

SAA is future-focused on sustainability as Project Solaris launches

Marble Hall, Limpopo: South African Airways (SAA) along with partners Boeing, SunChem and SkyNRG today launched its massive biofuels project, named after the tobacco plant used, Project Solaris in Marble Hall, Limpopo. The venture sees the first crops for harvest already cultivated in the area with plans to expand successes nationally. The development of locally produced biofuels not only answers the airline's pursuit to seek more environmentally friendly energy solutions but in addition supports SAA's dual socio-commercial mandate both in terms of future commercial savings and social development.

The launch crop comprises fifty hectares of the nicotine-free Solaris tobacco plant with its first harvest planned for later in December. Seed oils are processed into jet fuel. "Beyond a possible lifecycle reduction of up to 50% in carbon emissions when in use," says SAA Acting Chief Executive Officer Nico Bezuidenhout, "an optimised supply chain could reduce overall emissions by up to 75%." Ultimately future cost reduction through biofuel technology could substantially contribute to positive bottom line outcomes." Sustainable environmental responsibility is a key aspect of the Long Term Turnaround Strategy (LTTS).

Social benefits include the potential for small scale agricultural entrepreneurs to ultimately slot into a larger supply chain. "Project Solaris answers several developmental requirements and holds the potential to inject investment into rural economies, the job creation that accompanies it as well as the direct and indirect impact on local markets," says Bezuidenhout. SAA also supports the skills transfer and development aspect of the project. "As the deliberate global move from a dependency on fossil fuels gains momentum, it naturally creates growing opportunities for South Africans in the agri-innovation sector."

SAA plans to fuel a test flight using product from Project Solaris next year. "The yield from the first few crops will be used to power our first domestic flight using locally produced biofuel," says



Bezuidenhout. More than 1600 passenger flights using biofuel have taken off and landed since approval in 2011. “Project Solaris is a landmark project, it *is* innovative and highlights the industry leadership that South Africans should expect from their flag carrier.”

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