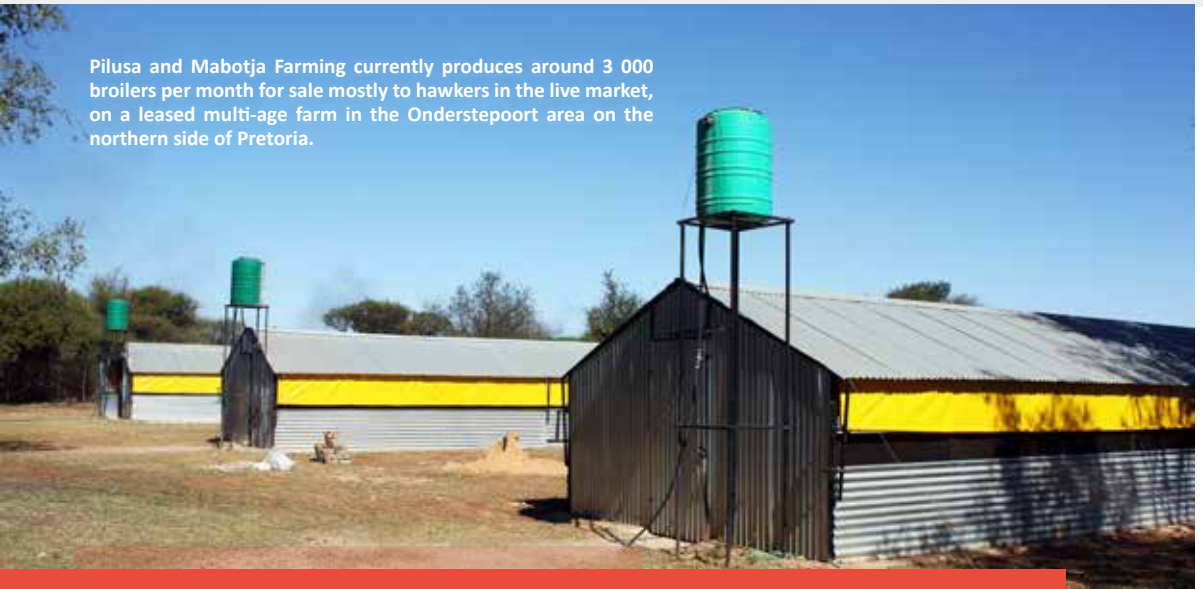


Pilusa and Mabotja Farming currently produces around 3 000 broilers per month for sale mostly to hawkers in the live market, on a leased multi-age farm in the Onderstepoort area on the northern side of Pretoria.



Young achiever walks alongside others to grow industry and individuals

Gilla Brunt

In 2015, Clement Pilusa (then 26) walked away with the title of SAB Kickstart and an accompanying grant fund of R500 000 for the development of his business, Pilusa and Mabotja Farming. This amount was in addition to the R170 000 seed capital received at the start of the year. However, what is so special about Clement is not only the fact that he is an achiever, but that he is intent on helping others learn and grow with him, so that they can also become achievers in their own right.

The SAB Kickstart competition is a youth entrepreneurship competition sponsored by South African Breweries that has been running for the past two decades. At the beginning of the year, 18 finalists were selected and included in a year-long programme of business mentorship and support,

which included a business growth strategy designed to suit their particular business, individualised mentorship and of course grant funding to use to develop their business over the course of the year. Throughout the year, the candidates' progress was assessed by an independent panel of business specialists and the top five were awarded grant money, as well as an additional six-month support programme to help them apply their prize money for the effective further development of their business.

Job creation is an important aspect of the SAB Kickstart competition and, together, the 18 finalists for 2015 created more than 100 full- and part-time jobs throughout the year.

According to Octavius Phukubye, economic development manager of SAB: "The key objective of SAB KickStart and its model of business development support is to ensure that the start-up businesses thrive rather than merely survive. This support creates an enabling environment in which young entrepreneurs are able to assist others in becoming economically active.

"Clement was an all-rounder whose progress as an

entrepreneur and that of his business impressed the judging panel on every level. He is a true agri-preneur who has shown an incredible amount of personal grit, a strong understanding of the technical aspects of his business and his business is set for positive future growth.”

Clement says that while the funding he received through this competition was obviously a big help, the mentorship in particular helped him shift his focus in the business and make better decisions about what to invest in.

Turning dreams to reality

When Clement started farming as a formal business in 2012, he was a final-year agricultural science student at the Tshwane University of Technology. Today, he has a multi-aged broiler farm with four houses on a rented smallholding in the Onderstepoort area outside of Pretoria with a total capacity of 6 000 chickens, of which he sells around 3 000 every month. The four houses currently in use house 1 500 chickens per cycle, while a fifth house with a capacity of 2 500 is almost ready for placement. This expansion in capacity is aimed at meeting the current demand for his chickens, which is already more than he can currently supply.

Clement says he actually leased his first plot of land even before he finished school. Here he planted vegetables and later added a chicken shelter.

“I was driven to start farming for myself because jobs are so scarce in this country,” he says. “I saw how everyone around me was always on the lookout for jobs and I decided to follow another route.”

He says he prefers poultry farming to vegetables, primarily because he saw the opportunities in this sector. “The fact that we are importing chickens tells me that there is a high demand for poultry,” he says.



Clement Pilusa feels that he is living the dream, earning a living from farming – something that he has wanted to do almost all his life. He has generated much needed expansion capital for his business by entering entrepreneurship competitions and winning them, and making good use of the mentorship and advice received in these competitions and from his suppliers.



In addition to his regular employees, Clement takes on final-year agricultural science students from the Tshwane University of Technology, Unisa and the University of Pretoria who have to complete the practical component of their training to work in the poultry houses. To make the most of this experience, he also arranges regular training workshops for his staff and the students by suppliers and other industry specialists. This group of students and staff were photographed just after a half-day brooding workshop presented by Marcos Grassini from Alfa Chicks (far right).

“This farm is my work and the way I earn my living. That is why I am deeply connected with each chicken. It pains me when one is sick or dies,” says Clement.

Marcos Grassini of Alfa Chicks, where Clement gets his day-old broiler chicks, remembers that when he first met Clement, before he moved his farming business to his current site, things did not go as well as now. “When we first met this guy didn’t seem to know what he was doing,” he says.

“However, what has always impressed me about Clement is that he asks for advice all the time, and then he listens carefully to what you say and implements it into his business. Every time you visit his farm, things look better than before – and it shows in his results.”

This same desire for development spurs Clement to enter the competitions for young entrepreneurs, particularly those that include a mentorship component in addition to prize money. This, he says, is a good way to learn how to grow your business and the money you win makes for good expansion capital.

Clement’s clients include mainly resellers (hawkers) for the live market, a few butcheries and direct customers who collect live chickens from the farm or prefer them slaughtered for a slightly higher price. He describes his biggest challenge as getting into the formal market, where one has a set take-off agreement to rely on, as opposed to the informal market where there is far more uncertainty. One of the problems with this is that the price per kilogramme offered by abattoirs is below his cost of production, which makes this an impractical off-take agreement to pursue.

He does not let this hold him back though, working hard to strengthen his informal market and offering incentives to his current customers to formalise their business relationship with set off-take agreements, for example through discount pricing.

He is also keen on opening retail outlets for live chickens in nearby areas, such as Soshanguve and Hammanskraal, preferably in busy areas such as near train stations, bus stops and taxi ranks. However, he is very careful not to impose on the retail markets of his existing clients, instead looking at areas currently not covered by his customers.

Bringing others into the fold

Those who work for him, say that he is more of a leader than a boss. He treats his staff as though they are working with him, rather than for him. He consults his team members on every decision, discussing the pros and cons in detail and then takes their input into consideration when making a decision. Both his employees and his family describe him as hardworking and persistent.

Clement believes that anyone can start anything that they believe in, but it is only dedication and hard work that pay off. “Persistence and patience lead to success,” he says.

He also believes that it is important to attract the youth into farming and encourage them to create employment for others. “They must not do it for the sake of money, they must have passion and work hard and the rest will follow,” he says.

This is one of the aspects that sets Clement apart from other entrepreneurs and small-scale poultry farmers: he views job creation as one of the primary objectives of his business and is already putting this into practice. For each of his houses, Clement employs one full time worker and an agricultural student completing his/her practical component of training in agricultural science. These students come from the University of Pretoria, the Tshwane University of Technology and Unisa, as per an arrangement that Clement set up with these institutions.

He also goes to a lot of trouble to ensure that the students not only learn through the day-to-day work on the farm, but through many practical workshops on all aspects of poultry production arranged with and presented by his suppliers and other people in the poultry sector willing to spend a few hours on training from time to time.

Marcos Grassini of Alfa Chicks is one of these suppliers who present regular training sessions at Clement’s farm, because he believes that investing in the success of your customers is the best way of growing your business. “When Clement first started buying day-old chicks from us, he took fewer than 500 per cycle, which was around every six weeks or so. Now he takes 1 500 chicks every week and he is still expanding.

As for Clement: “I am living the dream, because farming is the only thing I ever dreamt of doing in life.” ●