

Strawberry farmer has ambitious plans

Mohale Qina, 76, wants to supply the entire province with his berries

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An emerging strawberry farmer from Mthatha is not letting his age stop him from having big dreams of supplying berries to the entire Eastern Cape province.

Mohale Qina of Zone 14 in Mthatha may be 76 but he is as fit as a fiddle.

“I am very strong and healthy. I wake up at 3am or 4am so that I can tend to my garden and pick my strawberries and package them while they are still fresh for my customers. Then I make deliveries and sell off the day’s extra produce at different offices in Mthatha,” he said.

Qina, who is married and has nine adult children, says farming was a part of his upbringing. Reminiscing about his childhood, Qina said he and his five siblings would come home

from school and help their father on the land.

“My father grew all our vegetables in our garden; we lacked nothing. He sold the remainder to neighbours and would often go into town to sell there as well. Even when we were working we would help in the garden whenever we were home,” he said.

Qina spent most of his adult life working as a builder for the department of public works and when he retired, he knew he could not sit and do nothing.

He asked someone for strawberry seedlings because he had planted vegetables all his life and he wanted to try something different.

Now with 2.5ha, Qina produces enough strawberries to enjoy himself, supply stores in Mthatha, Mqanduli and Elliotdale, and Food Lover’s Market in Mthatha.

His strawberries are neatly packaged in plastic containers after one of his customers advised him to do so. Qina would

2.5

The number of hectares that Qina has for his strawberry farming

like to expand his business by farming blueberries, raspberries and blackberries as well.

“I would like to supply my berries to all of the Eastern Cape. In the future I would like to employ people to make juice out of my berries and for that juice to be sold in restaurants and supermarkets,” he said.

Qina said he was in support of land expropriation without compensation.

“Some of us have the will to farm and do not have the means. It would be great if government would give us an opportunity to do so,” he said.

Alister Antonakas, the owner of the Mthatha Food Lovers Market at BT Ngebs Mall, said: “We have to keep the money in the [former] Transkei, that is the most important thing. I always consult local farmers for products before I go to outside farmers in Johannesburg or Durban.

“It is important to us that the community we serve benefits in the money chain,” said Antonakas.



HOME GROWN: Emerging strawberry farmer Mohale Qina with some of the strawberries that he farms in his Mthatha garden. He sells them to businesses and individuals. Picture: LULAMILE FENI