

# The Farmers' Chronicles

BLOG

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## Africa's Plant Health Champions Gather in Mpumalanga, South Africa: Training the Trainers to Fight Pests and Protect Harvests Across the Continent.

In the gentle hills of White River, Mpumalanga, South Africa, something extraordinary took root from 23 to 27 June 2025, not in the soil, but in the minds of more than 50 plant health specialists from across Africa. For five days, these experts gathered to learn, collaborate, and lead as part of the Africa Phytosanitary Programme (APP), a continent-wide initiative aimed at strengthening Africa's ability to fight crop pests that threaten food security, trade and livelihoods.

This was no ordinary workshop. It marked the official launch of Phase Two of the APP and the beginning of a transformative journey for specialists from Algeria, Cabo Verde, Chad, the Republic of Congo, Liberia, Malawi, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia. Together, they immersed themselves in mastering advanced pest surveillance techniques using digital tools and mobile applications designed to monitor, detect and report pests of significant economic, environmental and regulatory concern.

The Africa Phytosanitary Programme began in 2023, built on a bold idea: that science, technology

and collaboration can protect Africa's agriculture from devastating pest outbreaks. Phase One, the pilot phase included 11 countries, among them Egypt, Kenya, Uganda, Morocco and Zimbabwe, and introduced participants to innovative field protocols and digital technologies for pest monitoring. Now, Phase Two builds on that momentum. Its focus is not only on developing technical skills but also on creating trainers and leaders.

Each participant is now equipped to return home and share their knowledge with colleagues within their National Plant Protection Organisations (NPPOs) and other relevant government structures. The goal is to strengthen plant health systems by multiplying impact, peer to peer, country to country.

This transformative programme is driven by a partnership between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and South Africa's Department of Agriculture (DoA).



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A NATION  
THAT WORKS FOR ALL



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Funding for Phase Two comes from the European Union and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, building on the earlier support of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and its Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), which funded the pilot phase. Together, these partners are committed to extending the benefits of APP to more African countries, and eventually, to other regions of the world. The five-day workshop combined intensive classroom-based sessions with practical, hands-on experiences.

Participants were trained in digital data collection, standardised pest surveillance protocols, and emergency response simulations, all aligned with international IPPC standards. They also received guidance on how to cascade this knowledge within their own national systems, ensuring sustainable capacity-building well beyond the workshop.

A major highlight of the week was the opportunity to take learning into the field. The first site visit was to the Agricultural Research Council's Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Crops Campus (ARC-ITSC) in Mbombela. There, participants engaged with plant health researchers, observed pest monitoring trials, and saw how digital tools are being integrated into traditional scouting methods for real-time decision-making.

The second visit took participants to Banana GIBA Farm, just outside White River, a commercial banana farm dedicated to managing banana-specific diseases. Delegates learned how to identify symptoms and collect and handle plant samples and conduct basic field diagnostics.

These real-world experiences provided a vital bridge between theory and practice, deepening participants' understanding of the challenges faced daily by farmers, inspectors and agribusinesses on the ground. Participants received a state-of-the-art tablet equipped with geospatial pest surveillance software and technical field protocols developed by plant health experts. With these tools, participants can now collect and report data more accurately and efficiently, strengthening early warning systems and response mechanisms across their respective countries.

By the end of the workshop, every delegate had not only been trained as a phytosanitary expert, but were also certified as a trainer, prepared to guide others in applying the APP toolkit and championing plant protection efforts at national and local levels.

"This workshop has transformed how we approach pest monitoring," said a participant from Malawi. "The combination of technology, fieldwork and shared expertise is exactly what Africa needs." A delegate from Liberia added, "We are returning home not just with new skills, but with a responsibility to protect our crops and livelihoods."

Crop pests may be small, but their impact is massive. They can destroy entire harvests, disrupt trade and push farming communities into hardship. While plant health may seem like a technical field, at its core, it is about something much bigger: ensuring there is food on the table, money in the hands of farmers and healthy produce in our markets.

What took place in Mpumalanga was not just a training, it was a resonant statement of intent.



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Africa is taking charge of its own food systems by investing in the people who protect them.

At The Farmers' Chronicles, we believe in the quiet strength of those who protect our crops, the researchers, the inspectors, the trainers and the farmers themselves.

The Africa Phytosanitary Programme Train-the-Trainer Workshop showed us what is possible when we combine science, solidarity and innovation. With every field visit, every digital report, and every trained officer, Africa is growing stronger, one plant at a time.

**-Prince Mtsweni-**

