

Imbewu Farmer Development



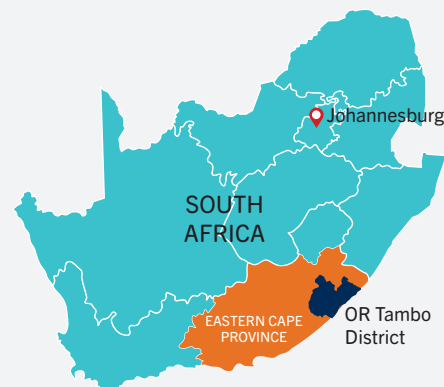
Agriculture has long been recognized as a powerful tool in the fight against extreme poverty. In South Africa, maize plays a vital role in the agricultural sector and is recognized worldwide for its quality. The country’s smallholder farmers, however, face significant challenges in earning a sustainable livelihood through the crop.

This is especially true in the Eastern Cape. South Africa’s poorest province ranks second to last in maize production, accounting for a mere 169 metric tons of maize in 2020–2021. In contrast, the province of Free State, which leads in maize cultivation, produced a staggering 7 million metric tons during the same timeframe¹.

Several barriers prevent Eastern Cape’s smallholder farmers from making a living from maize: a lack of knowledge regarding good agricultural practices, limited access to quality inputs for pest and disease management, and inadequate storage infrastructure. Furthermore, in OR Tambo District – one of the poorest districts in the Eastern Cape – farmers view maize production as a household chore rather than a business opportunity.

To ensure the long-term resilience and food security of communities in need, Tanager and the John Deere Foundation have partnered to implement the Imbewu Farmer Development project in OR Tambo District, Eastern Cape province. (“Imbewu” means “seed” Xhosa, the language spoken most frequently in the province.) The project, which takes a market systems approach, will enhance agricultural productivity, facilitate access to commercial markets, and improve incomes for the district’s smallholder farmers.

AT A GLANCE



Project Name:

Imbewu Farmer Development Project

Location:

OR Tambo District, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

Project Years: 2022–2024

Funding Partner:

John Deere Foundation

Project Goal:

Increase agricultural productivity and incomes of smallholder maize farmers



JOHN DEERE

¹2020/2021 Crop Estimates Committee, Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Republic of South Africa

TECHNICAL APPROACH

The first year of Imbewu Farmer Development introduced farmers to good agricultural practices. The project is building upon this knowledge via a three-pronged approach to boost farmers' production efficiency and profit potential:



AGGREGATION

An aggregated, or “block,” farming approach will enable farmers to join forces and become more competitive: By consolidating their production, farmers gain economies of scale whereby they can access commercial markets typically closed off to them.



STORAGE

Storage allows farmers to take advantage of price fluctuations in the market: Proper storage minimizes post-harvest losses while ensuring farmers can hold their crops for sale until prices are at their highest.



ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM

Farmers must leverage the entrepreneurial ecosystem to be successful: The project will therefore facilitate partnerships with agri input dealers, financial institutions, and mechanization dealers to help smallholder farmers maximize their yields.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

With access to a uniquely skilled workforce through John Deere, Tanager and John Deere Foundation have incorporated a volunteering program into the Imbewu Farmer Development project. Select John Deere employees will have the opportunity to provide much-needed business management training to local entrepreneurs in OR Tambo District – layering critical business skills upon the project's agricultural capacity-building initiatives.

“There has always been the traditional knowledge of maize farming, but we have acquired new knowledge to really make it profitable” —Mlungisi Ndobeni



TARGET IMPACT

The project promises to yield significant outcomes for farmers, small and medium enterprises, and, ultimately, households across OR Tambo District:

2,760

Number of farmers



67%

Increase in maize yields



67%

Increase in income



Tanager, an ACDI/VOCA affiliate, empowers people to realize life-changing economic and social opportunities. We have 30 years of experience in integrating gender empowerment and nutrition into agriculture, connecting people across the production supply chain, fostering access for women and other marginalized groups, and unlocking sustainable, climate-smart economic opportunities for all.

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