

5 reasons why small farms are key to the future of food systems

One of the planet's greatest challenges is food security; with populations increasing faster than food availability and agricultural land being overtaken by urban sprawl, the predicament is one that deserves urgent attention.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

Whilst large-scale commercial farms are always going to be the backbone of the agricultural sector, there is a growing need for small scale operations to play a bigger role. Pieter Smuts, managing director of Husqvarna South Africa, details five top reasons why he believes this is so.

1. Small scale farms deliver quality over quantity

Two areas illustrate this:

Nutritional value of the produce: It's simply a matter of capacity; small farmers can pay more attention to quality because they're not chasing quantity as a priority. Better quality produce fetches better prices so, if you're a small-scale grower, limited by scale, your attention goes into quality.

Distance from markets: The nutritional value of produce degenerates from the moment it is harvested. The further it travels, the greater the nutrient loss. Large producers generally supply vast geographic regions while small-scale operations supply retailers closer to their farm gate resulting in fresher, healthier produce on the nation's tables.

2. The 'nature' of small

Integrity, accountability and passion are generally synonymous with family-led businesses and almost ALL small-scale farms are family-owned and run. The characteristics of the producer are often reflected in the produce.

3. Soil sustainability

Few are aware of how harmful farming is to soil health. Soil nutrients, drawn up by plants as they grow, are removed permanently when those plants are harvested. Generally, farmers supplement the next crop by feeding it with chemical

fertilisers.

The soil becomes sterile, the water-ways polluted, the supplements more essential, the costs more exorbitant and the end result – the food – less healthy and more expensive!

Large, profit-driven farming operations are trapped on this hamster wheel while small scale farmers because their farms are likely to stay in the family, seem to be leading the charge to restore soil health which will ultimately return us to a more sustainable industry, and future, with more nutritionally complete food at a better price.

4. Innovation in small spaces

Think about a large-scale farm; miles and miles of wide, flat space. Now, consider, as our populations increase, how increasingly expensive those wide-open spaces are going to become as housing becomes a priority.

Then think about a small farm; and how innovative that farmer has already had to be with every inch of his land; he's constantly searching for smarter ways to produce more with less. This pressure is an incubator for innovation that will lead to creative ways to help secure the future of food.

5. Return to health

Generally, as humans, we have forgotten what food is. Instead of seeing it as a functional, quality fuel to power a body and mind into meaningful existence through to old age, it has become a short-term, immediate (and often harmful) satisfier. As private healthcare becomes more unaffordable, the demand for high-quality, locally-grown, sustainable produce will increase.

And, when this movement takes hold, local, small-scale, farmer-owned operations (because they are more easily accessible to the public) are the most likely source of this type of food.

Smuts says that in addition to being the best hope for increasing land productivity and crop diversity to feed an ever-growing world, small-scale farmers create jobs and wealth for their communities, and can contribute to a more stable society.

He adds that as a subsidiary of one of the world's leading manufacturers of forest, park, garden and construction products, Husqvarna is committed to helping South African small-scale farmers to improve their productivity and profitability by offering new, innovative products that align with their unique complexities and requirements.

"At Husqvarna, our own operations are based on the same philosophies of innovation, sustainability, agility and quality and partnering with businesses who share our ethos is key to practising the synergistic principle of $1+1=3$," concludes Smuts.

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