

Trade in BOLETUS MUSHROOMS

Forestry Sub-Sector Studies - Briefing 8 - January 2005



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This series of briefing notes provides summary information on the various parts of the forestry sector. The studies, commissioned by DWAF, focus on the role that each sub-sector can play in promoting poverty eradication. DWAF recognises the importance forests and forestry play in people's livelihoods and aims to create an environment that will increase forestry's impact on local-level development.

Introduction

- The *Boletus edulis* is a small, edible mushroom found in plantation forest.
- It is not a South African mushroom and is originally indigenous to North America, Europe and China. Its presence here is linked to the importation of pine and oak trees.
- These mushrooms are highly sought after in both specialist and traditional cuisine and can be eaten fresh, dried or salted. They are widely collected for domestic and overseas markets.
- The mushroom picking industry is concentrated in the pine plantation regions of Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. There are also mushroom-yielding forests in parts of the Limpopo Province and the Western Cape.
- The *B. edulis* mushroom that grows in South African plantations is extremely valuable in that the specimens are unharmed by a mushroom worm that is endemic to forests in other parts of the world.
- The wild mushroom industry in South Africa presently has a gross annual turnover of between R17 and R25 million.
- The industry employs about 200 permanent staff, and over 1000 on a seasonal basis. About half of permanent staff employed by the industry are women, and almost all seasonal, or casual, workers are women.
- The value of the gross annual turnover within

the *B. edulis* industry indicates that this sector has potential for further expansion and growth. It is also clear that there are a number of forests throughout the country where wild mushroom harvesting is not presently taking place.

Competitive Dynamics and Constraints

- There are two companies that dominate the wild mushroom industry in South Africa, namely Boletus Mushrooms and the Edulis Group.
- This domination makes it difficult for smaller operators to gain access to wild mushroom sites and markets.
- The dominant companies have well established supply-chain networks within South Africa, effectively making entry into the industry difficult for any smaller interests.

A perfect specimen of *B. edulis*



- Despite the potential for growth, there are particular challenges facing mushroom operators that need to be taken into consideration:
 - A pine forest needs to be about seven years old before the forest mushrooms begin to make an appearance.
 - If there are spores in the roots of a given forest, it takes another five years for the spread to increase to any significant amount.
 - While there is room for development, the wild mushroom industry is relatively small, and its seasonal character has an impact on the degree to which it can impact on the poor.
 - Concessions need to be allocated for approximately 20 000 ha to produce a significant yield.

Requirements for Creating an Enabling Environment

- Key interventions that are necessary to facilitate growth within this sub-sector are closely tied to the constraints mentioned above. These include:
 - Lobbying to ensure equitable allocation of picking concessions
 - DWAF is playing a significant policy role to ensure that concessions under its current control include meaningful participation by previously disadvantaged communities
 - Identification of forests not presently being harvested
 - Development of the local wild mushroom market
 - Initiation of new enterprises and partnerships.

