



# A cut above THE REST

DESPITE THE CHALLENGES, ORGANIC MICRO-FARMER, MOSIMA MACDONALD PALE, IS LIVING HIS VISION WITH DILIGENCE, DETERMINATION AND GRATITUDE

By NATALIE BORUVKA Photographs by KARL ROGERS

**L**ooking out across the multihued stretch of green, carefully arranged in long, neat rows, it's hard to believe that Mosima Macdonald Pale started farming less than two years ago. His spinach is deliciously dark and ruffled. Cabbages unfurl, rotund and robust. A billowy mass of rocket shoots delicate white flowers, signalling harvesting has begun.

The acre of organic bounty is testament to Mosima's conviction that he could make a living from a passion that took root in him as a child. "Some of my earliest memories are of playing in the soil at our homeland farm in Mokopane, Limpopo, during school holidays," says Mosima. "My family grew drought-resistant crops, like maize and sorghum, and, seeing how those harvests kept us going, was a lesson in understanding the long-lasting benefits of investing in one's land."

Born in Tembisa on Johannesburg's East Rand, Mosima was 10 years old



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when his family went into exile in Botswana. "Subsistence farming was a policy there," he says of the Azapo refugee camp in Francistown, where his father was a leader of one of the settlements. "Once again, I found myself playing in a big garden," he laughs. This one was almost a quarter of an acre and it fed about 50 people.

With the release of Nelson Mandela and the dawn of democracy, the Pale family returned to South Africa where Mosima continued his schooling. "I really enjoyed biology and decided to study crop production after high school, but the class was full. So, I ended up choosing horticulture at the University of Tshwane." Lack of funds, however, forced him to abandon his studies and pursue a career in the South African National Defence Force.

It was when Mosima was transferred to Cape Town that he started moving towards a defining point in his life. "I was struck by the beautiful, natural environment and found myself yearning for the carefree days of my childhood, snitching carrots and watering cabbages," he smiles. When his three-year service came to an end, he partnered with a friend who was still in the military, Tebogo Mabuza,

and, together, they established a 1 200m<sup>2</sup> farm on a rented plot in Wynberg. "We struggled initially," he says, "but, when the land was sold and I moved on my own to a new piece of land in Philippi, I had a valuable foundation of knowledge and experience to draw from."

Challenged by limited funds at the start, he decided to approach companies for sponsorships. An assertive attitude paid off. Western Cape Seedlings donated his first 30 crates of seedlings. He received a donation of compost from Reliance Compost, and The Pole Yard, an outlet for timber poles, jungle gyms and garden furniture, supplied him with materials to build a fence and construct shading. The City of Cape Town also came to the fore with spades, a wheelbarrow and 100 metres of hosepipe.

Garnering customers was no easy task. "In the beginning, I cold-canvassed, delivering samples of my organic produce from one place to the next and, although some people did show interest initially, it was tough to get them to re-order," he says. His first consistent customer was Abalimi Bezekhaya, a non-profit organisation based in Khayelitsha which, in addition

to providing training for home-based gardeners and micro-farmers, assists in the distribution of their fresh produce through their marketing project, Harvest of Hope. Two of Mosima's crop rows are dedicated solely to supplying them. "Essentially, I want to grow like this with every customer until I have a production plan that meets their unique set of needs," he explains. If a client base that now includes Knead Bakery, Starlings Café, Baked Bistro and Block and Chisel's flagship café, The Larder, is anything to go by, Mosima looks well on his way to achieving this aim.

Swiss chard is the crop he has the highest demand for. "We know it as spinach and, fortunately, it grows well throughout the year; although, production does slow down in winter, because it is actually a summer crop," he explains. It is followed by rocket, then curly kale. In summer, Mosima, who sells his produce every Sunday at the ERF 81 Food Market in Tamboerskloof, branches out and plants fruiting crops like baby marrows, tomatoes, aubergines and peppers. His winning formula is a mix of cow-and chicken manure combined with decomposing plant matter from his farm. When he does need to protect

his crops, he employs a means of extracting the juice from garlic, which he combines with chopped chillies. "Although it's a powerful weapon for pest control, the simple truth is that vegetables and plants grow in a certain season for a reason," he says. "Planting seasonally helps to ensure the health of a crop and improves its ability to fight off disease."

Cultivating an acre of land single-handedly is no small feat. While there's a borehole on the Philippi plot, absence of an irrigation system means a thorough watering takes three hours. He starts at 5pm every day.

Ultimately, Mosima, who is completing his degree through UNISA, wants to buy all seven hectares of the land he is renting. He has recently started an

initiative that enables independent farmers, who supply Think Organic, to develop their own rows on the plot, in exchange for tending to his crops two or three days per week.

Walking through the rows at dusk with his three-year-old son, Mogomotsi, clutching his trouser leg, Mosima says he wants "Mogomotsi to see that he can make a success of anything he wishes to do in life; but, that he must be prepared to work hard and help others." Contact Mosima on 079 323 7990 or email [mac.pale@gmail.com](mailto:mac.pale@gmail.com)

