

# Farmers open hearts, harvests

From apples to baked beans, they're helping feed the hungry poor

By PAUL ASH

● Every week Elgin apple grower Cath Boome helps fill three truckloads of fruit for nonprofit organisation Breadline, which feeds children in informal settlements.

She is one of the district's farmers who sends fresh produce to hungry people.

"We are picking an enormous amount of fruit," she said. By next week, she estimates the local farmers will have donated 5t of apples to the feeding scheme.

Twice a week, another Elgin farmer loads up her bakkie with apples and heads over the mountains to Mitchells Plain on the Cape Flats to help another feeding scheme.

After being urged to give money to the feeding scheme, the farmer – one of several women in the district who have donated part of their crop as food relief – realised her crop would be more useful than sending money. She asked to remain anonymous.

"A bakkie-load of apples is worth a lot more than a few hundred rands," she said.

Until last week, she made the deliveries herself. But as people become more desperate, the risk of violence grows.

"I wasn't nervous until last Friday," she said. "People were throwing stones. Security drove behind me into Mitchells Plain."

Elgin's apple harvest is in full swing and much of the crop goes to feeding schemes. It's part of a move by farmers and agricultural organisations to donate food.

In Groblersdal, maize and citrus farmer Kallie Schoeman is donating maize meal from his mill in Delmas which his workers hand out in nearby settlements, along with tins of baked beans. Schoeman reckons this is the best way to distribute food to the hungry in rural areas.

"Beans are your cheapest form of protein," said the Limpopo farmer.

He also donated 400kg of lemons, which have benefits as a natural supplement for Vitamin C and an immune booster, to the local Spar for people to help themselves.

Schoeman estimated that he would have milled about 7.5t of maize meal by the end of April – enough for 35,700 meals – along with 1,500 tins of beans.

He hopes to increase the monthly output to 20t of maize meal, enough for 100,000 meals. As news of his generosity spread, calls for help flooded in.

"It's overwhelming. I've been receiving phone calls all over, up to Sasolburg, people saying 'can you help us?'"

Schoeman concentrates on the Sekukhune district and around Delmas where the maize and beans are produced.

"Farmers will always step up," he said.



A farmer has given lemons to a local supermarket for distribution for free. Picture: Supplied

“Many will not know where their next plate of food will come from”

Jannie Strydom  
CEO Agri Western Cape

Farmers in KwaZulu-Natal are also responding to calls for help. Farmers from Ixopo, Highflats, Kokstad, Mount Currie and Mooi River have given fresh and dry produce, and milk, to surrounding rural communities, said agricultural union Kwanalu.

Through partnerships with churches, municipalities, local NGOs and community organisations, relief supplies have reached about 4,500 families in the Ixopo area and 700 families around Kokstad.

In Mooi River, dairy farmers joined forces with Danone SA and the nonprofit Upper Midlands Agricultural Transformation Initiative to supply milk and other essentials to nearby communities, among which are 1,500 children at the Lighthouse Community

Centre.

"The selflessness, rapid organisation and collaboration of these farmers is truly outstanding," said Kwanalu CEO Sandy La Marque.

Grain SA said it had appealed to maize farmers to donate part of their crop from the coming harvest as food relief.

Silos would waive storage charges and the maize would be shipped to mills for processing, after which it would be given to churches and charity organisations.

Harvesting of summer crops such as maize, soya beans, sunflowers and groundnuts has only just begun and the farmers in the North West and Free State, who supply the bulk of SA's maize crop, will begin harvesting in two weeks' time at the earliest, said Grain SA CEO Jannie de Villiers.

"Producers are doing an excellent job to deliver a bumper crop during these difficult times," said De Villiers.

Agricultural organisation Agri Western Cape has been working with NGOs such as FoodForward SA to distribute fresh produce to old-age homes, places looking after orphans and vulnerable children, and also to people living with HIV/Aids and TB.

About 100t of food donations have been distributed.

"The country will have to deal with many communities within the next few weeks who will not know where their next plate of food will come from," said Agri Western Cape CEO Jannie Strydom.