats. The aim is to train and support the existing organic community farmers in biodynamic methods.

The project has two focus groups:

Community farmers in organised garden groups and home gardeners in the community.

The core participants are township-based community gardens:

- Moya Wekhaya in Khayelitsha, Cape Town
- Siyazama Community Allotment Garden Association (SCAGA) in Khayelitsha, Cape Town
- Masiphile in Khayelitsha, Cape Town
- Vulamasango NGO in Philippi, Cape Town

Each community farm is between 1 and 2 hectares in size and has around 10 to 12 farmers working on it.

These groups receive regular support in the form of training materials, biodynamic preparation supplies, follow-up visits, and hands-on training on-site, while the home gardeners are able to attend quarterly workshops on biodynamic home gardening.



The Cape Flats have sandy soils, almost like pure beach sand, with very few nutrients. It is hard to build humus in this soil. For many years, farmers have worked hard to improve their land by building trench beds and composting, although finding good-quality compost in Cape Town is not easy.

Since I began introducing biodynamic methods, the land is still in its early stages of change (it's only been one year so far), but there is already more use of biodynamic preparations and compost making. Farmers have given positive feedback about stronger, healthier crops after using biodynamic preparations.

Introducing biodynamic farming can be challenging, especially when explaining its anthroposophical background. I adapt the language so it makes sense in a different cultural context. At this stage, my training focuses on encouraging the use of biodynamic preparations, especially Cow Pat Pit (CPP) and Horn Manure. Farmers are slowly becoming familiar with these methods and are seeing good results.

I work mainly in the Khayelitsha and Nyanga communities. These farmers grow a wide variety of vegetables and have their own markets, selling produce to various outlets around Cape Town, including restaurants. They are also supplying produce to the Biodynamic Harvest Hub.



Plett Update

Plett is abuzz with activity and a strong bond is forming between the two groups in the area – the Raphaeli Group (mainly parents of learners at the Raphaeli Waldorf School and a few teachers) and the Craggs group (mainly owners of smallholdings in the area).

Yvette Worrall, a teacher at the Raphaeli Waldorf School, who doesn't own a home, let alone a garden, but has an interest in anthroposophy and is a eurhythmist, said being part of the combined group has been very supportive for everyone.

"What brings the two groups together are the monthly farm visits, where we learn from each other. Within the combined group are experts who have honed their skills in both horticulture and agriculture, as well as those who are interested in learning about BD farming and gardening as well as other regenerative agricultural practices."

"It's an inspirational journey, ably led by Avice Hindmarch, and an eye-opening one for some who are new to BD to learn the importance of practices such as observation, versus academic research," Yvette added.

The August farm visit was a return to Agri Cult Farm, where Craig Pappin of the Craggs group cleared



The August event was a visit to Agri Cult farm in The Craggs where members of the two groups made and applied tree paste.

black wattle land and replanted it with macadamia and pecan nut trees a few years ago. "This was our third annual visit where we spent the day making tree paste and painting it on Craig's trees. It was a great opportunity to witness the growth of these nut trees, which have never been subjected to fertilizers and pesticides. A bonus was being able to take the left-over tree paste to use on our own trees," said Fotini Babaletakis of the Craggs group.

While the two groups meet independently to discuss BD principles, the farm visits are crucial for promoting understanding and knowledge sharing. Activities have included CPP and 500 stirrings, peppering, a visit to an asparagus grower and to a smallholding where swales were being planted, as well as a workshop on preparing cuttings and propagating seedlings.

Craggs people are involved in BD and regenerative farming practices in a fairly intense way, whereas members of the Raphaeli group are applying the learnings in their gardens and helping to pass their enthusiasm on to their children. The children who attend the Raphaeli School have all had some exposure to BD and permaculture as each grade has the opportunity to get their hands dirty in the school's vegetable garden.

Not only are the groups transforming the land and turning Plett into a food growing area, working together is having a therapeutic effect on the community.

