

Nyakallong farmer harvests award

By Sidwell Guduka

Allanridge - Subsistence farmer Joyce Mabele has ploughed a significant breakthrough for women in a man's world.

The 45-year-old mother from Nyakallong was acknowledged as one of the province's top vegetable farmers during the annual Hlasela Tlala Ka Diratswana awards ceremony held at Glen College of Agriculture, outside Bloemfontein, on Friday.

Mabele was named as the provincial winner for Best Backyard Garden in the Free State Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's awards that honour men and women who contribute immensely to food security. The awards are also aimed at encouraging food production in households, schools, clinics and churches.

Mabele won the district (Lejweputswa) leg of the awards earlier this year and went on to compete against winners from other districts (Thabo Mofutsanyana, Fezile Dabi, Motheo and Xhariep) in the provincial leg of the awards last week.

For her efforts, she smiled all the way to the bank with a cheque worth R4000 - each award she received contained a cash prize of R2000.

"I am thrilled. This gives me the energy to go on and on, especially when people are beginning to appreciate what I'm doing. I want to achieve more," Mabele told *The Mail*.

"To be honest, I didn't expect to win an award today. I couldn't believe my ears when I was called to the podium to receive it. It hasn't sunk in yet," she said.

"I'm thankful to the Lord for my achievement. I also want to thank the Department of Agriculture and Rural



Joyce Mabele is one of the top vegetable farmers in the province. Photo: Sidwell Guduka

Development as well as the MEC (Oupa Khoabane) for organising such a prestigious event," she added.

Mabele said her organic products provided a subsistence living for her family, while the surplus harvest is sold for profit.

The vegetables cultivated by Mabele include chillies, cabbage, tomato, beetroot, spinach, onion, lettuce and carrots.

MEC for Agriculture in the Free State, Oupa Khoabane, said his department had managed to get households to initiate their own food gardens to curb hunger through the Hlasela Tlala Ka Diratswana programme.

"Today, we stand tall to announce that since the inception of this programme we have more than 26000 beneficiaries, amounting to 30282 households and institutions across the province where these gardens are," he said.

Khoabane said he challenged the people of Free State to participate in his department's programmes and work closely with extension officers in their respective areas to ensure that together "we defeat this monster of poverty and hunger."

"We urge our communities through Hlasela Tlala Ka Diratswana to plant and effectively utilise their backyards and water to produce food instead of always buying.

In doing that they should use simpler methods of conserving water. Our officials are available to provide lessons regarding that," he concluded.

According to the survey conducted by Statistics South Africa in 2015, households' access to food has improved since 2002. Since then, the percentage of households that experienced hunger decreased from 23% to 11,3% by 2015.