

DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION (DSTI) · HERITAGE DAY 2026 · CELEBRATING  
SOUTH AFRICA'S STI HERITAGE

# GROWING BACKWARDS

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*What if innovation starts with what we already grew?*

**Jeanette M. Sutherland**

Founder, AgriLuxe Marketing · Curator, The WILD Initiative™



**What if heritage is not only  
something we preserve?**

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*What if we could also innovate from it?*

## THE PARADOX

**We have the knowledge. We have the crops. We have the stories.**

*But are we creating enough value from them?*

### WHERE WE ARE STRONG

**Research → Knowledge → Crop**

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### WHERE THE GAP LIES

**Consumer → Product → Market →  
Enterprise → Value**

*A disconnect between two systems that need to talk to each other.*

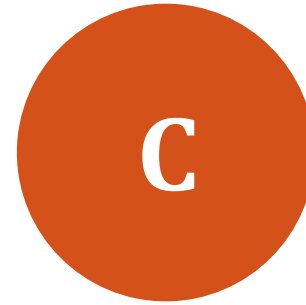
THE BRIDGE DSTI IS ASKING US TO THINK ABOUT



AGRICULTURE



FOOD



CULTURE



SCIENCE &  
INNOVATION



**ECONOMIC VALUE**

*An indigenous crop can simultaneously be an agricultural resource, a food, part of cultural identity, an object of scientific research, a source of innovation, a tourism asset, and the foundation of a business.*

# From “*underutilised*” to “*under-imagined.*”

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Not: how do we produce more of these crops?

**But: how do we create more reasons for people to want them?**

## THIS HAS BEEN DONE BEFORE

### NEW NORDIC CUISINE

A 2004 manifesto led by chefs including René Redzepi deliberately centred indigenous Scandinavian ingredients in fine dining — turning a regional cuisine into a global movement.

### PERU'S GASTRONOMY MOVEMENT

Chef Gastón Acurio and a coordinated push across government, PromPerú, and agriculture repositioned Peruvian food as a national and global asset.

**A necessary caution:** value concentrated in Lima's celebrity kitchens; Andean growers didn't always share equally — a quinoa price spike briefly priced local communities out of their own staple.

## South Africa doesn't need to invent the asset.

Bambara Groundnut

Sorghum

Millet

Cowpea

Amadumbe

Marula ...

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*The Question: Not whether we have indigenous food assets, but whether we have built the systems to research, develop, value, and reach markets with them.*

Knowledge



Research



Innovation



Enterprise



Markets

## THE WILD INITIATIVE — ONE EXAMPLE OF THIS THINKING



Wholesome



Indigenous



Local



Diverse

*A market-activation platform connecting food, agriculture, gastronomy, tourism, trade, culture and enterprise.*

WILD Exchange

WILD Feast

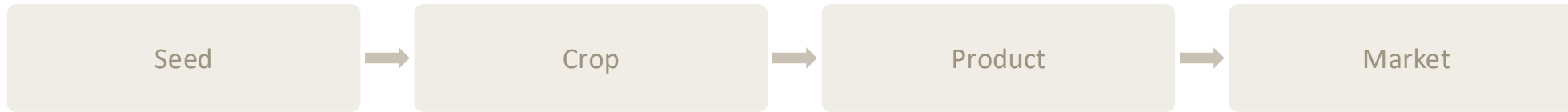
WILD Food Safari

WILD Product Accelerator

*The pillars are different ways of answering the same question: how do we move indigenous food from heritage into contemporary markets, experiences, and value chains?*

## CHANGE THE STARTING POINT. CHANGE THE INNOVATION OUTCOME

### THE FAMILIAR DIRECTION



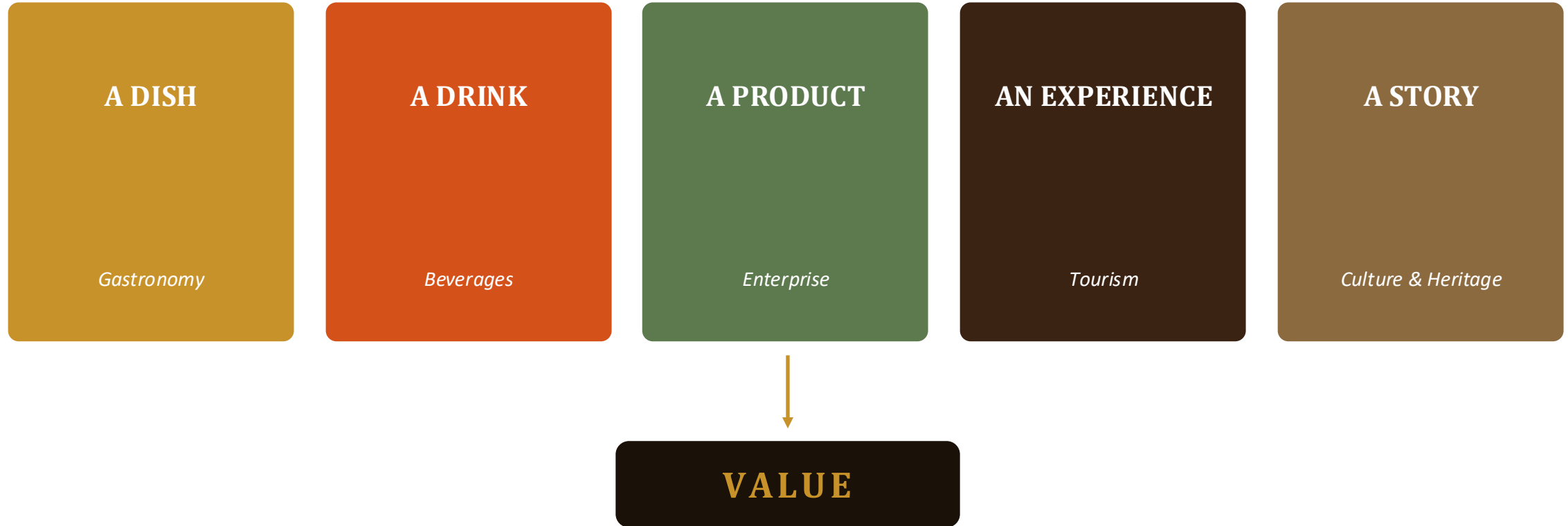
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### WHAT WILD DOES INSTEAD

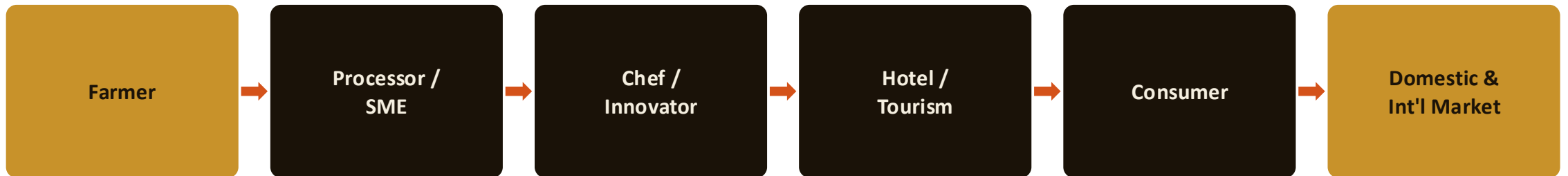


*“Market to seed.” We often ask: we have a crop, so how do we produce and sell it? WILD turns that around — what does the consumer want, what experience can we create, and therefore what crops and production systems do we need?*

A CROP CAN BECOME MUCH MORE THAN A CROP

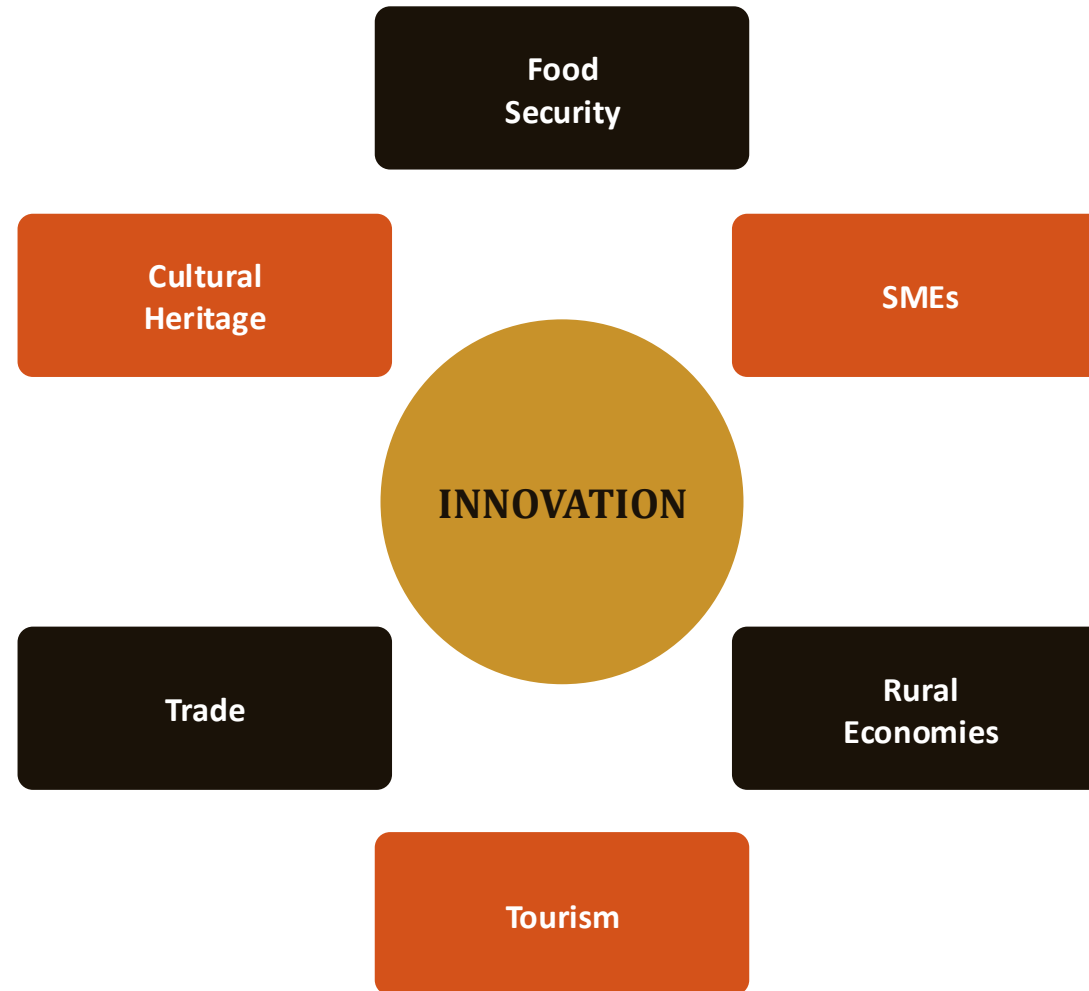


## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE CONNECT THE DOTS?



*The economic opportunity is not necessarily in exporting more raw crops. It may be in capturing more value around them — at every link in this chain.*

ONE ASSET. MULTIPLE DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES.



*The same asset can potentially contribute to several development objectives at once.*

## *Are we celebrating the past — or creating the future from it?*

- What did we inherit?
- What have we preserved?
- **What will we create from it?**

*Perhaps our STI heritage is not only the technologies and achievements we can point to — it is also the knowledge embedded in our communities, landscapes, and food systems, and our ability to reinterpret that for the future.*

# FROM HERITAGE TO POSSIBILITY

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*What will we imagine from what we have inherited?*

A P O E M

# *Feast After Feast*

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*by J.M. Sutherland · inspired by Derek Walcott's "Love After Love"*



# Thank You

*“The table was never empty — only waiting for you to arrive.”*

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