

MAIN PICTURE: Solomon grows soya beans and maize on his flourishing, rented piece of land.

Planting a seed of success

This small-town man's heart-warming story proves that through hard work and sheer determination dreams can become reality



ENTREPRENEUR, mentor, father of four – and award-winning farmer, Solomon Masango's life story is simply inspirational.

The 46-year-old, who farms in Carolina, Mpumalanga, overcame the odds to live his dream. Today he farms with a combination of cattle and field crops (he produces maize and soya beans in a rotation system). Solomon was raised by a single mom. After completing Grade 7, he left school, because money was scarce. He worked as a gardener and did other odd jobs. But he eventually saved enough to finish high school and started studying accounting through UNISA with the help of a man for whom he did gardening.

His dreams were dashed in his second year when his supporter could no longer afford to help him. Solomon then went on to work in the mining industry as a truck driver in 1994, where he was bold enough to ask his bosses if they'd pay for his studies in mining.

Solomon, who studied blasting engineering, was soon promoted to supervisor and started saving to achieve his dream of becoming a farmer. His biggest challenge was access to land – but he overcame this by leasing a plot to grow his crops. He now leases land from the government on a 30-year contract – since January this year. With little experience, he took to the task, using his savings for his initial efforts. He later joined the AFGRI Harvest



ABOVE and RIGHT: Solomon Masango and his son, Thieo Masango (15) on his farm in Carolina.



Time training and development programme, which could help grow his skills. They also helped with hire purchase funding, which allowed him to purchase what he needed and pay later. It wasn't long before Grain SA offered to help with training. This stood him in good stead as he later became the 2015 winner of the Grain SA/ABSA/John Deere Financial New Era Commercial Farmer of the Year award.

"I told myself it's not impossible," he says. "I entered the competition and they were so impressed with the way I ran my farm that I won."

He also won a tractor, which helped him to increase yields, and he uses it to help mentor 32 emerging farmers in conjunction with Grain SA. "As a black farmer I don't want to grow alone," he says. "I want everybody to grow and

create jobs with farming."

He employs six people – two of whom are pensioners with a passion for farming – and together they work to keep the dream alive.

Solomon learnt a great deal throughout his journey – the first year was the most difficult. In 2011, a drought taught him things could get tricky, but he learnt to ask questions from those who had more experience. He often visited nearby white farmers for guidance and they were happy to help.

Solomon now sells his crops through the JSE as well as some produce locally.

Next up? He wants to own his own land – a dream no longer impossible for this go-getter. Check out the video and learn more about Solomon's journey on Drum.co.za.