

# The Farmers' Chronicles

BLOG

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## Celebrating Women in Agriculture: The Inspiring Journey of Ellen Matsei

Did you know that women make up nearly half of South Africa's agricultural workforce, yet their voices remain underrepresented in leadership? This reality makes the achievements of trailblazers like Ms Ellen Matsei all the more inspiring. As Women's Month comes to a close, The Farmers' Chronicles celebrates the women breaking barriers in agriculture. Among them is Ellen Matsei, Director: Statistics and Economic Analysis, whose journey proves that resilience, intelligence and compassion are just as vital to agriculture as soil and rain.

Her story is not only about climbing the leadership ladder in a male-dominated sector; it is about using data to tell human stories, shaping food security policies, and inspiring a new generation of women to see agriculture as a space in which they belong and can lead. Ellen's path into agriculture wasn't a straight line, it was a journey marked by curiosity, resilience and determination. "Agriculture found me," she reflects, recalling how her exposure to statistics and economics at Statistics South Africa unexpectedly opened doors to her current role. The road wasn't without challenges.

In a sector long dominated by men, Ellen often had her credibility questioned simply because she was a woman. However, instead of backing down, she doubled down. Her work became her voice, and over time, it spoke volumes. Her leadership style today is grounded in authenticity, clear communication, and uncompromising principles and qualities that have allowed her not only to thrive in her role but also to inspire others along the way. For many, agricultural statistics look like columns of numbers. For Ellen, they are the heartbeat of South Africa's food security.

Her work involves collecting and analysing data on crop production, livestock and market trends; data that underpins crucial policies supporting farmers and communities alike. She highlights challenges the sector faces, from climate change disrupting yields to ongoing issues of land reform and resource access. By providing reliable and timely data, Ellen and her team help transform these challenges into actionable insights that policymakers, farmers and communities can use. "Behind every number is a farmer, a family, and a community whose livelihood depends on agriculture" she said.



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Women's Month reminds us of the unique strengths women bring to leadership, and Ellen embodies them fully. She believes women's natural tendency to nurture translates into leadership that is honest, empathetic and deeply connected to the communities they serve. This perspective ensures that agricultural data isn't just collected but interpreted in the context of real lives. Her commitment to inclusivity is especially evident in her drive to ensure that women farmers and smallholders are represented in agricultural statistics, paving the way for fairer access to resources and opportunities.

Ms Matsei is passionate about mentoring the next generation of women leaders in agriculture, offering advice that is both practical and empowering. She encourages women to see the bigger picture by understanding how their specialty contributes to the broader agricultural ecosystem. Staying informed about global and national developments in their fields is vital, as is the commitment to continuous learning and education to remain relevant.

She also emphasises the importance of getting involved by participating in decision-making spaces. She firmly believes that the future of agriculture lies in embracing technology, innovation and data-driven solutions, with women playing a pivotal role in driving this transformative change. Women's Month is more than a celebration; it is a recognition of the hurdles women have overcome, balancing family, facing scepticism and breaking barriers. It is also a reminder of the opportunities that still lie ahead.

With leaders like Ellen Matsei, the agricultural sector is steadily moving toward a future that is more inclusive, innovative and sustainable. As we close this month, let us carry forward these stories of resilience, leadership and hope. Women like Ellen remind us that agriculture is not just about food production, it's about nurturing communities, empowering individuals, and sustaining the future. Agriculture is more than growing food, it's about growing people, opportunities and futures. **Call to Action:** Do you know women making an impact in agriculture? Share their stories with us in the comments on our social media, we'd love to celebrate them too.

**-Prince Mtsweni-**