

Sustainable blueberries, order of the day for tobacco farmers

Two South African tobacco farms in Limpopo have embarked on sustainable blueberry production under United Export's premium OZblu brand.



elizadean via [Fxabay](#)

Traditional and inadequate housing structures have made way for newly upgraded housing facilities on Waterberg Berries, close to Vaalwater, where OZblu estate manager Carel van der Merwe and his team have settled. "When I arrived here, there were no toilets for the farm workers, and most of the housing structures were in ruins," said Van der Merwe.

Van der Merwe says that they sold the traditional tobacco irrigation systems and kilns and replaced them with new fertigation equipment and systems that are suitable for blueberry production. Altogether 50ha of blueberries has been planted on Waterberg Berries at the beginning of this year.

Blueberry planting operations

In the same way that Waterberg's location is ideal for blueberry production, so too is Metsi Berries, the farm of grower Eduard Pauer, a former tobacco, corn and popcorn farmer. He started planting blueberries on his farm, in collaboration with OZblu. Currently, he has 27ha of OZblu blueberry varieties growing under shade netting and still expanding.

"I can't wait to get out of bed in the morning and into the fields," says Pauer who stopped all his tobacco operations eleven years ago because it was no longer feasible. He had to sell a part of his farm, as well as equipment to pay off tobacco debts after the corporation at Potgietersrus closed down.

He also had to lay off some of his workers when he started planting less labour-intensive crops. It was at this stage that he met OZblu founder and CEO, Roger Horak, who convinced him to direct his energy to blueberries.

Metsi Berries now employs 45 people on a permanent basis. Together Pauer and his team are upgrading and renovating the accommodation facilities on the farm to also provide for seasonal workers during harvest time.

"We are in our second year of blueberry production, and we are convinced that we will see our investment grow year on year," concludes Pauer.

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