

WORLD FOOD DAY:
MINISTER
CELEBRATES WITH
FARMERS

OLIVIA DLAMINI: THE
18TH WOMAN FARMER
OF THE YEAR

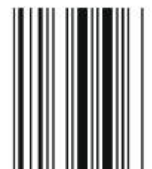
**INGWENYAMA VISITS
MPAKENI DAM AS IT
NEARS COMPLETION**

**65 PORKERS
PER WEEK
DJD PIGGERY**

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Glad to be back

When we published our last issue in May 2017, I didn't imagine it would take this long to return.

But business is like farming — some seasons are full, some are dry, and sometimes you have to go back, re-think, and plant again.

When we started Agribusiness Media in 2012, the goal was simple: use journalism to grow agriculture. I was (and still am) a journalist who farms — so I knew farmers had powerful stories, and I also knew many of them weren't getting the information they needed to scale, formalise, or even see themselves as businesspeople. That was the gap we wanted to close.

Then the media landscape changed. Money got tight. People moved. Digital took over. We had to pause. But the dream didn't die. It just needed time — and I believe it's only God who keeps people's dreams alive even when the timeline doesn't make sense.

So we're back — but not in the old way. We've been rebuilding quietly since the start of the year and we're coming back 100% digital, with multiple touchpoints because farmers consume information differently now: a

monthly online magazine, a daily news site, an app, a YouTube channel, and podcasts. Whether you're in the office, in the field, or on your phone at night, we want to reach you.

Our focus remains the same: serve agriculture. Tell real farmer stories. Track policy. Spotlight women and youth. Share market opportunities. Show that agribusiness is not theory — it's livelihoods.

To everyone who supported us then and is meeting us again now — thank you. To anyone who ever parked a dream — don't quit. Sometimes the pause is part of the plan.

Let's build the sector, together.

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A Fearless Revival of Eswatini's Agricultural Story



Boniswa Malaza, 2025 Woman Farmer of the Year (Youth Category)

It is with great excitement that I welcome you to the November edition of Agribusiness Monthly Magazine, the first under my editorship and a fearless revival of a platform that once shaped Eswatini's agricultural conversation. With over a decade of experience in journalism, media, and marketing, my vision is to see this publication become the trusted guide for farmers, a space where insight, innovation, and opportunity converge.

We aim to revive hope, open doors, and propel farmers to the top through dynamic storytelling, features, and in-depth interviews, both in print and across digital and podcast platforms. In this issue, we celebrate courage, transformation, and ingenuity. Eli Olivia Dlamini, our cover story, embodies grit and vision, redefining what it means to farm with purpose.

Young trailblazers like Boniswa Malaza and Thabiso Dlamini are proof that age is no barrier to ambition, while the near-completion of the E2.6 billion Mpakeni Dam promises to turn drought into prosperity for Shiselweni farmers. We also explore Bonsucro-certified sugar production, the rise of climate-smart and agroecological farming, and Eswatini Coffee's resolute entry into regional markets, accentuating that local innovation can now command global attention.

This magazine is more than a chronicle of successes - it is a movement. Our mission is to empower, inform, and inspire farmers, positioning Agribusiness Media as the platform that changes the game, uplifts communities, and amplifies Eswatini's agricultural story to the world. Welcome to the journey. Welcome to the future of farming.

PHE SHEYA KUNENE
EDITOR



Bonsucro Certification

Puts Eswatini Sugar on the Global Sustainability Map

Bonsucro has handed Eswatini sugar a passport to premium, sustainability-driven markets — and the big win is that growers, not just mills, stand to benefit. By becoming the first country in mainland Africa to secure Bonsucro certification, Eswatini has signalled to the world that its sugarcane is traceable, responsibly produced, and ready for tougher international rules.

SIKHONA SIBANDZE
reports

Eswatini's sugar sector has stepped onto the global stage in a big way.

With the Royal Eswatini Sugar Corporation (RES) and Tambankulu Estates officially receiving Bonsucro sustainability certification at Simunye Country Club in October, the country has become the first in mainland Africa to meet this internationally recognised standard for responsible sugarcane production. That's not just a plaque on the wall — it's a signal to buyers, financiers, and development partners that Eswatini can supply sugar that is traceable, ethical, and climate-conscious.

Bonsucro is the benchmark that top sugar nations like Brazil and Australia work with. Being on that list means Eswatini can:

- Protect current export markets
- Enter new, high-value ones
- Stay ahead of tightening rules on deforestation, human rights, water, and carbon

As Mandisa Maphalala, Head of Cane Testing and Quality at Eswatini Sugar, put it: this

milestone confirms what the industry has been building for years — responsible production, strong community links, and efficient use of resources.

Beyond Compliance

What's impressive about Eswatini's approach is that this wasn't just a factory-level tick-box exercise. Bonsucro's Mike Ogg praised the country for using a joint certification model that brings in both mills and estates — a move that will make it easier to onboard smallholder growers next.

That's crucial, because the future of sugar in Eswatini isn't only in the big estates — it's in making sure outgrowers can also sell into markets that now demand sustainability.

"We Were Already Doing It"

RES Managing Director Nick Jackson was clear: certification didn't mean Eswatini was behind — it meant the world has now recognised what the industry has long practised.

"This was not about catching up," he said. "It was about validating the sustainability we've already built into our production — from field to factory."





RES, Tambankulu and other industry players have for years invested in boreholes, water supply systems, and rural projects — now those efforts are converted into market advantage.

Tambankulu’s Mindset Shift

For Tambankulu Estates MD, Chris Shabangu, Bonsucro was the result of years of training, audits, and internal culture change.

“We didn’t treat it as a compliance tick,” he said. “We used it to strengthen how we work — on labour, environment, and productivity.”

That’s the heart of it: Bonsucro isn’t just about being “green.” It’s about being bankable, competitive, and ready for buyers in the EU and elsewhere who are now very specific about how their sugar is produced.

A Signal to the Region

Eswatini has effectively set the bar for Southern Africa. By being first, it shows that small countries can lead if government, millers, estates, and growers pull in the same direction.

And in a beautiful touch, Bonsucro presented certified organisations with Lebombo cycads — an indigenous symbol of resilience and adaptation. Very fitting for an industry that has had to evolve to survive.



Bottom line: Bonsucro is not the end of the journey. It’s the door. The next task is clear — bring more growers into the system so the whole value chain benefits from premium markets, better finance, and a stronger sustainability story.



Water at last

Mpakeni Dam Brings Water — and Hope — to Drought-Hit Shiselweni

A R2.6 billion water lifeline is rising in the heart of drought-hit Shiselweni — and for the first time in decades, farmers can see green where there was only dust. The Mpakeni Dam, now well underway and visited by His Majesty King Mswati III, is being hailed as the project that will finally unlock irrigated agriculture in Eswatini's driest region.

PHESHEYA KUNENE reports

When the King toured the site of the Mpakeni Dam in mid-October, it wasn't just a ceremonial stop. It was a message to farmers: help is coming. Built under the Mkhondvo–Ngwavuma Water Augmentation Programme (MNWAP), the E2.6 billion project is already 34% complete and on track to deliver what Shiselweni has never had at scale — reliable, year-round water for farming.

Once finished in 2028, the dam will irrigate 25,000–30,000 hectares of farmland stretching from St Philips to Siphambanweni, effectively turning a drought-prone belt into a new agricultural growth corridor. For smallholders who have watched crops fail with every poor rainy season, that's not infrastructure — it's liberation.

His Majesty praised the Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise (EWADE) for pushing the project forward and described it as a development that will “breathe life into the farmlands of Shiselweni.” It's a view shared by EWADE CEO Dr. Sithole, who said the dam is “more than concrete and water — it is opportunity, empowerment, and a shared national vision.”



The knock-on benefits are already visible. Over E660 million has so far been spent locally on contractors, suppliers, and service providers, and 779 jobs have been created on site — many of them for young professionals gaining real engineering and construction experience. Even resettled families have been moved into better, serviced homes and supported with gardens and beekeeping through a E10 million livelihood restoration programme — development that actually looks like development.

What will this mean for farmers? In simple terms: stability. With irrigation, Shiselweni can finally move from “rain-fed survival” to planned, commercial production — horticulture, fodder, sugarcane outgrowers, livestock feed, even export crops. As Agriculture PS Sydney Simelane noted, the project will help balance production across regions instead of relying on the same traditional irrigated zones.

There is still work to do — roads, a 10km access route, and the long engineering process to 2028 — but the direction is clear. For a region long defined by drought, Mpakeni is rewriting the story: from water scarcity to water-powered agriculture.





Women Powering Eswatini's Farming

The 18th Woman Farmer of the Year Competition at Riders Ranch in Sidvokodvo brought together 247 farmers from across Eswatini to celebrate excellence, resilience, and innovation in agriculture, with Eli Olivia Dlamini crowned overall winner and 29-year-old Boniswa Dlamini-Malaza taking the youth title — clear proof that women and young producers are now at the forefront of food security, value addition, and climate-smart farming. PHESHEYA KUNENE reports.

At Riders Ranch this October, it was clear: if you want to see the future of Eswatini's agriculture, look at its women and youth. The 18th Woman Farmer of the Year Competition, hosted by the Woman Farmer Foundation (WFF) in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, brought together 247 farmers from all four regions — 181 adult women and 66 youth — to celebrate excellence, resilience, and innovation in the fields.

At the centre of it all were two standout producers: Eli Olivia Dlamini of Mpolonjeni, KaShoba (Lubombo), who walked away with the overall 2025 Woman Farmer of the Year title and prizes worth E163,840, and 29-year-old Boniswa Dlamini-Malaza of Phophonyane (Hhohho), who clinched the Youth Woman Farmer of the Year crown with a package valued at E57,405 — complete with a smartphone, laptop, and E7,000 cash.

Their wins were not just personal victories. They were signals of what Eswatini's agricultural sector is trying to do: make farming climate-smart, inclusive, youth-friendly, and business-minded.

A platform that keeps growing

What began years ago as a platform to recognise rural women farmers has now matured into one of the country's most important agricultural empowerment programmes. This year's edition was more competitive — a Top 15 was selected in each category, then narrowed to the Top 10 finalists after a rigorous judging process involving experts from NAMBoard, NMC, the Dairy Board, World Vision, the Ministry of Agriculture, and WFF. The aim was clear: reward real farmers doing real work on Swazi Nation Land.

WFF Programmes Officer Sebenele Zwane put it well: "These finalists have shown skill, creativity, and resilience. They are proof that agriculture is modern, dynamic, and profitable."

Champions of climate-smart farming

Throughout the event, the message was repeated: Eswatini cannot keep importing what it can produce. Minister of Agriculture Mandla Tshawuka urged farmers to adopt conservation farming, crop rotation, irrigation, and agri-technology to boost local production of maize, beans, carrots, tomatoes, as well as diversify into sugarcane, aquaculture, and apiculture.

"Gender-inclusive agriculture is part of our climate response," the Minister said, aligning the competition with His Majesty King Mswati III's NKWE vision of speed, integrity, and innovation. Government, he added, is working to unlock long-standing constraints for women — land, finance, water, and markets.

Women who feed — and lead

Winner Eli Olivia Dlamini is a textbook example of integrated farming done right: livestock, dairy, poultry, and vegetables — all managed at commercial standard. Runners-up Jabu Tsabedze (Mahlangatsha) and Nelisiwe Mngometulu (Ngculwini) were also recognised for maintaining productive mixed enterprises that feed their communities while creating jobs.

What made this year special, however, was how tech and youth took centre stage. WFF Co-Founder Sonia Paiva praised young farmers for marketing their produce on digital platforms, using mobile phones to get orders, and building brands online — behaviour that mirrors where the market is going. Her counterpart Carlos Paiva urged farmers to collaborate so they can supply in bulk and help the country move toward its E2.5 billion agricultural output target.

Youth proving farming pays

Youth winner Boniswa Dlamini-Malaza's story resonated with the audience because it was practical: baby vegetables, done consistently, sold well, and backed by technology. It's the kind of small-but-smart enterprise that shows young people they don't need 100 hectares to start — just knowledge, market access, and discipline. Runners-up Nontsetselelo Mamba (Siphofaneni, Mphumakudze) and Phumzile Happy Thwala (Siphocosini) were also applauded for turning small parcels of land into productive agribusinesses.

More than an awards show

Beyond the trophies and photo moments, this competition remains a rural development tool. Winners go home with cash, inputs, equipment, and, more importantly, visibility — which often leads to partnerships and supply contracts. For many, it's the first time their work is seen at national level.

As Agribusiness Monthly, our takeaway is simple: when women and youth are equipped, agriculture becomes unstoppable. This year's edition proved, once again, that Eswatini is not short of talent — it just needs platforms, water, finance, and markets to match the ambition in our fields.

The future of farming is here — and it is female, youthful, and climate-smart.





From Tech to Trotters

Armed with tech skills, a severance package, and courage, the former ICT engineer built DJD Piggery in Matsetsa into a 160-sow commercial operation creating jobs and supplying local markets.

When Duncan Dlamini left a comfortable IT career in South Africa in 2016 to start a pig farm on Swazi Nation Land, many thought he was taking a step back — today DJD Piggery produces about 65 pigs a week, employs 14 people, and is helping other Lubombo farmers upgrade their herds through better genetics, record-keeping, and business planning.

SIBUSISIWE NDZIMANDZE AND SIKHONA SIBANDZE REPORT.

When you arrive at DJD Piggery, you don't find a man who "failed in town and came back to farm." You find a man who chose farming. You hear it in the sound of well-fed pigs, in the easy banter of the workers, and in the way owner Duncan Dlamini walks through the pig houses — calm, confident, and fully in control of an operation he built from the ground up on Swazi Nation Land.

Yet less than 10 years ago, Duncan was not in gumboots. He was in meetings. He was an ICT professional in South Africa, working on big systems — including the EGS Enterprise Scheming System — installing and rolling out solutions across the country. It was good work, well-paying, and stable. But it wasn't his.

"I was good at the job," he recalls, "but I wanted something that would grow beyond office walls. I wanted to build an asset, not just a CV."

So in December 2016, he did what most people only talk about — he resigned, took his severance package, came home to Eswatini, and in 2017 started a piggery in Matsetsa, Lubombo Region. That was the birth of DJD Piggery.

A Businessman Since Primary School

Duncan will tell you this wasn't a random turn. "I've always sold," he says with a laugh. As a child he sold sweets, helped his grandmother in her shop during holidays, and watched how money moved. That early exposure created a mindset: if you can source, process, and sell — you can survive.

So when he looked at agriculture, he didn't see "just farming." He saw a value chain. Pigs, in particular, made sense: regular market, good turnover, and a product that can be sold whole or in cuts, to butcheries or households.

Starting Small, Thinking Big

He began modestly — 20 gilts (young female pigs) and a lot of faith. The plan was not to get rich fast. The plan was to build capacity. He invested in proper housing, biosecurity, and feed planning. He took notes. He watched his numbers. "Farming needs discipline and planning," he says. "It's not guesswork. You must treat it like any other profession."

By 2018, just a year in, the numbers were telling a good story. DJD Piggery had grown to 160 sow units, producing about 65 pigs every week — enough to supply local butcheries and consistent customers. That kind of growth doesn't happen by luck. It happens because the farmer knows his numbers.

When Tech Meets Trotters

This is where Duncan's ICT background became his secret weapon. He tracks feed conversion ratios. Monitors sow fertility and farrowing rates. Keeps sales and breeding records. Uses simple systems for costing and cashflow. "Running a farm is not so different from managing an IT system," he says. "Both need structure, consistency, and the right tools."

His wife, who was doing her master's at the time, supported him with research and business planning. Together, they built a farm that's modern, documented, and scalable.

Financing the Dream

Like every commercial farmer, Duncan hit the usual hurdles — breeding stock, genetics, staff retention, inputs. At one stage, he couldn't find the quality of pigs he wanted locally, so he imported genetics from South Africa to improve growth, uniformity, and feed efficiency.

Then in 2018 he secured a E1.5 million loan from Swazi Bank. That was a game-changer.

The finance allowed him to:

- Expand pig houses
- Improve biosecurity
- Upgrade feeding systems
- Formalise the business

What started as a passion project became a fully commercial enterprise.

Jobs for Matsetsa

Today, DJD Piggery employs 14 people — technicians, cleaners, general workers — most of them young and from the area. That's one of the parts Duncan is proudest of. "Agriculture gave me freedom," he says. "But it



also allowed me to create opportunities for others."

In a rural community where jobs are scarce, a pig farm paying monthly salaries is not a small thing.

Teaching Others to Farm Better

Duncan's vision doesn't end at his gate.

He now mentors other pig farmers in the Lubombo region — helping them improve hygiene, breeding, and record-keeping. He believes the sector will only grow if more farmers can supply quality, uniform pigs.

His next mission? Value addition.

He wants to see more pork processed locally — sausages, bacon, cuts — so that Eswatini doesn't just buy feed and sell live pigs, but actually keeps the money in-country.

He's also planning a breeding programme to supply quality piglets to smaller farmers.

A Model for Youth in Agriculture

What makes Duncan's story powerful is not just that he made money from pigs — it's that he made a professional transition into agriculture and succeeded.

He didn't come back because he failed in ICT. He came back because he saw agriculture as the next level. It's an important narrative for young people who think farming is "for those who didn't make it."

"Our youth can do this," he says. "But they must treat it like a business. Learn. Keep records. Get the right genetics. Use technology."





From Farmhand to Frontline

How 28-Year-Old Thabiso Dlamini Is Turning Sobo Farm into a Rural Agribusiness Hub

BY PHESHEYA KUNENE

Gundwini — Not every success story in agriculture starts with a big loan, a commercial greenhouse, or a fleet of delivery vans. Some start exactly where farming itself starts — with a young person, a piece of family land, and a decision not to give up.

That's the story of Thabiso Dlamini (28), founder of Sobo Farm in Gundwini, just outside Manzini. In 2019 he was simply helping on the farm. In 2025 he is running one.

When we met him, he was in dusty overalls, moving from bed to bed, checking spinach, then beetroot, then a line of onions. Behind him, in separate paddocks, were goats and chickens. It wasn't fancy — but it was working. And for a young farmer on Swazi Nation Land, that is the real headline.



"It all began with passion," he said. "I wanted to prove that a young person can start small and grow. Sobo Farm is my way of turning that love for agriculture into impact."

Starting Small, Learning Fast

Sobo Farm began as a small horticultural plot growing spinach, lettuce, beetroot, onions, maize, and beans. Like most start-up farmers, Thabiso hit the familiar walls: no funding, no irrigation on day one, shifting market prices, transport costs, and the constant pressure of "can this really feed me?"

Instead of quitting, he treated every mistake like school.

“Every failure became a lesson,” he said. “You learn to plan your production, match it to the market, and not plant because you like a crop — but because the market will buy it.”

That thinking — simple but strategic — is what has turned Sobo Farm into more than a garden.

Today the enterprise produces vegetables and small livestock: spinach, beetroot, lettuce, onions, maize, beans, broilers, goats, turkeys, and a few cattle — a clever mix that spreads risk and keeps cash flowing.

A Farmer Who's Also an Economist

What sets Thabiso apart is that he's not only a farmer — he's also completing his degree in Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness Management at UNESWA. So, when he talks, he moves easily from soil to markets to business models.

“Farming isn't just the hoe anymore,” he said. “It's science, it's economics, it's branding. If we want young people to come into agriculture, we must show them the business side.”

Because of that, Sobo Farm doesn't just produce — it teaches.

Thabiso runs consultation and mentoring sessions for aspiring farmers, especially youth starting on family land with no formal training. He helps them with:

- crop planning and seasons
- basic budgeting
- market identification
- climate-smart practices

“There's a serious knowledge gap,” he said. “Many people plant before they learn. I want to change that.”

Farming With People in Mind

Like many of the new generation of farmers, Thabiso is very clear: profit matters, but people matter more.

Sobo Farm:

- creates seasonal jobs in Gundvwini
- supplies fresh produce to local vendors who then resell
- supports local food security
- shows, by example, that youth can farm and study

“It's not just about me selling vegetables,” he said. “It's about helping someone feed their family. That's the real reward.”

Why His Story Matters

Thabiso's journey — from farmhand to frontline agripreneur — is exactly the kind of story Eswatini's agriculture needs right now:

It proves farming is not age-restricted.

It shows you can start on family land.

It shows education + farming is a powerful mix.

It shows young farmers can lead, teach, and create jobs.

In a season where government and partners are pushing climate-smart, youth-led farming, Sobo Farm is not just producing spinach — it's producing an example.

And somewhere in Gundvwini, on a quiet field not far from Manzini, a 28-year-old in dusty overalls is making agriculture look young again.





Minister celebrates World Food Day with farmers

World Food Day 2025 in Eswatini moved from tents to tilled fields as Agriculture Minister Mandla Tshawuka, FAO, EWADE, NAMBoard, World Vision and local farmers toured Mafutseni, Luve and Mkhiweni to reinforce the message that food security must be built “hand in hand” where farmers actually produce. The Minister announced E61 million in new support — for Hamba Ubuye, commercial farming finance, and maize/beans subsidies — and linked it to bigger climate-resilient projects like the Mpakeni Dam, while FAO, celebrating 80 years, pledged deeper technical backing through a new country office. Youth-led enterprises such as Marrime Farms and Sonkhe Dlamini’s Happy Horns Feedlot were showcased as proof that Eswatini’s food future is young, market-aware, and fully bankable. PHESHEYA KUNENE REPORTS.

Mafutseni / Luve / Mkhiweni — World Food Day 2025 in Eswatini wasn’t a hall event — it was a field event. Instead of speeches under a marquee, the Minister of Agriculture Mandla Tshawuka walked actual farms with FAO Eswatini, EWADE, NAMBoard, World Vision Eswatini and local producers, under the fitting theme: “Hand in Hand for Better Food and a Better Future.” The message was simple: food security is built where people farm, not where people sit.

Speaking after touring farms in Luve and Mkhiweni, the Minister said the commemoration was about “bringing policy to the people and people to the centre of policy.” Standing in the fields at Marrime Farms — the youth-



led agribusiness run by the Marrime brothers — he praised their climate-smart practices, irrigation, and value-chain mindset. “This is the type of farming we will continue to support as government — young, organised and market-ready,” he said.

E61 million for real production

Tshawuka used the occasion to announce E61 million in fresh government support for agriculture:

- E14 million for the Hamba Ubuye commercial farming programme
- E40 million for new commercial farming funding

- E7 million to top up maize and beans subsidies

“These investments will not only transform the sector but uplift rural livelihoods,” he said, tying the funding to Eswatini’s broader infrastructure push — scoop dams, medium irrigation schemes, and the flagship Mpakeni Dam that will integrate irrigation, agro-industry, energy and even an eco-city concept. “This is how we secure Eswatini’s food future,” he added.

FAO at 80: partnership that feeds

This year’s commemoration also coincided with FAO’s 80th anniversary. FAO Assistant Representative (Programmes) Tendai Munyokoveri saluted Eswatini for deepening cooperation — especially through the new Host Country Agreement that will see a fully fledged FAO office established in the Kingdom. He reminded stakeholders that even as the world produces enough food, 8.2% of people still face chronic malnutrition, which means “our work is far from over.”

He urged the sector to keep aligning with FAO’s Four Betters — Better Production, Better Nutrition, Better Environment and a Better Life — and anchored Eswatini’s work in three pillars: agricultural transformation, inclusion, and sustainable natural resource management.

Farming as legacy: Marrime brothers

If policy was the headline, the Marrime brothers were the human face. Farming in Luve, they’ve built an enterprise that controls more of the chain — nurseries, field production, and transport. “Every seed we plant is a statement of hope,” said Sibusiso Marrime. For the Minister, this is exactly the kind of youth-led agribusiness that proves food sovereignty is not theory but “what happens when youth, technology and government support meet in the same field.”

From two bulls to a feedlot

World Food Day also spotlighted Sonkhe Dlamini of Happy Horns Feedlot, whose journey from two bulls to a fully operating feedlot echoed the day’s theme of resilience. Faced with high feed costs, he planted 20 ha of yellow maize and started making his own feed — an example of on-farm solutions to rising input prices. “If you stay committed, you can achieve anything,” he told fellow young farmers — a message that tied neatly to the Youth Employment Programme and climate-smart trainings government is rolling out with partners.

Walking hand in hand

What linked Mafutseni, Luve and Mkhiweni was collaboration: chiefs opening land, farmers opening farms, government opening the purse, and FAO opening a new chapter of support. As the Minister concluded:

“The story of food in Eswatini is the story of all of us. Government will continue to walk hand in hand with farmers and partners so that no Liswati is left behind.”

On this World Food Day, the promise was clear: the hands that feed Eswatini will no longer work alone.



Eswatini Coffee

Breaks into Kenya

Eswatini Coffee Puts Local Agribusiness on the Continental Map



Why Kenya matters

Kenya is not just a market — it's a coffee school. Partnering there gives Eswatini access to:

- quality and grading standards
- roasting and barista culture
- packaging and branding insights
- real market intelligence from East Africa

That kind of knowledge transfer is exactly what Eswatini needs if coffee is to become a serious export crop and not just a boutique product sold at events.

Eswatini's coffee story has just gone regional. In a move that blends trade, diplomacy, and pure entrepreneurial courage, Eswatini Coffee has entered the Kenyan market through a partnership brokered by the Eswatini Investment Promotion Authority (EIPA) — taking a proudly Swazi product straight into one of Africa's strongest coffee cultures. It's more than a deal; it's proof that Eswatini can export branded, value-added agri products across Africa, not just raw commodities.

At the 18th COMESA Business Forum and Exhibition, EIPA connected Eswatini Coffee with Sumseron Coffee and Café AMKA of Kenya — two players that understand Africa's coffee value chain from farm to cup. For Eswatini Coffee, fresh from being crowned Best Emerging Exporter at the 2025 National Export Excellence Awards, this was the perfect springboard.

"By connecting Eswatini Coffee with established players in Kenya's world-renowned coffee industry, we're opening new export opportunities for local businesses," said Thandeka Dlamini, EIPA's Manager for Export Trade. "This is regional integration in action."





A bigger national play

This push into coffee isn't happening in isolation. Earlier in the year, Prime Minister Russell Mmiso Dlamini visited Jimma in Ethiopia — the cradle of African coffee — to study how coffee can create jobs, protect the environment through agroforestry, and sustain rural economies. The message from that mission was clear: Eswatini can do this too.

"We saw how coffee sustains entire communities," the PM said. "That is the kind of sustainable model we envision for Eswatini."

That vision is now being turned into reality through EIPA's trade missions, the support of NAMBoard, and development partners such as the EU and International Trade Centre (ITC) — the same team that took Eswatini Coffee to the Nordic-African Business Summit in Oslo to benchmark packaging, branding, and market entry.

Africa trading with Africa

What makes this Kenya breakthrough important is the principle behind it: African products conquering African markets first. Instead of waiting to be "discovered" in Europe, Eswatini Coffee is building its name in Nairobi — among people who know, grow, and love coffee.

It's also a confidence signal to other agri-entrepreneurs: chillies, herbs, honey, essential oils, mushrooms, even processed cassava — if coffee can move, other niche products can

move too.

Brewing a new identity

Eswatini Coffee's rise is really the story of what happens when:

- entrepreneurs show up
- EIPA opens doors
- government sets a vision
- development partners provide technical support

From Norway to Nairobi, the Kingdom is slowly crafting a new agribusiness identity — one where we don't just grow, we brand, export, and tell the story.

Because in the end, every cup of Eswatini Coffee is doing three things at once:

- selling a product,
- marketing a country, and
- proving that small economies can play in big value chains.

And that aroma? That's the smell of opportunity, freshly brewed.



SMART WATERMELON FARMING IN THE RAINY SEASON

How Eswatini Farmers Can Turn Wet Weather into Profits

The good news is the rains are back. The challenge is that rain, on its own, doesn't guarantee a good watermelon harvest. For Eswatini farmers planning to cash in on summer demand, the rainy season is both a blessing and a test: it cuts irrigation costs, but it also brings waterlogging, diseases, and pests right into the field.

Watermelon loves warmth, loose soil, and good drainage. What it doesn't like is "wet feet." In rainy months, the rule is simple: plant as if it will rain hard. That means raised beds or ridges, properly opened drainage channels, and fields that allow water to move away from the roots. As one agronomist from Farm with Fred puts it, "Good drainage is the difference between a good harvest and a failed one."

1. Manage the water, don't let it manage you

Heavy rains can compact soil, drown roots, and even affect pollination. Farmers should:

- plant on raised beds/ridges
- avoid low-lying, poorly drained spots
- use mulch (grass, crop residues) to reduce erosion and protect soil structure
- consider contour planting on sloped areas

This is straight out of the climate-smart playbook many Eswatini growers are now adopting.

2. Fight humidity diseases early

Rain = humidity. Humidity = fungal problems. In watermelons, watch out for powdery mildew, anthracnose, and fusarium. To stay ahead:

- plant disease-tolerant varieties
 - spray recommended fungicides at the right growth stages
 - rotate with maize or legumes — don't plant watermelon on the same spot every season
- Rotation breaks the disease cycle and keeps soil healthier.

3. Pests don't take rain breaks

Moist conditions attract aphids, cutworms, fruit flies and other sap-suckers that reduce fruit quality. This is where Integrated Pest Management (IPM) comes in — regular scouting, trapping, spot-spraying, and using bio-friendly options so you don't destroy beneficial insects.

4. Keep the sweetness

Too much water can dilute sugars — the fruit grows but doesn't taste as sweet. Farmers can improve brix (sweetness) by:

- timing planting before the peak rains
- avoiding unnecessary irrigation once fruits are sizing
- allowing the fruit to reach full maturity before harvest

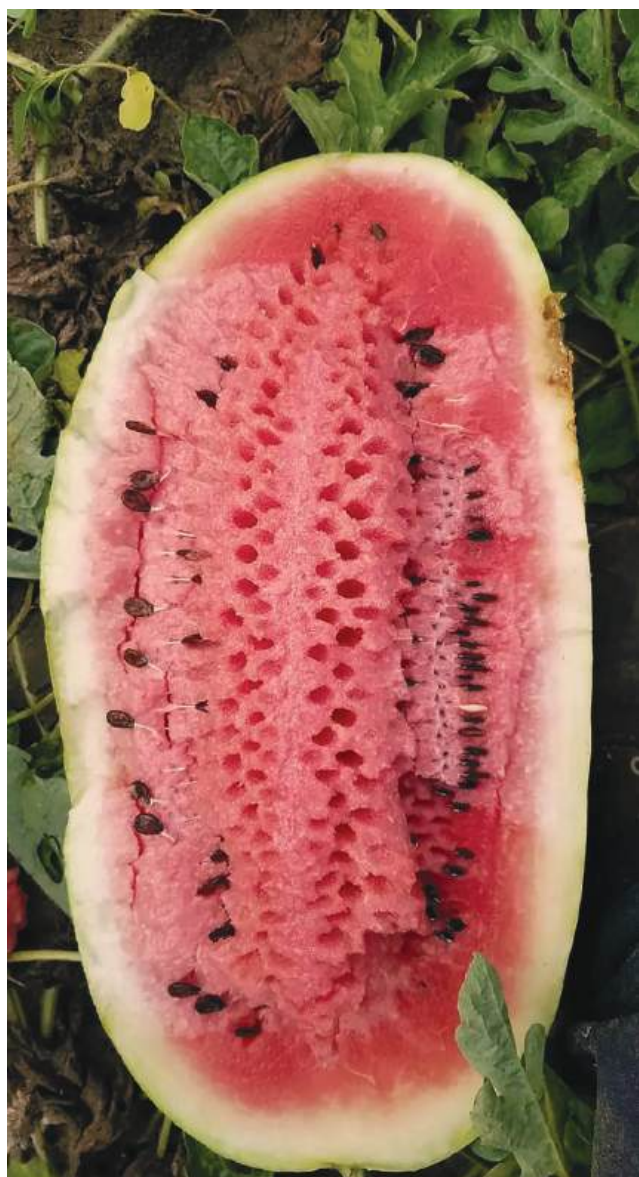
A slightly drier finish often means a sweeter melon.

5. Climate-smart is the new normal

From Big Bend to Hhohho, farmers are learning to farm with the rain, not against it — planning around weather forecasts, protecting soils, and building drainage into field design. Those who invest in training and weather-based planning are getting more consistent yields, even in unpredictable seasons.

As one farmer in Ngwenya said: “The rain can feed you or fail you — it depends on how you manage it.”

This rainy season, the winning watermelon farmer in Eswatini will be the one who planned drainage, protected the soil, watched for disease, and harvested at the right time. The rain is coming either way — the profit is optional.





School Gardens Grow Future Farmers

TAVI's inaugural competition turns primary classrooms into mini-farms, teaching nutrition, climate-smart crops, and agri-confidence to Eswatini's youngest learners.



On an ordinary Friday, at the Eswatini College of Technology, something extraordinary happened. Primary school learners — some in oversized uniforms, some still shy, some bold and lyrical — showed that agriculture in Eswatini has a future, and that future has already started.

The Inaugural TAVI Schools Competition, run under the Taiwan Africa Vegetable Initiative (TAVI), brought together over a dozen schools to compete not just in gardening, but in cooking, poetry, and quizzes — all built around agriculture and traditional vegetables. It was learning, but without walls. Farming, but fun.

What began as a simple effort to reintroduce indigenous vegetables into school gardens has now grown into a full education movement that links nutrition, climate resilience, and youth empowerment.

Classrooms turned into gardens

Learners demonstrated how to grow and cook vegetables like amaranth (imbuya) and jute mallow (ligusha) — crops that are nutritious, drought-tolerant, and deeply African. Through poems, recipes, and agri-quizzes, they proved that agriculture is not just “for the rural child,” but for any child who wants to eat better, learn better, and one day farm smarter.

Cooking (Learners): 1st – Sydney Williams Primary; 2nd – Boyane; 3rd – Ezulwini Community

Quiz: 1st – Sakhile Dlakudze (Lavumisa); 2nd

– Khonelinkhosi Ngwenya (Ezulwini Community); 3rd – Melokuhle Mkhonta (Sydney Williams)

Poetry: 1st – Amuhle Sibandze (Sydney Williams); 2nd – Ngcebo Masuku (Ezulwini Community); 3rd – Siwakhile Ginindza (Tentele)

School Cooks: 1st – Stuff Nhleko (Sydney Williams); 2nd – Babazile Nxumalo (Boyane); 3rd – Fortunate Zulu (Ezulwini Community)

Gardening: 1st – Musa Maseko (Enhlanhleni); 2nd – Nonhlanhla Dlamini (Mgululu); 3rd – Ntombikayise Phungwayo (Lavumisa)

Prizes were deliberately practical — wheelbarrows, garden hoses, rakes, kitchen utensils, stationery — so that teachers and learners can keep producing food after the applause is over.

“A classroom without walls”

“This is not just agriculture,” said Agribusiness Media Editor Phesheya Kunene on the sidelines of the event. “It’s a classroom without walls. It’s a movement nurturing the next generation of problem-solvers, innovators, and responsible citizens.”

Teachers who accompanied the learners said the programme is also changing behaviour — learners are more disciplined, more curious about food, and more confident about speaking in public.

A regional vision

The competition sits inside the broader TAVI project run by the World Vegetable Center, working with Eswatini’s Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Education and Training, and supported by the Government of the Republic of China (Taiwan).

Project Manager Dr. Yuan-Li (Sophia) Chan said TAVI has already reached over 9,000 learners and is targeting 20,000 learners across 42 schools in the next phase. Phase II, launching in 2026, will extend to Kenya and Tanzania, turning what started in Eswatini into a regional model for teaching agriculture in fun, age-appropriate ways.

Her key message: traditional African vegetables are not “backward” — they are climate-resilient, nutritious, and marketable. Teaching them in primary school is planting future farmers, nutritionists, chefs, and agri-entrepreneurs.

Planting more than vegetables

As the children left ECOT — medals shining, hands full of prizes — the takeaway was clear: agriculture is exciting when it is seen, celebrated, and connected to opportunity.

In their small hands were hoes and hoses. In their minds were poems about farming. In their hearts were dreams bigger than a school garden.

Those are not just pupils. They are Eswatini’s next growers.





Phezu Komkhono

Government Supercharges 2025/26 Farming Season

Expanded subsidies, more tractors, and wider input access signal a “no farmer left behind” approach as the ploughing season begins.

SIBUSISIWE NDZIMANDZE REPORTS

The farming season has arrived. Government has opened the 2025/26 farming season with one of its biggest support packages in recent years — 8,670 subsidised farmers, an expanded fleet of 365 tractors, and a fast-growing network of agro-dealers to make sure inputs reach producers in all four regions.

Launching the season at the Ministry of Agriculture headquarters, Minister of Agriculture Mandla Tshawuka said the Input Subsidy Programme has grown by 28% from last year's 6,079 beneficiaries, proving that the state is "deliberately putting muscle behind smallholder production."

"The subsidy programme is designed to uplift hardworking farmers who qualify but cannot afford inputs on their own," he said. "Government has done its part — now it's time for every farmer to do theirs. Phezukomkhono!"

Mechanisation to match the rains

To stop farmers from "missing the window," the National Maize Corporation (NMC) has strengthened mechanisation under the Phezukomkhono campaign. This season the country has:

153 government-owned tractors

212 contracted tractors from private operators

45 planters already available, with a target of 65 as the season peaks

The idea is simple: kute lowephelelwa ngumdzaka — no farmer should fail to plant because there was no tractor.

Inputs made easier

The Ministry has also published a full list of accredited agro-dealers and widened the network, so farmers can buy closer to home. Within their subsidy budget, farmers can pick one crop package — maize, beans, or sorghum — to ensure fair distribution and focused production.

With the weather outlook favourable, the Minister urged farmers to plant early and plan for beans by February 2026 to maximise yields.

Livestock: FMD under watch

On the animal side, there was good news too. The Minister reported that the Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) incursion in Mambane has been contained, with no new infections in Hluti, Lavumisa, or Lubulini. Eswatini has received 188,800 vaccine doses, and vaccinations are underway with support from the Botswana

Vaccine Institute (BVI).

"We are maintaining strong surveillance to prevent further spread," he said.

A season of opportunity

With better rainfall prospects, more tractors in the field, and more farmers on the subsidy list than last year, the 2025/26 season is being framed as a year to recover, expand, and commercialise.

Key points for farmers

8,670 farmers on subsidy (up 28%)

365 tractors available nationwide

45 planters in use, target 65

Wider agro-dealer network

FMD under control with 188,800 vaccines

Early planting strongly encouraged

This season, government says it has cleared the runway. Now it's up to farmers to plant, produce, and prove that with the right support, Eswatini can feed itself.





Agroecology Takes Root in Eswatini

BY SIKHONA SIBANDZE

With input prices climbing, rains arriving late, and soils losing life, Eswatini's farmers are asking a hard question: how do we keep producing without going broke or breaking the land? At the country's first Sustainable Agriculture Indaba in Mavuso, the answer came through clearly — agroecology.

Far from being “small garden” farming, agroecology was presented as a science-based, African-grounded way of producing food that works with nature, cuts costs, and builds resilience to climate change.

“Agroecology is not backyard gardening,” said Futhi Magagula of CCARDESA. “It can be done by a homestead farmer or a commercial producer. The goal is simple: lower costs, healthier soils, and farms that can survive climate shocks.”

What it looks like on the ground

Agroecology is about balance, not inputs. Farmers:

- plant more than one crop to spread risk
- integrate livestock so that manure becomes fertiliser
- turn crop residues into compost



- use cover crops and trees to protect soil
- keep and exchange local, drought-tolerant seed so that even if rains fail, something still harvests

It's already working. Dudu Nhlengetfwa from the Swaziland Rural Women Assembly told the Indaba: "I planted local maize seed, and when the hybrid failed during drought, my traditional seed still gave me food."

Why the shift is urgent

Speakers said Eswatini's farmers are facing a "triple challenge":

Expensive agriculture – fertiliser, chemicals, seed

Environmental pressure – land degradation, erosion, loss of biodiversity

Climate stress – more droughts, sudden floods, storms

"We can't keep farming the old way when the climate is changing this fast," warned Andile Dlamini of PELUM Eswatini. "Agroecology gives us tools to adapt without destroying the land."

A continental conversation

The Indaba, held under the theme "Agroecology for Food Systems Resilience and Climate Justice," brought together over 300 farmers and leaders from 14 African countries — a sign that this is not just an Eswatini debate, but an African one. Participants called on government, private sector, and buyers to:

- recognise agroecology products
- create farmer-friendly finance
- protect indigenous seed systems
- include climate-resilient farming in policy

Start small, build up

One key message: agroecology is a journey, not a switch. Farmers can begin with one or two practices — composting, saving seed, adding trees, reducing chemicals — and grow from there. Every step reduces dependence on expensive inputs and strengthens the farm for the next drought.

The Indaba's takeaway was simple and powerful: the future of farming in Eswatini lies in working with nature, not against it.





E851 Million Boost for Smallholders

A E851 million, 8-year push to help 19,600 smallholder households produce more, irrigate more, and actually reach paying markets.

Eswatini has unveiled one of its most ambitious rural agriculture programmes to date — an E851 million investment that puts smallholder farmers at the centre of national growth.

Launched by the Ministry of Agriculture together with the Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise (EWADE), the Smallholder Agriculture Productivity Enhancement and Marketing Project (SAPEMP) will run from 2025 to 2033 and is expected to directly benefit 19,600 households — about 117,700 people — across the country.

Funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) with co-financing from the Green Climate Fund (GCF), SAPEMP is not just another project. It is a deliberate attempt to fix the things that have held small farmers back: rainfed production, poor market links, limited finance, and climate shocks.

“Our five-year strategy seeks to attain food sovereignty and create wealth for Eswatini,”

said Minister of Agriculture Mandla Tshawuka at the launch. “SAPEMP supports two of our strategic pillars — food sovereignty and employment creation — by directly investing in farmers and linking them to markets.”

Who the project targets

SAPEMP has clear inclusion targets:

- 40% women
- 30% youth
- 5% persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups

That’s significant, because those are the very groups often left out of agricultural finance and contract farming. Through SAPEMP, they will access coaching, productive assets, and value chain opportunities — not just training without markets.

The Minister also revealed that Eswatini is in talks with IFAD for an additional \$14.23 million (about E263 million) to build small and medium

dams — a move that will make the project even more climate-resilient.

Market-led, not subsidy-led

IFAD Country Director Francesco Rispoli praised Eswatini for staying the course on market-led smallholder development, building on EWADE's earlier project that reached 90,000 beneficiaries.

"SAPEMP is designed to tackle the root causes of low productivity and limited market access," he said. "It will support coordinated production and connect farmer clusters to anchor enterprises in win-win business relationships."

That's a major shift: farmers won't just be told to "produce more" — they'll be helped to produce what the market wants, together, at volume.

Agriculture still supports over 70% of rural households in Eswatini, yet contributes only around 8% to GDP. SAPEMP is meant to close that gap — by helping smallholders commercialise, irrigate, organise in clusters, and sell.

It also aligns neatly with national and global frameworks:

ENAIP (Eswatini National Agricultural Investment Plan)

SDGs 1, 2, 5, 8, 13 (poverty, hunger, gender, jobs, climate)

In other words, it's not a standalone project — it plugs into where Eswatini wants to go.

A call to work together

Both the Ministry and IFAD were clear: SAPEMP will only succeed if government, private sector buyers, financial institutions, and farmer groups pull in the same direction.

"Let us walk this journey together," Minister Tshawuka said. "We are sowing the seeds of transformation — to build a productive, competitive, and sustainable agricultural sector for generations to come."

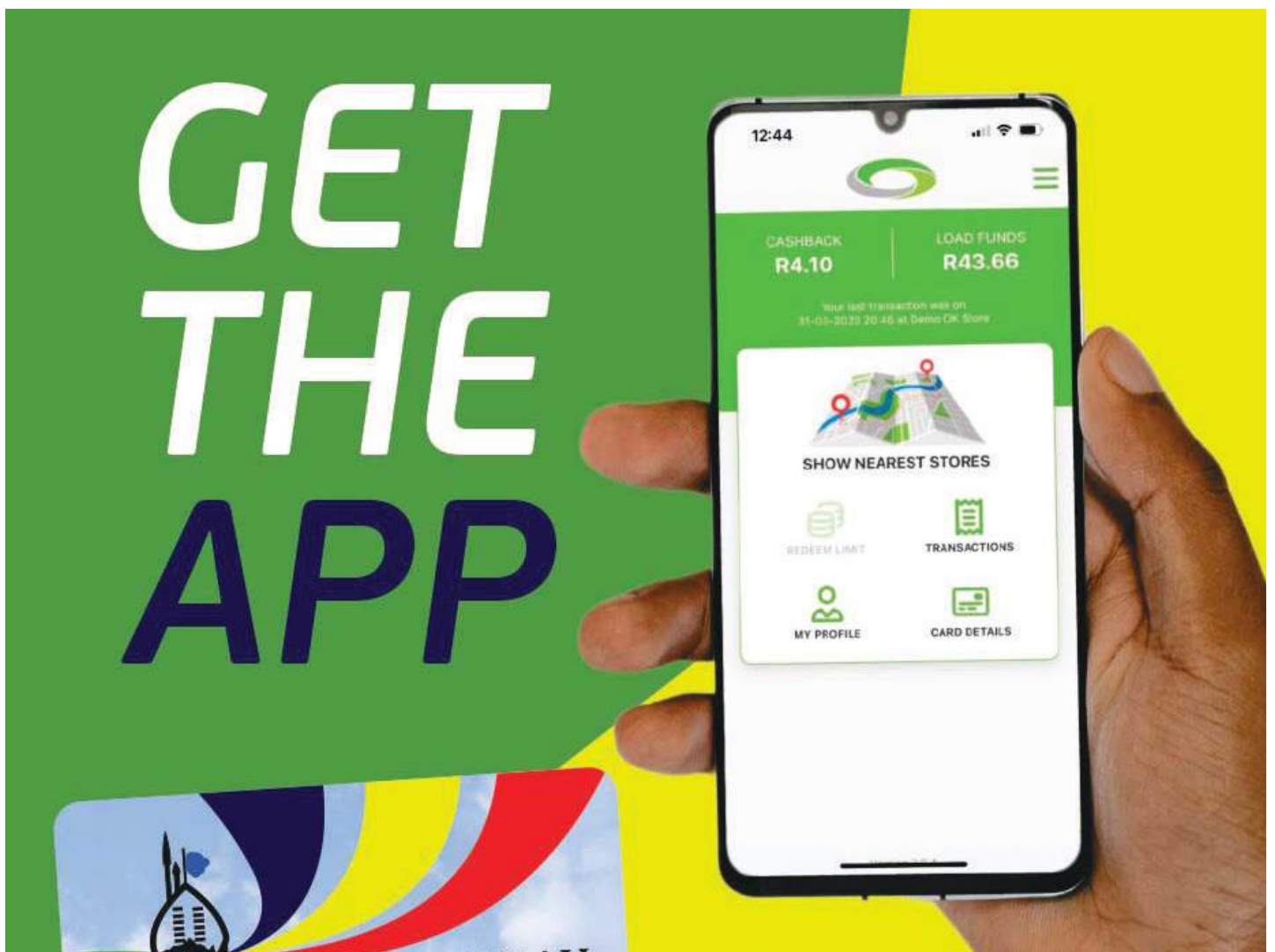
For smallholders who've waited for irrigation, real market access, and climate-smart support — SAPEMP is that long-awaited door opening. Now the work begins.



ESNAU goes DIGITAL

New Membership Card Puts Services in Farmers' Hands

BY SIKHONA SIBANDZE





For years, smallholder farmers in Eswatini have asked the same question: “How do we actually benefit from belonging to a farmers’ union?” At ESNAU’s 17th Annual Policy Conference at The George Hotel, that question finally got a practical answer — a digital membership card that turns membership into something you can use, not just something you pay for.

Unveiled under the theme “Increasing Value Through Farmer Membership, Association, Skills Building and Technology,” the card is ESNAU’s biggest step yet toward becoming a modern, service-driven farmer organisation. It’s not a bank card, but it works like a key — one card, many doors.

What the card does

With the digital membership card, farmers will be able to:

- prove active ESNAU membership instantly
- access ESNAU services at trainings, meetings, and partner events
- plug into future ESNAU digital platforms for announcements, programme sign-ups, and farmer info
- enjoy discounts and rewards at selected agri suppliers like Limisa Agricultural Suppliers and Shiselweni Livestock

For a farmer in Sigwe, Mhlangatane, or Somntongo, that’s a big deal — it means the union is no longer “far away in Manzini,” it’s on your phone or in your pocket.

Government likes the direction

Officially opening the conference on behalf of Minister of Agriculture Mandla Tshawuka, Principal Secretary Sydney Simelane applauded ESNAU for moving from talk to tools.

“These innovations are critical in ensuring that farmers see real benefits from their union, which should translate into improved productivity and national output,” he said.

It’s aligned with government’s wider push to digitise agriculture — from e-voucher systems to database-driven farmer support.

Farmers want relevance, not rhetoric

For farmers, the card signals seriousness.

“This card makes us feel like true members of a serious organisation,” said farmer Alex Gule at the launch. “It will help us access inputs, pricing information, and training opportunities more easily.”

That sentiment matters. Many farmer bodies in the region are struggling with

ageing membership, low participation, and limited services. ESNAU is trying to flip that — make membership useful, digital, and linked to real benefits like funeral cover, crop insurance, and partner discounts.

ESNAU’s bigger play

ESNAU CEO Tammy Dlamini said the card is part of a broader modernisation drive — turning ESNAU from just an advocacy voice into a service platform.

That includes:

- better data on members
- easier renewals
- linking farmers to social protection products
- making it simpler for partners (input suppliers, NGOs, government) to reach real farmers

Because agriculture is going digital — markets, traceability, subsidies, even livestock auctions. If farmers are not digitally identifiable, they get left out.

ESNAU is urging farmers to register or renew and collect the digital card through their regional reps or via WhatsApp on 7867 6660.

It may look like “just a card,” but for rural farmers who’ve long worked outside formal systems, it’s something bigger — recognition, access, and a pathway into the modern agricultural economy.



Foot-and-Mouth Disease Puts Eswatini's Livestock on Alert

Containment steps intensify as farmers report new cases, Parliament demands answers, and export markets tighten.

Eswatini's livestock sector is riding through its most difficult disease season in years as Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) — first confirmed at the Sikhwebezi dip tank in Shiselweni on May 12, 2025 — has since shown up in new hotspots in Malindza, Mpaka, Sikhuphe, Lubhuku and parts of the Lubombo corridor, prompting tighter movement controls, emergency vaccinations, and parliamentary oversight.

What was initially treated as an isolated incursion believed to have come through cross-border animal movement from South Africa has now exposed gaps in staffing, surveillance, and enforcement inside the country's animal health system. Farmers are complaining of cattle deaths. Parliament is demanding weekly reports. Export markets are watching. And the Ministry of Agriculture is trying to convince the nation the situation is under control.

How it started — and spread

The first confirmed case in Sikhwebezi, Mkhwakweni (Shiselweni) triggered the standard response: creation of infected and surveillance zones, a total ban on the movement of cloven-hoofed animals and their products, and the setting up of checkpoints around southern Eswatini — Mhlosheni, Hluthi, Engwavuma, and along the Lavumisa-

Big Bend route.

But within two months, farmers in Lubilweni, Luhhwahweni, Makhovini, Mpaka, Maphatsindvuku, Sikhuphe, and Lubhuku started reporting animals showing classic FMD signs — salivation, lameness, mouth lesions — and, in a few cases, deaths.

"Last week a farmer lost four cattle that showed clear signs of foot and mouth," said Siphos Magagula, a farmer from Mpaka. "Another from the Sikhuphe dip tank also reported losing a cow. It's getting worse."

For communal farmers whose cattle are both a bank account and a cultural asset, this is not just a veterinary issue — it's a livelihoods issue.

Government response ramps up

Principal Secretary Sydney Simelane, speaking for the Ministry, confirmed that government has:

- deployed 60 cordon guards to reinforce border and internal controls
- secured 188,800 vaccine doses (earlier in the year the Ministry had already reported vaccine support from the

- committed E38 million to rebuild and tighten frontier infrastructure
- continued quarantine of over 10 dip tanks and farms in affected zones
- warned farmers not to use private or unapproved vaccines

“The disease does not infect humans, but its economic impact is severe,” Simelane said. “We need farmers to cooperate with official vaccination and movement controls.”

Parliament steps in

A Parliamentary Select Committee led by MP Sicelo Prince Dlamini found that staff shortages and resignations in the Department of Livestock and Veterinary Services (DLVS) had slowed the early response. MPs have now demanded:

- a comprehensive FMD status report
- improved conditions for cordon/border guards
- consistent enforcement of livestock movement bans
- better communication with farmers
- clarity on compensation where applicable

They also flagged that temporary closure of abattoirs and “stop–start” restrictions were undermining biosecurity and collapsing the local cattle market.

FMD is a red-flag disease in international trade. Following notification of the outbreak, the UK veterinary authority restricted meat imports from Eswatini — a warning sign that prolonged outbreaks can dent export confidence and delay market recovery even after the last case is cleared.

Locally, farmers report dropped cattle prices, stalled sales, and nervous buyers — especially in Lubombo and Shiselweni.

Why this matters for farmers

FMD spreads fast — even via vehicles, feed, and people

It halts cattle movement — no selling, no dipping elsewhere, no shows

It affects productivity — sick animals lose weight and milk

It hurts exports — one outbreak can close a market

It costs money — vaccination, surveillance, and border control are expensive

That’s why the Ministry has tied FMD control to wider national investments in agriculture (input subsidies, mechanisation, dams). Without strong animal health, the rural economy cannot fully recover.

The Ministry is now giving weekly updates to the Parliamentary Agriculture Committee on:

- vaccine rollout
- number of quarantined dip tanks
- traceability and movement permits
- export market status

For the outbreak to be declared over, Eswatini will need strict movement control, full cooperation from farmers, and completion of vaccination in the infected zones. Any illegal movement of cattle from controlled areas will restart the clock.

For now, the message from both government and legislators is aligned: FMD is a national priority. How quickly Eswatini seals the current outbreaks will determine how fast its beef and livestock sector regains local confidence — and international market access.



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