

ANTI-DUMPING DUTIES

SA potato industry 'able to meet demand'

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THE local potato industry has assured South Africans that it would be able to meet local demand for French fries after heavy "anti-dumping" duties were imposed by the International Trade Administration Commission (Itac) in July last year on Belgian, German and Dutch suppliers.

When the duties were announced there was concern that South Africans could face a severe shortage of French fries as it curbed imports from its usual European frozen chips markets.

But Potatoes SA acting marketing manager, Jaco Koekemoer, said the country has a sufficient supply of fresh potatoes, with forecasts looking promising over the next 12 months.

Koekemoer said: "There is ample



POTATOES have not had their chips.

produce to meet frozen chip manufacturing demand, and satisfy customer and retail appetites. What's more, there are 16 potato production regions across South Africa, and a continuous supply of potatoes is delivered to fresh produce markets on a daily basis."

However, Koekemoer said the major challenge facing potato producers was load shedding and it's dis-

ruption of food production, as well as cheap imports.

"There is no potato shortage in SA. Potatoes SA's data show the country produced 2.6 million tons of potatoes annually between 2017 and 2021, with approximately 400 000 tons being processed each year during the same period. On January 10 this year, 420 000 10kg bags were delivered to fresh produce markets across the country ...

"There is ample produce to meet frozen chip manufacturing demand, and satisfy customer and retail appetites," Koekemoer said.

Regarding shortages, Agricultural Business Chamber of South Africa chief economist Wandile Sihlobo agreed that load shedding was having a major effect on potato chip manufactures.

"The actual potatoes supplies are down, but still at comfortable levels and we expect the harvest in the coming months to help replenish the stocks. The major issue is power outages that are disrupting food production," Sihlobo said.

Andricus van der Westhuizen, DA Western Cape spokesperson on agriculture, said: "When Itac introduced the increased import tariffs, they obviously could not have foreseen the impacts caused by load shedding, which worsened in the second half of 2022."

Koekemoer said these import duties were put in place to protect the local industry and in reality, cheap, low-quality potatoes entering the market would ultimately be detrimental to South African producers and the sector as a whole, and could cause a surge in illicit trading activities.