

TELA DOCUSERIES – Where technology meets stories of hope and resilience

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The TELA Maize Project is a public-private partnership between the Agricultural Research Council and its partners that is working towards initiating the commercialisation of transgenic drought-tolerant and insect-protected maize varieties to enhance food security in Sub-Saharan Africa. The TELA Maize Project builds on progress made from a decade of excellent breeding work under the Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA) Project. WEMA's purpose was to develop drought-tolerant and insect-protected maize varieties for farmers to produce more reliable harvests under moderate drought conditions and protect maize from insects.

The Mpumalanga Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs (DARDLEA) played a vital role in helping The Agricultural Research Council gain access to smallholder farmers to conduct interviews and gather testimonials. Through its extensive network of local agricultural extension officers and community leaders, the Department was able to identify and connect the research team with farmers in remote and rural areas who would have otherwise been difficult to reach. Thanks to the Mpumalanga Department of Agriculture's support, the Agricultural Research Council was able to collect valuable insights and testimonials from these farmers. These are their stories:

Marite – Shuttling Community



The farming community of Marite, Shuttling in Mpumalanga, South Africa have been farming as means to sustain their families all their lives. According to Khelina Mzimba, prior to 2018 when they came to know about TELA maize varieties, they believed that small quantity yields and pest damage were farming norms. “We are just farming ordinarily, knowing and accepting that half of our crops might be destroyed by the Fall Armyworm,” she said.

Through interactions with Extension Officers from the South African Department of Agriculture, they came to know about TELA Maize varieties. It was the beautiful maize fields of Khelina Mzimba that could be seen from kilometers away that prompted the other members of the community to knock on her doorstep to ask about the source of this maize that seemed to not be like any other in their area. She explained her connection with the Department of Agriculture and they asked to meet with the people that bring the maize. Initially, they planted (not sure which variety this is) and they were

thrilled. One farmer says that she had never seen her maize crops grow so strong. “Even in the scorching, unbearable heat, the maize would still retain its moisture. That is something that really surprised me,” says Make Masuku. The others echo her sentiments and add that planting TELA maize varieties has helped them with making a sustainable living as they are able to make enough for their families to eat, and also have some leftover to sell to their families.

The group of Shuttling farmers has some preferences when it comes to TELA varieties. They are all in agreement that even with some of the production challenges they have faced, they are only willing to plant TELA varieties going forward.



