

MEDIA RELEASE

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IT IS A WRAP

Smallholder cotton farmers in Matlerekeng, Limpopo, and Nkomazi, Mpumalanga, on Wednesday, 24 August 2022, wrapped up the season's cotton harvest with the launch of locally manufactured and assembled cotton baling machines in Matlerekeng Village. The pink wrapping used in the demonstration of the baler was befitting of celebrating the women in the cotton industry during this Woman's month. Approximately 60% of South Africa's smallholder cotton farmers are women.

These two baling machines were made possible through the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI)'s Agricultural Bioeconomy Innovation Partnership Programme (ABIPP). DSI established ABIPP to implement partnership programmes in support of a competitive and sustainable agricultural bioeconomy and is implemented by the Technology Innovation Agency (TIA) on behalf of the DSI. It facilitates, coordinates and funds multi-institutional, multi-stakeholder and co-funded agricultural bioeconomy initiatives contributing to increased productivity, food security and rural economic development.

DSI and TIA provided funding to Cotton SA to procure these baling machines. These cotton balers sign the end of manual cotton baling for the beneficiary communities and will allow them to save on cotton harvesting and transporting costs.

Previously, the cotton harvested by the smallholder farmers was delivered to the ginneries in woolpacks. Most ginneries have modernised their gins to process round bales aligned to commercial farmers' mechanisation. This resulted in additional costs for the ginners to build special modules for cotton delivered in different forms to enable them to process it. With the new compacted round bales, the farmers can load more seed cotton on the inter-link truck for transportation. As a result, the farmers will earn an extra R0,73 per kg for their seed cotton.

Local cotton farmer and vice-chairperson of Swara o Tiise Molemi Agricultural Co-operative, Mr Frans Malela, who also serves as a regional representative on Cotton SA's Smallholder Cotton Farmer Forum, expressed his gratitude to Cotton SA and the funders for supporting the farmers with this innovative technology. "The mechanical baling of the seed cotton saves us time and money", he said. "We no longer have to buy woolpacks and we save on the handling fee at the gin. The cotton baler wraps the bales much faster than we could pack the bags."

The Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande, said, "The machines will enable farmers to conduct primary agro-processing using a hub-and-spokes model so that they can leverage economies of scale to aggregate their produce into bales, which the gins can accept without additional costs for the small-scale farmers," said the Minister.

According to Mr Tertius Schoeman, the Manager for Transformation and Development at Cotton SA, preliminary investigations indicate that if smallholder farmers could deliver their cotton in round bales, this could result in a saving, which could lead to an additional income of about R1 514.69 per farmer per 2,5 hectares. This is a saving that could have a multiplier effect in terms of socio-economic benefits in their area. "Cotton SA's Smallholder Cotton Farmer Strategic Plan aims to increase smallholder black farmers' participation to 20% of the national crop in South Africa by 2030", said Schoeman. He expects that the Nkomazi machine will benefit more than 880 farmers, with the Matlerekeng machine to benefit 186 farmers, mainly situated in Matlerekeng, Dichoeung, Nokaneng and Rust de Winter, in the 2022 planting season.

Cotton is considered one of the world's greatest poverty-alleviating crops, with 150 million people relying on it for income worldwide. It is a crop that thrives in conditions many others cannot. Cotton is the only agricultural crop that is a source for fibre, food and animal feed. It is natural, versatile, biodegradable, and renewable. According to the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC), this drought-resistant crop creates five jobs on average across the value chain for every ton lint produced, thus having massive potential in South Africa and the rest of the continent.

Sourcing locally supports the local farmers and creates opportunities for local empowerment and job opportunities throughout the value chain. It is not about one person but about feeding a family and growing a community. Cotton is a cash crop and creates opportunities to unlock wealth in underdeveloped areas where little more than cotton can be produced.

Mr Sibusiso Manana, Head of Agriculture at TIA, says that the provision of the balers is aligned with TIA's developmental mandate of supporting the diffusion of technologies to emerging and smallholder farmers for increased participation, productivity and profitability. Particular targets for TIA's support are women in rural areas, the youth and people living with disabilities. "This kind of partnership is part of the role played by TIA as an industry builder, engaging in value chain interventions that are economically inclusive in their setup," he explains.

Deputy Director for Biotechnology at the DSI, Dr Thabang Bambo, who was the keynote speaker at the event, said that the funding of the machines was aligned with the 2019 White Paper on Science, Technology and Innovation, which identifies the importance of access to technologies, as well as enhanced services and processes that support inclusivity and commercialisation. "To implement the White Paper, the DSI has developed a decadal plan, which provides a strong theory of change for innovation in driving the revitalisation of agriculture. We must take advantage of this recognition to build the agriculture sector," said Dr Bambo.

Please visit www.cottonsa.org.za for more information on cotton in South Africa.

High res photos are attached.

Photo captions:



Sibusiso Manana (Head of Agriculture, TIA), Dr Thabang Bambo (Deputy Director for Biotechnology, DSI), Mike Ramushu (DALRRD Limpopo), Frans Malela (cotton farmer), Tertius Schoeman (Manager Transformation and Development, Cotton SA), and Hotu Rantho (DALRRD Mpumalanga)



Tanya Aucamp, (Cotton SA) the programme director at the event with female farmer Maria Swele.

Maria Swele, the chairperson of Swara o Tiise Molemi Agricultural Co-operative, who has been farming cotton for 18 years, is relieved that manual baling will be a thing of the past. She believes that the co-operative will be able to do much more with the help of the technology.