

## Hot on the heels of success

Tshilidze “Chilli” Matshidzula is a remarkable young dairy producer. Winner of more than one award, he oversees the Little Barnet Trust on the outskirts of Alexandria in the Eastern Cape. On 11 June, [Beautiful News](#) released a short film of a man who started out in the forlorn fields in Little Barnet, turning it into a thriving business. [Watch it here.](#)



Image Source: [AgriOrbit](#) - With less than 50 cows, the future of Little Barnet seemed bleak. However, thanks to the vision and boldness of someone like Tshilidze “Chilli” Matshidzula, today it is a thriving business.

### Faltering land reform project

Previously, Little Barnet’s fields beckoned imaginative minds, and it offered an enticing challenge to an ambitious group of farmers. Chilli was only 19 years old and among 18 members of the Longvale Trust when he was brought in soon after completing his diploma in Animal Science and Production at Tshwane University of Technology. He did his practical learnership on Little Barnet under the guidance of Walter Biggs, who is also his mentor.

Two years into its activity on the farm, the trust was on its way to establishing a respectable dairy operation, with more pastures developed, and cows bought in. However, when the trustee was murdered, an exodus of shareholders followed. Those who remained were left with the conundrum of how to continue.

Chilli, however, stood fast. Having come on board as a share-milker, he found a way to save the project by taking out a loan and purchasing a 40% stake in the trust.

### Risky move pays off

The move was risky and bold, but it paid off. Almost a decade later, Chilli manages and partly owns the successful farm which is basically 100% operational. He manages 12 full-time, and four part-time staff members.

With the help of Walter Biggs, he has played a vital role in building it up from the ground to become a multi-million rand business. Where others shied away from the task of saving a faltering project, he revelled in the challenge and saw potential in the land and in himself. Now he is one of South Africa’s few black farm owners and thriving

### Prestigious awards



Image Source: [AgriOrbit](#) - Chilli's mentor, Walter Biggs with him after being awarded the 2016 Toyota Young Farmer of the Year award at the Agri East Cape Congress last year.

Last year, at the annual Agri East Cape Congress in Port Alfred, Chilli was awarded the prestigious Mangold Trophy. It is presented to the most well-conserved farm in the Bathurst area and is one of two annual prizes awarded by the Bathurst Conservation Committee (BCC). The other is for the most improved farm.

Simon Matthews, chairman of the BCC, described the trophy as the “ultimate prize” and hailed Chilli as a star farmer. “He is a very impressive guy and we salute him on this fine achievement.” Chilli, previously awarded the Most Improved Farm prize, is also the 2016 Toyota Young Farmer of the Year. He has been a prominent member of the Alexandria Dairy Study Group for several years and is a member of Agri Eastern Cape.

As the winner of the award, he held a special Farmers’ Day on Little Barnet with the assistance of the BCC. Proceeds from the day went to supporting an agriculture student through the Jas Clacey Bursary. Originally started by the Department of Agriculture more than 50 years ago, the BCC is comprised of representatives from Farmers’ Associations from the Eastern Border, Bathurst West and the Lower Albany and Bathurst Border. It plays a vital role in helping farmers with planning, legal compliance, and problems of erosion, overgrazing, and weeds.

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