



ORGANIC NEWS

ISSUE 10 | JUNE 2026

We may have been a little quiet lately, but behind the scenes there's been plenty happening. Over the past months, our **organic agroecological community** has kept moving with new developments and ongoing work towards a more sustainable food system.

In this issue:

- From our Chairperson: Bakhusele Mathupha
- The Good Life Show in Cape Town
- Graduation Day for our AOLC changemakers
- Spotlight on fertiliser shortages
- Cape of Storms - impact on our PGS farmers
- PGS Working Group update
- Growing the next generation of storytellers
- Highlighting PGS farmers in South Africa, Eastern Cape
- Rolling towards dignity: Water Rollers transform daily life in Great Kei
- News
- Ways to get involved



FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON: BAKHUSELE MATHUPHA



"As SAOSO, we believe health equity starts long before someone walks into a clinic. It starts with access to healthy food, clean water, a safe environment, and sustainable livelihoods.

That is why we are committed to building a united and strong organic and agroecological movement. By working together to transform our food system and enable sustainable agriculture to flourish, we can improve people's health, create opportunities for young people, protect our natural resources,

and build stronger, more resilient communities.

As we focused on Youth Day in June, our thoughts turned towards creating greater opportunities for young people to develop meaningful skills, become entrepreneurs and grow as leaders. The organic sector offers exactly that – creating pathways to sustainable livelihoods while empowering the next generation to produce healthy food, protect our environment and build more resilient communities."



THE GOOD LIFE SHOW WAS IN CAPE TOWN IN MAY!

The Good Life Show took place at the Cape Town International Convention Centre from 29–31 May, and SAOSO, together with our Western Cape PGS farmers, was proud to be part of this vibrant celebration of sustainable living.

Our beautifully curated stand full of fresh, organic produce, plants and dried goods provided a welcoming space to showcase our sector, the farmers, connect with consumers, engage with suppliers, and network with fellow humans who share our vision for a healthier and more sustainable food system.

The story started long before the exhibition doors opened. In the days leading up to the event, our PGS farmers including Abitz Farming, Valota, Botanical Taste, Native Way, Seeds for Life, Tri Toad Nursery, Metro Organics, and Oranjezicht City Farm



harvested a vibrant selection of seasonal produce from their fields.

This was delivered not only to the SAOSO stand, but also to the show's culinary stages, where it became the foundation for a series of inspiring live demonstrations and masterclasses by celebrity chefs. This demonstrated what is possible when exceptional chefs are paired with exceptional produce, celebrating the journey from farm to plate, connecting visitors with the farmers, flavours and stories behind certified organic food.

The Good Life Show was an incredible opportunity to showcase our strong organic movement, one harvest, one conversation and one delicious dish at a time.

GRADUATION DAY FOR OUR AGROECOLOGY AND ORGANIC AGRICULTURE LEADERSHIP COURSE CHANGEMAKERS!

At The Good Life Show on the 29th of May, IFOAM – Organics International and SAOSO celebrated the graduation of 19 leaders who successfully completed the Agroecology and Organic Agriculture Leadership Course (AOLC).

The nine month hybrid journey consisted of two face-to-face sessions held in Cape Town with virtual webinars in between. This training is part of IFOAM – Organics International's Agroecology Promotion

Programme that is facilitated in partnership with SAOSO, and supported by the Swiss Development & Cooperation. The programme is designed to equip emerging leaders with the tools, mindset, and networks to drive real change in our food systems.

From systems-thinking workshops and entrepreneurship



sessions to policy discussions, an urban organic farm visit, and a local market experience – this new generation of agroecological leaders has stepped up to help catalyse an organic, equitable, and food-sovereign future.

"The AOLC had a significant impact on my personal life by making me more conscious of how my daily actions affect the environment," says graduate Refilwe Makgopela.

"It encouraged me to critically evaluate practices and

habits that I previously took for granted, ensuring that my choices contribute to the protection rather than the degradation of natural ecosystems. The course also strengthened my appreciation of the vital link between environmental conservation,

technological advancement, and long-term food security. As a result, I am now more intentional about living and working in ways that support a sustainable future for both present and future generation."



SPOTLIGHT ON FERTILISER SHORTAGES

By Jenny Slabber, Talborne Organics

Who could have imagined that distant wars in Russia, Ukraine, the Middle East, and US to China politics would affect farming in Southern Africa? On TV and social media, we can see horrific scenes of explosions, bombing and destruction of cities and infrastructure, oil wells, petroleum processing plants, and the blocking of the supply chains of oil, energy and fertiliser inputs for industrial commercial farms locally.

- Shipping routes through the Strait of Hormuz are under pressure or closed, impacting the movement of key raw materials, oil and fertilisers globally
- Global shipping lead times are increasing as vessels are rerouted to avoid conflict zones
- Sulphur supply, much of which is sourced from Saudi Arabia into South Africa, is not available
- Nitrogen-based fertilisers (particularly Urea & Monoammonium Phosphate (MAP) are increasingly constrained due to global supply limitations
- China's fertiliser export restrictions are reducing global availability, with indications

that this may continue through to August 2026

- Fuel prices are expected to increase, impacting logistics and distribution costs

At the same time, many industrial chemical fertiliser suppliers in Southern Africa have begun temporarily closing their order books due to uncertainty around supply and pricing. Grain, crop, and pasture farmers that rely heavily on these imported inputs are facing serious threats to their farming businesses due to steep price escalations in fuel, energy, and chemical inputs.

But the biggest risk is that Africa remains at the back of the queue in global supply, with larger markets such as the US, China, India, and Brazil prioritised.

Don't panic — this is also a turning point

While these developments present real challenges, they also create a critical opportunity for conventional farmers to rethink their dependency on imported, petrochemical-based inputs and transition toward more resilient, locally supported farming systems. Now may be the best time to change.

Organic agroecological practices are not new ideas

— they are grounded in generations of understanding that soil health and fertility remain the foundation of successful, resilient and profitable farming systems.

For many farmers, the conventional approach has long relied on ploughing, repeated applications of synthetic fertilisers, herbicides, and routine spray programmes — often resulting in dependency on "rescue chemistry." This moment calls for a shift toward systems thinking — working with nature rather than against it.

The background on commercial chemical fertilisers use in SA

Grain SA statistics from 2019 to 2023 show that nitrogen (N) fertilisers dominate South Africa's imports, accounting for 56% of total value and 64% of volume. Farmers rely on a range of nitrogen sources and much of this supply is imported, primarily from the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Oman), Russia, and China — although Chinese exports are now restricted — highlighting the sector's heavy dependence on global supply chains.

Local production capacity has declined significantly, with companies largely acting as importers or blenders rather than primary manufacturers. Disruptions to key inputs, such as acids for phosphate production, have further stalled local production.

Challenging the status quo

There is a persistent myth that agroecological farming methods are only suited to small-scale or subsistence farmers. In reality, across Southern Africa and globally, leading farmers are already making this shift – with operations ranging from 40 to 1,500 hectares successfully implementing organic and regenerative systems.

Rather than focusing solely on short-term yield maximisation, these farms prioritise:

- Long-term soil health
- Biodiversity
- Ecological balance
- System resilience

Panic or seize the opportunity?

The current crisis is forcing a shift away from industrial farming systems developed during the post-World War II “Green Revolution,” which relied heavily on petrochemical inputs. While these systems increased yields, they also led to long-term soil degradation, pollution, and dependency – what some now refer to as the “Brown Revolution.”

The renewed focus on regenerative, organic, and agroecological methods reflects a growing understanding: working with natural ecosystems to build living, fertile soils is essential for producing resilient, nutrient-dense crops and ensuring a sustainable future.

How to transition: practical steps for farmers

- 1. Start with Knowledge and Planning**
Research agroecological principles and engage with credible resources, study groups, and experienced farmers. Adopt a “can-do” mindset – a key success factor in transition.
- 2. Understand Market Opportunities**
Demand is growing for organic products locally and globally. Value-adding and processing can improve profitability and income stability.
- 3. Plan Your Farming System Carefully**
Consider climate and soil suitability, water availability and quality, infrastructure and labour, market access and pricing.
- 4. Soil First: Measure, Analyse, Improve**
Soil and water testing are essential to guide fertility programmes and address constraints such as salinity or nutrient imbalances.
- 5. Understand Certification Requirements**
Organic certification may require a 3–5 year conversion period. Early engagement with certification bodies is critical.
- 6. Select Inputs Carefully**
Use approved, verified inputs and avoid misleading or unproven product claims.

Do the basics right

Building a resilient farming system starts with protecting the soil’s living ecosystem by minimising disturbance, maintaining soil cover, and supporting beneficial microbial life. At the same time, farmers need to balance soil chemistry by correcting nutrient imbalances through soil, leaf, and sap analysis, and applying natural

minerals and organic inputs where needed. Improving soil structure is equally critical – this involves building organic matter, enhancing water retention and infiltration, and reducing compaction and excessive tillage to create a healthy, well-functioning soil environment.

Solutions: building resilience in a changing world

Farmers can take practical steps to reduce risk and improve sustainability by making better use of on-farm resources such as compost, manure, and cover crops, while planning thoroughly ahead of each season in terms of markets, finances, and inputs. Supporting local South African suppliers helps strengthen the domestic agro-industry, while reducing reliance on imported inputs and long, vulnerable supply chains. Diversifying production and income streams further builds resilience, and when exploring new ventures, starting small allows farmers to learn and adapt without taking on unnecessary risk.

The bottom line

This “perfect storm” of fertiliser shortages, rising fuel costs, and global instability is not just a crisis – it is a turning point. Farmers who remain dependent on imported, petrochemical-based inputs face increasing uncertainty and risk. Those who invest in soil health, local inputs, and agroecological systems are building resilience, reducing dependency, and positioning themselves for long-term success.

Don’t panic – adapt. Now is the time to grow organic.



CAPE OF STORMS – IMPACT ON OUR PGS FARMERS



can make all the difference.”
– Angelo Marman, Abitz Farming.

The recent storms have highlighted both the vulnerability and the remarkable resilience of our PGS farming community.

While many farmers were faced with the difficult task of rebuilding damaged infrastructure and recovering lost crops, their determination to continue producing healthy, locally grown food remains inspiring.

Severe weather conditions lashed the Western Province in mid-May 2026. According to the provincial Minister of Agriculture, Economic Development and Tourism Dr Ivan Meyer, the storm caused “billions of rands” in damage to the province’s agriculture sector.

“The wind caused devastating damage to one of our tunnels, and replacing it will cost around R200,000 which is an enormous expense for a small-scale farmer. We are determined to keep going. Support during times like these



PGS WORKING GROUP UPDATE

A new PGS Working Group has been established to strengthen local certification systems and improve coordination across the organic sector. Bringing together farmers and stakeholders, the group will support participation, governance, and on-the-ground implementation, while also contributing to the development of a provincial PGS structure.

Interim leadership is in place, and Maxabandile Mlauli has been appointed as PGS Administrator and Coordinator, supporting national coordination of PGS

groups, communication, and system development.

Work is also underway to expand PGS nationally through a funding proposal focused on farmer support, training, and system strengthening. Alongside this, a new storytelling programme will train youth journalists and share real farmer stories to build awareness and trust in PGS.

For more information or to get involved, contact maxabandile@saoso.org



GROWING THE NEXT GENERATION OF STORYTELLERS

The people who grow our food are often the least visible part of the food system. Yet their stories, knowledge and experiences are essential to building greater awareness, trust

their cellphones as powerful storytelling tools.

The programme continued to visit PGS farms, markets and events such as the Good Life Show to

capture and share the people, practices and produce that make up our growing organic movement. By investing in storytelling, we are investing in visibility, connection and recognition for the farmers who nourish our communities every day.

"This training has been incredibly meaningful to me as a creator in the farming world," says MOJO journalist Sumaiyah Zalgoanker.

"For a long time, I've witnessed inspiring people doing incredible work in the regenerative organic space, but I've never had the skills to share those stories in the way they deserve to be told. This training gave me both the technical knowledge and the creative confidence to capture these experiences in a way that is engaging. It has reignited my passion for storytelling and I'm so grateful for the opportunity."

"One of the most valuable parts of the SAOSO MOJO training has been learning how to tell stories with greater confidence and intention, from interviewing and filming to editing and capturing the small moments that bring a story to life," says MOJO Journalist Hannah Hopper. "I've also loved getting to know the other participants and being inspired by the incredible work they're

and appreciation for organic agroecological farming. By giving farmers a voice and helping tell their stories, we can raise the profile of the people behind our food and strengthen the connection between producers and consumers.

This is why SAOSO partnered with Mycelium Media Colab and the Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Southern Africa to launch the PGS Storytelling Programme in March 2026.

The programme equips a new generation of storytellers with the skills to document and share the stories emerging from South Africa's organic food systems. Seven passionate participants from the Western Cape recently completed the hands-on Mobile Journalism (MOJO) training course, learning how to use



doing in Cape Town. In a world where social media is often filled with negativity, creating space for young people to tell stories of regeneration, sustainability and hope feels more important than ever."

"The training was truly eye-opening and equipped me with valuable new skills," says MOJO Journalist, Lucky Mncedi. "It showed me that, with even the simplest equipment, we can create meaningful stories that educate, inspire and benefit our communities. As someone who loves content creation and storytelling, this experience opened my eyes to new opportunities. I'm grateful to have been part of the training, and I look forward to using what I've learned to grow both personally and professionally."

You can see some of their content here: <https://www.facebook.com/share/r/1BGZoyrsRiS/>



Each month, we'll be putting a spotlight on the PGS network in a different province – sharing updates, farmer stories, and what's happening on the ground. We're starting in the Eastern Cape, where strong community-led initiatives are helping to grow and strengthen participatory organic systems from the ground up.

Agroecology Awareness Day at Phawu Agri Park in Willowvale

In February, SAOSO was proud to stand alongside farmers, researchers, traditional leaders and government at an Agroecology Awareness & Exhibition Day at Phawu AgriPark in Willowvale. The theme was: "Building resilient food systems through agroecology".

Hosted by the Agricultural Research Council and co-funded and co-organised by SAOSO, Food & Trees for Africa, Green Riverbend Programmes, Seriti Institute, the Agroecology Action Collective and others, the event saw over 300 farmers bussed in from rural districts across the province. It was a significant moment of radical collaboration for the Eastern Cape, united around a shared vision:

- Sustainable agricultural practices
- Strengthened food security
- Climate resilience
- Food sovereignty



SAOSO's newly elected Chairperson, Bakhusele Mathupha, hosted the day at his emerging AgriHub and called for unity across a historically fragmented sector. The message was clear: Agroecology connects us. With the presence of traditional leaders and the national Department of Agriculture, this gathering signaled that after decades of advocacy for policy reform, the shift toward agroecology is no longer theoretical – it is happening.

This event was a massive success and stands as an example of what is possible when we focus on collaboration over competition.

Read more: <https://mg.co.za/thought-leader/opinion/2026-03-07-agroecology-awareness-day-draws-strong-turnout-strengthening-the-future-of-food-systems-in-the-eastern-cape/>



Status of PGS in the Eastern Cape

The Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) network in the Eastern Cape is entering a renewed and hopeful phase of growth. Across the province,



PGS groups are currently being reactivated and rejuvenated, with fresh plans, renewed energy, and practical activities set to unfold in the coming quarter. This process reflects more than organisation; it signals a shared commitment to strengthen agroecology, restore local food systems, and deepen farmer participation in organic certification built on trust, transparency, and community responsibility.



A clear example of this momentum was seen at the Umzimvubu Agricultural Show, held in Mount Frere on 8th and 9th of April 2026. KwaBhaca PGS and agroecology farmers proudly participated by displaying their products at their stall and engaging the public on organic farming, agroecological practices, and the role of PGS in supporting credible local production. They also explained how farmers can become part of the South African

Organic Sector Organisation, helping to widen awareness and open pathways for inclusion, learning, and market access.

The Umzimvubu Agricultural Show remains an important annual platform hosted by Umzimvubu Local Economic Development (LED), bringing together farmers, organisations, community development actors, government institutions, school children, and consumers. For the PGS movement, such spaces are vital because they connect farmers with communities, build confidence in agroecological production, and demonstrate that local food systems can be both participatory and transformative.



From the 19th to the 23rd of May, 20 young farmers gathered at Mount Carmel Youth Training and Conference Centre in Aliwal North for a life-shaping training led by SAOSO Chairperson Bakhusele Mathupha and PGS Administrator and Coordinator Maxabandile Mlauli. What began as a workshop on agroecology, organic farming, PGS, and SAOSO quickly became something deeper: an invitation to see farming not only as a practice, but as a calling.

With his characteristic charisma, warmth, and inspiring energy, Mathupha guided the young participants through the vision of agroecology as a way of

life rooted in respect for nature, community, and the wisdom of the soil. He encouraged them to become active stewards in their own communities, to defend the integrity of organic farming, and to understand that food systems can be rebuilt from the ground up when people work together with purpose and discipline.

Mlauli added another powerful layer to the training by urging the young farmers to see themselves not only as producers, but also as entrepreneurs. He reminded them that the future of farming belongs to those who can combine passion with enterprise, and that small farms can grow into sustainable businesses capable of unlocking future funding opportunities, creating livelihoods, and contributing to local economies. In this way, the message was clear: agroecology is both a moral commitment and an economic pathway.

Although the Eastern Cape PGS network is still in a rebuilding phase, the signs are encouraging. The renewed participation, the growing interest in agroecology, and the intention to establish new PGS groups across the province all point toward a stronger future. What is emerging is a network that is not only recovering, but repositioning itself to serve farmers and communities with greater unity, visibility, and purpose. The road ahead is one of collaboration, learning, and steady expansion – and the Eastern Cape PGS movement is moving forward with confidence and hope.



Rolling towards dignity: Water Rollers transform daily life in Great Kei



Communities in the Great Kei Local Municipality are experiencing a practical and empowering solution to one of their daily challenges – accessing water. Through a partnership between Green Riverbend Programmes and Water Rollers Africa, a pilot project has been launched to support households in two villages with innovative water rollers.

The initiative targets 50 households, with a strong focus on women and children, who traditionally carry the responsibility of fetching water over long distances. This task is often physically demanding, time-consuming, and limits opportunities for education, income generation, and rest.

The introduction of water rollers marks a significant shift. Unlike conventional methods of carrying heavy containers on the head or by hand, the rollers allow users to push up to 70 litres of water easily along the ground, reducing strain on the

body and increasing the volume of water that can be transported in a single trip.

The pilot programme is not only about distribution—it is also about learning. Over the coming months, the study will assess how the water rollers are improving everyday life. Early observations suggest that they are already:

- Reducing physical strain and fatigue
- Saving time spent on water collection
- Improving access to sufficient water for household needs
- Enabling children to focus more on school activities

Scenes from the handover reflect both community engagement and curiosity, as beneficiaries begin to adopt the technology. The simplicity of the rollers, combined with their impact, highlights how small innovations can bring about meaningful change.



This collaboration underscores the importance of partnerships in addressing local development challenges. By working together, Green Riverbend Programmes and Water Rollers Africa are not only delivering tools—but also contributing to dignity, wellbeing, and opportunity for rural households.

As the pilot progresses, the findings will help inform opportunities to expand the programme and reach more communities in need.





From ISAN to Mizizi Magazine!

The relaunched Mizizi Magazine is a mobile-first, web-based publication covering Africa's organic and agroecological food and farming systems. Stories can be read online or download the mobile version in PDF form to read at leisure.

Read it here → mizizimag.africa/read

Subscribe here: airtable.com/appVvmkVfp8z0tpdT/pagcY39jPpvyikQ4W/form

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

Here's how!

You have the power to make a difference! Start by asking your local retailers where their food comes from—and encourage them to stock certified organic products.

Get to know your local PGS group: visit farms, connect with the farmers, learn about their practices, and see where their produce ends up. Use the [PGS Map](#) to find a group and a retailer near you.

Want to support SAOSO? Become a member or make a donation to help grow the organic movement in South Africa. Every action matters!



Become a member!



Donate today!



Future Newsletters: We'd love to hear from you! Got news to share or a topic you'd like us to cover in the newsletter? Send us an email at info@saoso.org.

**The Principle
Of Health.**

**The Principle
Of Ecology.**

**The Principle
Of Fairness.**

**The Principle
Of Care.**