

26-year-old production manager leads the way in Checkers' blooming flower business

Tseke Tladi (26) and his team of 27 employees at Freshmark's Flower Co. packhouse in Johannesburg are responsible for ensuring the flower bouquets at Checkers supermarkets exceed customer expectations this Valentine's Day.

After graduating with a BSc degree in Agriculture from the University of Free State in 2020, Tladi, originally from Benoni in the East Rand, joined Freshmark as a trainee manager – an opportunity he credits with launching his career. In 2022, Tladi was promoted to production manager, and now leads a team that supplies flowers to Checkers stores nationwide.

"My training helped me to better understand the value chain and how flowers go from farms to customers. There are many aspects to it, which makes my job exciting. From flower auctions to designing bouquets, production and making sure all our flowers arrive fresh in stores every time," he says.

Established in August 2019, Flower Co. is a department within Freshmark, the Shoprite Group's procurement and distribution arm for fresh fruit, vegetables and flowers.

The department started with 10 employees in a packhouse located at Multiflora – Africa's biggest flower auction – in Johannesburg. This is where all Checkers' fresh flowers and bouquets are packaged and arranged. The packhouse doubled in size almost overnight to 670m², and was expanded again last year to over 1 000m². In 2021, another facility was opened in the Western Cape focusing on fynbos production.

Since the department was established, Checkers' flower sales have grown by over 30% year-on-year. About 95% of the supermarket chain's flowers are now produced at these two facilities, which also supply the Group's stores in Namibia, Botswana and Angola.

The business aims to be ahead of the curve by working with suppliers to grow special varieties exclusively for Checkers, such as lollipop roses, which are perfect for Valentine's Day.

A limited range of bouquets is also available on Checkers Sixty60, so even South Africans abroad can have fresh flowers delivered within 60 minutes to their loved ones at home.

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