



Thato Moagi
2017 Nuffield International Scholar
South Africa



I have a 50ha farm in Limpopo province we focus on crop production, we cultivate potatoes and maize and breed cattle and goats for meat. On a smaller scale we also have a greenhouse which is about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a hectare where I grow spinach, lettuce, green peppers, green beans for my local retail market.

It has been fascinating to realise that here around Brasilia is quite similar to where I live - the climate and rainfall distribution. So the farm visits were directly beneficial for me to see what they are doing, how and what crops are they planting, how are they mitigating risk, how they are dealing with not having rainfall in winter, even the plant breeding for drought tolerance.

Then just generally the experience of flying all this way, meeting agricultural professionals on different levels from farmers, to people in policy, journalists and people in finance; that interaction and getting to understand how agriculture has a broad network and a lot of individuals contributing to it was quite interesting. I've had great discussions, and been learning how to effectively communicate. I've also got many tips on how to get the most from this Scholarship opportunity – so quite a comprehensive week. Actually, it's a lot to absorb in just one week!

How did you get into farming?

I grew up in Johannesburg city and after graduating in BSc Plant Science at the University of Pretoria, I looked at the opportunities that were before me. I didn't want to work as a government extension officer so I decided to start a business. In 2013, I got my family to invest in land.

It's been quite a journey building my farm from scratch. Putting up fencing, putting up electricity, putting in pipes, building dams, building paddocks, putting up barnyards and building offices so it was really the genesis of something unique. Since then there have been many challenges getting enough scale and to being able to satisfy the markets and being able to compete with other commercial farmers who have been around for a very long time. The experience has been humbling because I have been able to create a network of farmers in my area that I can go to consult with, get advice from.

What does it mean to be the first Nuffield Scholar ever from South Africa?

It is quite interesting, and also a lot of pressure because I have to be an ambassador for Nuffield to South Africans and also to get South Africans to understand what Nuffield is. I need to galvanise South Africans to support this initiative because the ideals that Nuffield stands for are very important. We need those ideals back home to galvanise young people into agriculture.

What challenges do you see for agriculture in South Africa?

There are many challenges. Young people are not entering agriculture because they don't think it is cool - so you find an aging population of farmers. Many kids from farms study to become lawyers or doctors as they don't value agriculture. There has been a devaluing of agriculture because there hasn't been good examples, or young people involved and enjoying farming. Furthermore, young adults with tertiary education need farmers to say "come, spend time on my farm and learn". We need to start a culture of sharing information. Most farmers are closed off as in they concentrate on their enterprise so they shy away from innovation, they shy away from sharing. We really need a cultural shift to promote agriculture in a way that people can see it in a positive light.

I hope that my experience with Nuffield and the exposure Nuffield will give me serves as an example to young people back home to show that there are amazing opportunities in agriculture. That these are the doors that can open for you.