

Food For Mzansi, saluting the unsung heroes of SA agriculture

 By [Robin Fredericks](#)

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Launched as a digital platform in November 2018, Food For Mzansi is on a mission to change the narrative of South Africa's agriculture industry. Co-founded by Ivor Price and Kobus Louwrens, Food For Mzansi share's success stories and good news from the farms and agribusinesses who feed the nation, stimulating positive change in a divided country.



Image via [Food For Mzansi](#) - Ivor Price and Kobus Louwrens

We caught up with Louwrens to find out more...

■ **What is Food For Mzansi's story – How, when and why did it all start?**

It started with a TV show that co-founder Ivor Price presented, which took him to meet more than 50 farmers on their farms all over South Africa. As a city boy from the Cape Flats, Ivor was struck by how different his experience was to what he had been led to expect by his upbringing and by the media he consumed. Farmers are ageing white men in two-tone khaki, with a tendency to bigotry and violence, right? The farmers he got to know showed him that this stereotype is far from valid.

Ivor and I met as journalists at a daily newspaper 20 years ago and have been good friends ever since. He moved through reporting and media management and ended up in broadcasting, while I followed a similar path to online marketing.

When we discussed his newly gained insights we realised how far apart our perceptions of farming is. As an Afrikaans person, I feel connected to agriculture in a weird way, even though I am as 'town' as can come. We realised that most South Africans don't share this connection, with many people feeling pushed out or ostracised and linking these feelings directly with agriculture.

“ Our mission as a social enterprise is to salute the unsung heroes of agriculture. We tell the stories of the farmers and agripreneurs who have been unrepresented until now, because their successes are considered to be below the bar for mainstream agrimedia as well as news media. ”

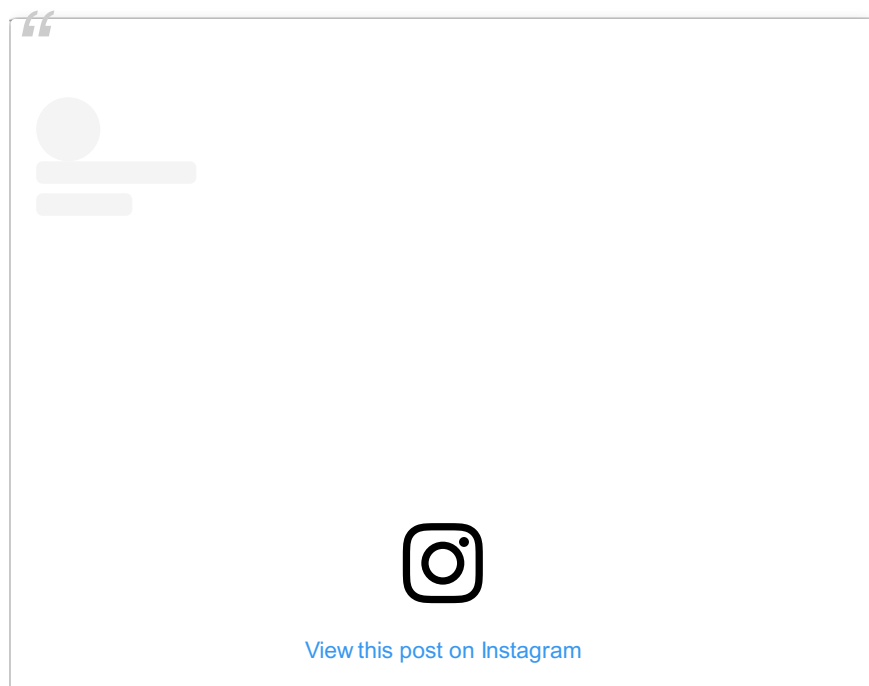
Our impulse was to change this, and that is where the idea for an agri lifestyle, and news platform that speaks to the ordinary South African was born. We figured that, since agriculture is an essential sector for our survival that ironically also cuts down to the main divisions in our society, this could be a place to start building social cohesion.

We were fortunate to find supporters in the agriculture sector, like the VKB Group, who bought into the vision of using agriculture to fight our stereotypes of one another and remind South Africans of where their food comes from.

We started with the insight that farmers don't look and act like the stereotypes many of us have. But we've discovered a diversity of people and opportunities in the sector that continues to amaze us. We've met farmers of all ages, from 19 to 90 years of age. There are women who farm in high heels and make-up and black men in khaki hats and vellies. We've met the Muslim woman whose family farming business provides eggs to many Shoprites in the Western Cape, and a young Hindu woman who is an aspiring farmer in KwaZulu-Natal. Also, people who farm with anything from fly larvae and snails to exotic mushrooms and tilapia fish.

📌 **What is your mission?**

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This gogo is helping other gogos in her area, and she's providing relief for those affected by the Aids epidemic. Tap the link in our bio to read more.

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A post shared by [Food For Mzansi](#) (@foodformzansi) on Oct 19, 2019 at 9:01am PDT

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we are also sharing the inspiring stories of farmers and agribusinesses who go out of their way to help others, in many cases taking responsibility for the upkeep of rural infrastructure and building schools and hospices where local authorities have failed.

■ **What has been the most valuable lesson you've learnt on your start-up journey?**

We spotted a gap in the media market that none of the established players saw or took seriously, because they were used to looking at the industry in an established way. Our naiveté regarding farming and the agri industry combined with deep media experience turned out to be a winning combination.

■ **What has been your proudest achievement so far?**

Two of our favourite moments were definitely being awarded Best News Start-up in Africa by WAN-Ifra less than a year since we started, and then being invited to share our story at the Digital Media Asia conference in Hong Kong recently.



Image via [Food For Mzansi](#)

But I think we are proudest of the fact that we are able to build a media business with such an important social mission, and

getting feedback daily from people who have gained new perspectives, or who feel represented in media coverage for the first time.

■ ***What are some of the challenges you have faced – how have you overcome them?***

We're every bit the scrappy start-up. Budgets are tight and the mission is huge and nation-wide! Part of what helped [Food For Mzansi](#) grow quickly was our partnering with an online marketing firm, YehBaby (which I co-own and Ivor co-founded 10 years ago!) to ensure that each piece of content we create works for us on all social media and online marketing platforms.

We also have a very dedicated team of young journo's who really resonate with the target market, and are superbly multi-skilled.

■ ***Where would you like to see Food for Mzansi in the next five years?***

I'd like Food For Mzansi to be well-entrenched as a mainstay in the agricultural media, that keeps breaking new ground and breaking limits of what the industry thinks is possible or viable.

■ ***What is your ultimate vision?***

We're building a strong, multi-platform brand, run by a team with a real curiosity for our country and continent. With that combination, the sky is the limit and the future sure to be interesting.

■ ***Any advice for start-ups out there?***

Be very focused and sure of the insight you are basing your business on. Be quite ruthless when making decisions to ensure you are not tempted off course by opportunities that are not 100% aligned with the needs of your business or your chosen target market.

Also, be on the lookout for programmes and competitions – even if they don't bring you funding, they help you refine your proposition and clarify your thinking about your strategy.

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