



*The Grain and Oilseed Industry  
of South Africa*

**A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME**

**CHAPTER 8**



# 8 The birth and progress of Farmer Development in the **GRAIN AND OILSEED INDUSTRY**

*I thought, 'Why doesn't someone do something about this?'  
And then I realised I am someone – Author unknown*

Early farmer development initiatives regarding grain and oilseed production had already been implemented by farmer organisations like the National Oil and Protein Seed Producers Organisation (NOPO) and the National Maize Producers Organisation (NAMPO) prior to the forming of Grain SA. Their successes and the clear thirst for knowledge and networking demonstrated by the farmers encouraged Grain SA to take over the baton and build on this positive momentum.

By 2005 the Grain SA Executive had given instruction that the management were to prepare documentation for presentation to the Congress of 2006. It was their wish to entrench the participation and voting rights of developing farmers who were sent to Congress by their regions. Congress wholeheartedly supported this proposal and developing farmers were formally included in the structures of the organisation.

The study groups were then grouped into four regions: North, South, East and West. Each region was asked to nominate a member who would have full voting rights and would represent them on the Executive and other structures in the sector including the Farmer Development Working Group. The spirit of the congress decision was a significant indicator from the commercial farmers of their intention to co-operate with the transformation and land reform programme by contributing to the development of farmers through the transfer of knowledge, skills development and mentorship support wherever it was needed.

The Farmer Development Programme (FDP) of Grain SA has been operating for more than ten years now and the programme currently offers its services to farmers from nine different regional offices. The journey has not been all plain sailing and there have been many challenges and disappointments along the way; but purpose and passion has burned in the hearts of the farmer members and management of Grain SA, as well as the farmer development team which has been expanded considerably over time. Incredible results have followed many years, thousands of kilometres and dogged determination, and have been the continued source of inspiration and motivation to continue growing the Programme.

Furthermore, rain-fed grain farming in South Africa has long been under extreme pressure. For years the value of the grain had not risen in keeping up with the prices of inputs, and it did not reflect the risks involved in this type of farming. In a South African context anyway, there are a number of important reasons why it is still necessary to develop 'empowered black commercial farmers', not the least of which is to have a united voice so that the real issues facing farmers (and therefore national food security) can be addressed. Agriculture has been an important employer and the foundation of many related industries who also contribute in terms of job creation as well as the gross national product. Most significantly in terms of the rural development plan and land transformation agenda of South Africa, 30% of white owned land was to be in the hands of black farmers, implying that 30% of inputs and outputs should also come from this land.

These are all reasons which continue to inspire Grain SA to pursue the FDP's mission statement as it is written today: *To develop capacitated commercial grain farmers*



**Mr Gert Pretorius**



**Mr Nico Vermaak, previous Manager of NOPO.**



**Mr Cois Harman**



and to contribute to household and national food security (optimal use of the natural resources available to each farmer).

In pursuit of this mission fundamental determinants have been laid down as a framework for sustainable development and transformation in the sector.

## NOPO ASSISTS DEVELOPING FARMERS

The early initiative to include developing producers into the NOPO structures was birthed at the February 1997 NOPO Congress. There the gathering of farmers made the decision that they wished to make access to the structure of organised agriculture accessible to all producers regardless of colour.

From the outset the aim was to ensure that emerging farmers were included in both the Executive Committee and the general congress. Membership to NOPO was now available to all developing producers and by 26 March 1997 the additional region 10, which afforded developing farmers a voice and vote, was included in the composition of the executive committee.

There were many interested parties and the organisation was introduced to the emerging farmers by a number of key role-players. NOPO executive member, Mr Naas Bellingan, went out of his way to connect with developing producers in the North West and the team from the Agricultural Research Council, in particular Dr Klaus Pakendorf, Messrs Phonnne du Toit and Johan Els were instrumental in forming the founding committee of region 10.

Another key role-player was Mr Gert Pretorius, Chairperson of NOPO in the Lichtenburg district, who supported the initiative from the outset and took the lead in motivating for the necessary finances for the various NOPO development projects. This took place under the guidance of Mr Nico Vermaak, the then Manager of NOPO. NOPO started with farmer development long before it became a trend in agriculture, as it was the right thing to do. The action was driven by leader farmers in the Executive, to whom it was a passion to serve as mentors.

The project funding was sourced from the OPDT with the support of the Oil Seeds Advisory Committee. The first ever developing farmer representative to the executive committee of NOPO was the well-known farmer from the Rustenburg region, Mr Basie Ntsimane. Ntsimane was supported by nine other farmers who were elected to the region 10 committee namely, Messrs Stephen Mohappaanele, Filie M Gaseetshubelwe, John Loeto (Taung), Joseph Appolus, David Legobate, David Miga, Barney SJ Saudi, Harold Mathekga and BA Kgosiemang.

By October 1997, Mr Cois Harman, a linguist and farmer, had been appointed by NOPO as a farmer development official based in Zeerust. He is credited with doing valuable pioneering work in building linkages with developing grain producers and establishing the first study groups. For the first time it became possible, through these structures, to relate with farmers in the more remote regions of the North West Province, an important sunflower and sorghum producing region of the country.

On 1 December 1997, NOPO officially opened a regional office in Zeerust which was run by the administrative assistant Ms Julia Ramokhua. Recognition must be given to the OPDT which funded the NOPO projects implemented from this office and contributed to the founding of a dynamic process which picked up significant momentum very quickly.

The farmer development activities quickly bore fruit. The reach of the projects expanded and funding was provided for 1998/1999. Information Days were held in co-operation with the ARC in the North West Province, Mpumalanga, the Northern Province and the Free State. In August 1998 a 'Leader Farmer Course' was organised by the NOPO office in Zeerust. This was very popular and the large attendance clearly indicated the farmers' hunger for training.

Communication and networks with the developing producers were established in the form of a Tswana newsletter, NOPO/*Pula*, which was issued every two months. Since radio is always a popular medium of communication easily accessible to many farmers, the decision was made to invest in a regular slot on the regionally based Radio Motsweding called, 'Letsema'.

## MORE SWEET THAN BITTER

JANE MCPHERSON

The stories about our work as part of the Grain SA Developing Agriculture Programme are endless. Every single team member in this programme has a heart-warming story which tells of the impact of their work and the resulting changed lives and livelihoods.

Stories like the old farmer in the Zeerust district who tells how he has seen many farmers who planted sweet sorghum battling the birds eating their crops and how he only plants bitter sorghum, because *"Die bitter is bitter, maar dit is glad nie so bitter soos honger wees nie!"*. Or when one sees the sparkle of satisfaction in the eye of a now fully commercialised farmer in the Senekal district who describes how he has just been able to buy another new farm as a result of his good yields.

Or when another female subsistence farmer in a remote valley of the Eastern Cape tells you that she has improved her yield from 0,5 t/ha to 6 t/ha by using better seed, fertilising accurately and using her knapsack to do chemical weed control and no longer has to worry about what she will feed her children every day.

# PULA

## DIKANCNGOLO TSA TEMOTHUO

Mokgatho wa Balemirui wa Bokone Bophiriritha  
 Postbus 316 Zeerust 2885  
 Call: 083 265 6210  
 Tel / Fax: 01428 - 21596

The masthead of the first NOPO/*Pula* newsletter.

The developing farmers used the formalised network of communication to discuss their issues with market access to commercial markets. Immediate support was given and efforts were made to introduce the developing farmers to buyers and to ensure that they were able to negotiate fair, market-related prices for their produce. NOPO did not broker any of the deals, but rather acted in an advisory capacity. Other networking and communication opportunities for developing farmers presented themselves in time. NOPO met with the Department of Agriculture in North West, Mpumalanga, Free State and the Northern Province. It also conveyed the needs of the farmers to input providers, to inform them of the farmers' unique circumstances and requirements. For example, some seed companies started marketing seed in smaller packaging since the standard size bags were too large and too expensive for smaller farmers.

NOPO also launched a Developing Sunflower and Groundnut Producer of the Year Award. The purpose of this was to give recognition for excellence to developing producers. Criteria taken into account for the recognition was production practices, involvement of the farmer with study groups and support by the farmer to co-producers in the region (see Table 3: Awards made by NOPO in 1999 in Chapter 5). In May 1999 the award was presented at the awards function, to Mr Edmund Tsogang of the Genesa Study Group as Developing Groundnut Producer of the Year. The award for the Developing Sunflower Producer of the Year was presented to Mr Basie Ntsimane, member of the Bafokeng North Study Group.

NOPO extended a sincere hand of friendship to the new oilseed producers. The response to this project was huge and it soon became clear that the needs of developing producers far exceeded available capacity.

When the different grain producer organisations amalgamated to form the new Grain Producers Organisation, the momentum in development was maintained and the NOPO development model was continued there. Mr Basie Ntsimane went from NOPO to Grain SA becoming a member of the Executive of Grain SA.

## EMPOWERING EMERGING DEVELOPING MAIZE FARMERS: NAMPO

In 1994 NAMPO partnered with the ARC-GCI and Omnia to initiate a programme intended to empower black farmers and assist them towards commercialisation. The compilation of a booklet, 'A Key to Successful Farming' which discussed fundamental aspects of maize production such as soil as a resource, climate, crop production and marketing was published in 1996. The response was enthusiastic and revealed a hunger amongst developing farmers to learn more and improve their skills.

Clearly further support structures needed to be established with study groups where the farmers' issues could be addressed. The vision for the programme



Ms Jane McPherson



Mr Basie Ntsimane



extended 1) to developing a set of management guides about the different crops and 2) running courses on farm management; but the NAMPO personnel was finding itself under pressure to respond to the need. The desire was there to assist developing maize farmers but the challenge was to find sufficient capacity to manage this development project.

## **AMALGAMATION: THE BIRTH OF GRAIN SA'S FARMER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

Transformation was happening in the world of organised agriculture. The different producer organisations of NAMPO, NOPO, SPO and WPO were amalgamated in 1999 to form a single grain producer organisation which we know as Grain SA. As far as the farmer development initiatives already implemented in the old structures were concerned, the mood in the new organisation remained positive. Farmers were enthusiastic about becoming more involved with farmer development activities and the combined forces of the different commodity groups had already gathered considerable insight and expertise.

Following presentations about the potential of a farmer development programme within Grain SA, support from the various trusts – formed after the country's deregulation of agricultural marketing – was encouraging and from the outset of Grain SA's FDP this support has been a vital component in the rollout and dynamic expansion of the programme. Grain SA still had the support of the ARC-Grain Crops Institute and now they had also found valuable partners in the trusts.

## **SUPPORT FROM THE TRUSTS: THEN AND NOW**

The different trust funds, namely the Maize Trust, Winter Cereal Trust, OPDT and Sorghum Trust have all played a critical role in the growth of Grain SA's farmer development programme and formed the bedrock for its success providing a firm foundation on which it could be built. They were involved from the outset and are still involved today to a greater or lesser degree.

The Maize Trust has been by far the greatest contributor and has been instrumental in the expansion of the programme so that it is in a position to support farmers in most of the primary grain growing regions of the country. 'Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.' Mr Leon du Plessis, Administrator of the Maize Trust, explains that the Trust looks for partners who will assist them to serve the maize industry and fulfil its mission to facilitate the continuous improvement of the entire maize industry in South Africa. As a result the Maize Trust has collaborated with Grain SA's programme since its formation. This investment has paid dividends as the numbers of successful commercial farmers was growing annually.

The main objective of the OPDT is the promotion and development of the Oil Seeds Industry in South Africa. The objectives were to address household and national food security, improve rural prosperity and focus on empowering the individual farmer to become independent. Course material such as an introduction to sunflower production, advanced sunflower production and marketing, skills development aspects such as settings and calibrations and an introduction to soya production was developed, whilst demonstration trials showed best practice. OPDT also contributed to farmers days as well as four pages every quarter in the *Pula Imvula* magazine.

The Sorghum Trust contribution has seen the funding of demonstration trial plots, farmers days, manual development and a training course.



## PERSONAL DISCLOSURE

### MR COIS HARMAN



It was an adventure to establish study groups across the grain producing areas of the country as the need for training was indescribably big. Mechanical courses were presented in co-operation with New Holland, while grain courses were designed and presented in collaboration with ARC-GCI. The grain courses covered the prime aspects of farming, including soil sampling, soil preparation, liming, crop and cultivar selection, production practices, fertilising, pest and weed control, harvesting as well as grain marketing.

We approached training on a regional basis and supported it with crop trials planted per region as the conditions, soils and climate of regions differ. Study groups proved to be a very effective method to provide training, but also served as a platform to connect our members with expertise, enabling them to develop and grow independently. From 2002 provincial managers were appointed to co-ordinate development, organise farmers' days, facilitate training and to provide one-on-one mentoring.

The most fulfilling experience for me was to see farmers progress while they are learning.



**Messrs Cois Harman (Development Officer of Grain SA) and Jub Jubelius (Executive member of Grain SA), in front, explain the advantages of the correct usage of fertiliser to Mr Paul Kgori, his cousin, Solomon Manato and Peter Solane.**

By 2008 the Winter Cereal Trust was actively supporting developing farmers through the work of Grain SA. They reported that progress was evident and 22 farmers were assisted by the Winter Cereal Trust and the Free State Department of Agriculture. The key challenge remained the profitability of wheat production in the Free State. Their support has also seen the establishment of a provincial office in Paarl to service developing farmers in the Western Cape.

## EARLY FARMER DEVELOPMENT BY GRAIN SA

Mr Cois Harman was appointed by Grain SA in 1999 to manage the programme and organise appropriate skills training for the developing farmers. The first step was the continuation of services to established study groups from the NOPO era, and to proceed with the establishment of new study groups. Trial plots were established to enable producers to see for themselves the advantages of best practice production, the benefits of new cultivars, soil sampling and fertilisation, as well as proper weed control. Special farmer days were held for larger groups of farmers so they could learn about up-to-the-minute techniques. Study groups form the foundation for communication between the farmers and the organisation, together with the radio broadcast which continued, and a monthly newsletter, *Pula Imvula*, published in Tswana, Northern Sotho and Zulu.

The organisation was encouraged by the success of the projects being run and the feedback from the farmers was enthusiastic. Evidence of project success could already be measured in improved yields for example where sunflower yields had been averaging 300 kg/ha – 500 kg/ha, farmers were already harvesting in excess of 1 t/ha with some even harvesting over 2 t/ha. Maize crops had improved with amazing yield results as a result of the farmers applying their new-found knowledge and using improved seed cultivars, together with more effective fertilisation and spray programmes.

One such farmer is Mr Lazarus Mothusi from Weltevrede in the North West. Today he is a successful farmer and role model for others. He tells how as a beginner farmer he used to harvest about 4 tons of sunflowers on 15 ha and thought he was doing okay. He considers the day he met Harman in 1996 his lucky day. Harman mentored him and invited him to attend Grain SA training sessions. He fully credits Grain SA's farmer development initiative for his growth and success.

By 2002 the Grain SA programme was involved with 436 study groups which comprised of 9 680 farmers altogether. Harman resigned in 2005 and was succeeded by Ms Jane McPherson in September of that year.



## Grain SA's Farmer Development Working Group

The structure of Grain SA is such that every focus area is supported by a Working Group comprised of members of the Executive and management. In this way the Executive manages to stay informed about developments on the ground. The Chairperson of this Working Group is essentially the channel of communication from the operational division to the decision making authority which is the Executive and vice versa. When Grain SA was founded in June 1999, Pretorius came into the organisation with the experience he had gathered from the development activities of NOPO and the same passion for the work that needed to be done. He held this position until April 2006 when he retired and Jenny Mathews was elected in his stead – a position she held until her retirement from the Executive of Grain SA in March 2012.



Ms Jenny Mathews

### INTERVIEW WITH JENNY MATHEWS

Interview with Estie de Villiers for SA *Graan/Grain* magazine, August 2015

"The educator in me was very excited to learn about Grain SA's dedicated Farmer Development Programme, headed up by Ms Jane McPherson. I immediately signed up to be a member of that Working Group. I had wanted to find a way to make a small contribution towards the healing of this land and I saw this as an opportunity.

This encounter changed my life. **I recently told Jane that she, together with her incredible team of people, opened my eyes to something truly wonderful happening at grassroots agriculture; and the farmers who I have met along the way, have changed my heart.** "I have met so many beautiful people who work hard, long hours with a smile on their faces. They see my heart and not the colour of my skin. My motto has become: 'It's not the colour of our skin, but the colour of our heart that matters.'"

According to Jenny many of the emerging farmers' challenges are exactly the same as for commercial producers, since agriculture in general is extremely stressed and profitability is under heavy pressure. 'Producers are just struggling to survive, especially after the terrible 2014/2015 season which saw many crop failures. This is exacerbated for many emerging farmers because they struggle to access finance for inputs and they often do not hold the title to their farms so they can't use the land as security.

'The truly dedicated farmers who I have met are hard workers who not only need mentorship and education, but also recapitalisation funding to ensure that their businesses get a fair chance of survival. Just to give any man or woman a piece of land is not a recipe for successful land reform,' she said.

For everything under the sun there is a season and it was time to pass the baton of leadership on. The committee elected Mr Victor Mongoato as the new Chairperson and he is still the Chairperson of the Working Group. In support of transformation within the organisation, the Executive co-opted him to the organisation's Management Committee in this capacity.

### ***Establishment of a 'Voice of the Farmer' sub-committee***

It was the feeling of the Working Group that there was not enough representation from the developing farmers to ensure enough insight was available about circumstances in the different regions. The Executive had already given its approval that the Working Group organise to co-opt more farmers, so a special meeting with the advanced farmers was called during Grain SA's NAMPO Harvest Day in 2009. They formed a sub-committee comprised of nine farmers who they mandated to speak on their behalf as 'the voice of the farmer'. The first meeting with the elected members was held on 8 September 2009.

## FOCUS ON MR VICTOR MONGOATO

FDP Working Group Chairperson since 2012

*'Land only has value if it is used. We must ensure that people who receive land are in a position to produce food and fibre for our country.'* – Victor Mongoato

Victor shared an interesting insight on the terms used to describe the black farmers: 'We use the term 'developing' farmer as we feel that this could apply to any farmer of any size who wants to develop. We do not use the term 'emerging' farmer. This seems to show that we are under something we have to emerge from.' And in the case of farmers who have been included in the 250 Ton Club, the term 'New Era Commercial farmers' applies.

He added that through the FDP Grain SA is striving to unite agriculture and move away from splitting the industry along racial lines saying that all farmers are working together to ensure food security for South Africa.

Victor elaborated further on the main challenges facing developing farmers: 'Training and skills development is crucial for farmer development, but training alone is not enough. Many of our farmers don't have tractors and other implements required, or they lack production finance. Different areas have different challenges. In the eastern parts of the country (Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape), for example, where the rainfall is higher, the pH of the soil is low and more lime supplementation is needed. In many of the communal areas, the lands are not fenced and the crops are often damaged by livestock. There is also a shortage of combine harvesters and storage facilities. We have vast tracts of land that are not yet utilised optimally. This leaves room for our farmers to expand and to produce food for the country and for the SADC region.'

As far as challenges for farmer development he highlighted two main issues:

- Many institutions 'farm for' developing farmers and call it 'farmer development'. Our farmers do not want others to farm for them; they want to be empowered to do it themselves. Wherever the government has tried to get contractors to farm for people, this has failed. We must invest in individual farmers and assist them to become successful farmers in their own right.
- The so-called 'group farming' projects are a mistake. Experience has shown that it is almost impossible to farm as part of a group.



Mr Victor Mongoato



**IT'S THE ACTION, NOT THE FRUIT OF THE ACTION THAT'S IMPORTANT. YOU HAVE TO DO THE RIGHT THING. IT MAY NOT BE IN YOUR POWER, IT MAY NOT BE IN YOUR TIME, THAT THERE'LL BE ANY FRUIT. BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU STOP DOING THE RIGHT THING. YOU MAY NEVER KNOW WHAT RESULTS FROM YOUR ACTION. BUT IF YOU DO NOTHING, THERE WILL BE NO RESULT.**

*Mahatma Gandhi*



## WHO DOES THE GRAIN SA FDP ASSIST?

Early on the FDP's management recognised that in Africa there are numerous forms of land ownership systems. It was decided that it is unimportant what the farmer's relationship was to the ground he or she accessed. It was still appropriate to strive to empower them to get the most out of the land they had access to. With the team operating across a wide area at grass roots levels they could gather critical information about developing farmers and their operations and they have gathered interesting data on the programme members and how they access land. (It is interesting to note that the level of expertise of the team is such that increasingly, outside stakeholders including government departments had started to seek advice or information/data from the Grain SA team.) For example, the 2011 study group statistics reveal much about the nature of the farming operations and the diversity of access to land:

Study groups members		Total: 3 558
Land tenure		Hectares
<b>Arable land</b>	<b>Total arable land</b>	<b>46 954</b>
Own	Being used by farmer	<b>17 456</b>
Communal land (PTO)	Being used by farmer	<b>12 831</b>
Commonage land (Municipal)	Hired by farmer	<b>1 890</b>
Leased private land		<b>4 451</b>
PLAS (Land Affairs)	Being used by farmer	<b>10 030</b>
<b>Grazing land</b>	<b>Total grazing land</b>	<b>119 829</b>
Own	Being used by farmer	<b>19 566</b>
Communal land (PTO)	Being used by farmer	<b>85 898</b>
Commonage land (Municipal)	Being used by farmer	<b>400</b>
Leased private land		<b>1 828</b>
PLAS (Land Affairs)	Being used by farmer	<b>12 138</b>

Grain SA is not concerned with how a farmer accesses land or whether a farmer produces off 1 ha or a 1 000 ha. The intention has been to ensure that optimal production is achieved by using modern, economic and effective farming methods. Regardless of the size of the farm, the basic principles remain the same. Quality seed, soil sampling and accurate fertilisation and proper weed control. If a person has 1 ha and, through learning how to use a hand planter with a piece of knotted string to space the seed with a knapsack spray for weed control, they can achieve 6 t/ha, it can make a huge impact – it can change the lives of producers. Not everyone can access large hectares, but they can be taught best practise. This is also the motivation behind the trials. They are planted in exactly the same way as the locals plant. If they plant by hand, the trials are also planted by hand



### GRAIN SA PROGRAMME

A basic point of departure fundamental to the functioning of the Grain SA programme is:

**DEVELOPMENT IS ABOUT THE INDIVIDUAL**

Farmer development is **NOT ONLY** about land

Farmer development is **NOT ONLY** about machines

Farmer development is **NOT ONLY** about markets

Farmer development is **NOT ONLY** about money

Farmer development is **NOT ONLY** about

skills development and training

It is about all of the above

Development is a process and not a LEAP

(Programme Manager, Ms Jane McPherson)







Messrs William Matasane, commercial farmer from Senekal (left) and Koos Mthimkulu, Developing Farmer of the Year for 2011, discuss wheat business with Mr Jannie de Villiers, CEO of Grain SA.



to demonstrate that best practices and improved yields are achievable. There is enormous value in seeing and believing and in some places change in farming methods has swept across a region like wildfire as one farmer passed the message on to his neighbour.

The ethos behind Grain SA's programme says:

- Farmers should be empowered to farm for themselves (not farmed for by contractors).
- Where at all possible, farmers should own their own equipment and not rely on the activities of other service providers.
- Farmers with farms of all sizes can be assisted to use the land that is available to them using the most modern methods of crop production.
- The measure of success is the sustainable production of profitable crops on every hectare (and not the total number of hectares planted, or the total number of tons harvested).

In order to achieve these goals funding has been sourced to extend the programme's footprint over time by establishing a regional presence.

## THE FOOTPRINT OF GRAIN SA IN THE COUNTRY: REGIONAL OFFICES

From humble beginnings in Zeerust the programme has steadily increased its footprint into more of the key grain producing regions. Regional offices manned by a Development Co-ordinator, who is conversant in the indigenous language of that region, and an administrative assistant, have been opened. At present offices can be found in Lichtenburg and Taung in the North West, Ladybrand in the Free State, Nelspruit (Mbombela) in Mpumalanga, Louwsburg and Dundee in KwaZulu-Natal which also service parts of Mpumalanga, Kokstad and Mthatha in the Eastern Cape, and Paarl in the Western Cape.

There are a total of nine offices including the co-ordinating office in Bloemfontein. These offices have all been strategically placed to service a wide area where grains can be produced profitably and where developing farmers have access to land.

### LAND POSSESSION, CROPS PLANTED AND GRAIN SA OFFICES PER PROVINCE

Province	Office	Crops planted	Land tenure
North West	Lichtenburg	Maize, soybeans, sunflowers	All types
	Taung	Irrigation maize, wheat, barley, cotton, groundnuts, lucerne, potatoes	Mostly state land in the Taung irrigation scheme
Free State	Ladybrand	Maize, soybeans, sunflowers, groundnuts, dry beans	All types (very little communal land)
Eastern Cape	Mthatha	Maize, dry beans	Mostly communal land
	Maclear	Maize, dry beans	Mostly communal land – some PLAS
	Kokstad	Maize, dry beans	Mostly communal land – some PLAS
KwaZulu-Natal	Dundee	Maize, dry beans	Mostly communal land – some PLAS
Mpumalanga	Louwsburg	Maize, dry beans	Mostly communal land
	Nelspruit	Maize, dry beans, groundnuts	Mostly communal land
Western Cape	Paarl	Wheat barley, oats, canola	Mostly church land and PLAS

Each office differs slightly in terms of the work they are doing as this is dependent on the area, climatic conditions, level of farming, land tenure arrangements and crops planted but they all do a specific quota of work each year. The projects which are managed by the offices include the study group service, planting of demonstration trials, farmers' days, and development of partnerships, the Farmer of the Year competition, the support to the advanced farmers as well as the making of arrangements for the training courses.

Currently (2015/2016) the costs of the offices have been borne by the Maize Trust and the Winter Cereal Trust. The cost of an office is in the region of R1 525 000/ year which includes the personnel cost for the development co-ordinator as well as the office administrator, the cost of the travelling (usually in the region of 4 000 km per month), the office rental, telephone, cell phone and fax, office equipment rental and the costs of overnighing for the co-ordinator.

#### THE GRAIN SA FARMER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME SEEN IN NUMBERS (2015)

Number of offices	
<i>Lichtenburg, Taung, Ladybrand, Nelspruit, Louwsburg, Dundee, Kokstad, Mthatha, Paarl</i>	9
Study groups	123
Current number of study group members	5 801
Demonstration trials	53
Farmers days held	76
Advanced farmers	141
Average arable land per study group member	198

The different offices all service a slightly different farmer client base which is why the detailed work load of each office differs from the others.

#### PEOPLE HELPING PEOPLE AT GRASSROOTS

The Development Co-ordinators have continuously reported on good progress with demo trials planted, farmers' days held and the 'advanced farmer' programme which has walked the road one-on-one with the larger scale more commercialised farmers. The nominations for the Farmer of the Year competition were all excellent candidates who had grown considerably. According to development co-ordinator, Mr Danie van der Berg they are in fact no longer 'developing' farmers, they are good farmers with good crops.

The study groups were a big help as were the farmers days. 'They are making a good contribution to food security in their areas', he said. Mr Tonie Loots, then development co-ordinator in Zeerust, said that farmers were starting to use chemical weed control and were able to get better prices for their maize. 'It's a totally different world of farming!' Mr Papi Nkosi, past Grain SA Executive member from Bushbuckridge in Mpumalanga, expressed the farmers' appreciation, 'Grain SA is doing wonderful work for the developing farmers. All the farmers who are part of the programme are adjusting their production practices. This is a very worthwhile programme and it is impacting on the lives of people.'

Development co-ordinator, Mr Johan Kriel, who is based in Ladybrand in the Free State, observed that Grain SA has had to cope with a snowball effect. The demand for assistance and mentorship was great: 'If you find a farmer getting 1 to 2 tons and you can increase that to 10 tons – this makes a difference in the life of the people. We do not always realise the impact that we are having – the loyalty and the responsibility that comes with that is huge – people come with lots of problems. We are committed.'

Evidence of this 'snowball effect' is reflected in the programme's 2010/2011 statistics which demonstrates a rapid momentum in its continued expansion:

- A total number of 655 study group meetings were attended by 10 033 farmers.



Sound bite: The rewards of being a development co-ordinator – Mr Jerry Mthombothe





## WHAT A FARMER MEANS TO A MENTOR

PHILIP DU PREEZ, A MENTOR FROM THE FREE STATE



**M**entorship requires information on the mentee, and the implementation of the characteristics of honesty, reliability, adequate knowledge, practical experience and the ability to communicate.

Information on the mentee's family, spouse, children, successors, farming background, future plans, problems and possible solutions is essential to improve relationships.

Knowing the ins and outs of the mentee's family and receiving regular feedback, with sincere interest on both sides, makes the mentor a member of the family.

Honesty must be maintained at all times. Where sufficient knowledge is lacking, it should be followed up to promote reliability.

Knowledge and practical experience should be exchanged with the mentee in plain language. One is never too old to learn and should acknowledge this.

Stick to principles regarding farming practices, e.g.: 'The farm determines the type of farming activity.'

Fields performing below potential should be withdrawn from cash crops and established with permanent pasture. This principle is not yet applied as it should be, but results are improving.

Mixed farming with quality cattle that can utilise pasture, crop residue and planted grazing is more sustainable. Selection and marketing are carried out together with the mentee, and results are communicated with appreciation.

Where cash crops are grown on fields with a higher potential, better yields are more sustainable and recognition for this is greatly appreciated.

Soil preservation is high on the agenda and assistance with laying out water courses and contours is very successful. Practical experience plays a major role here.

William Matasane, Koos Mthimkulu, John Depali, Sameul/Simon and Jafta Thaso generate good crops and feedback is very positive because their successes are my success too.

All the positive comments that come over a long period of time are very encouraging. The major contribution is honesty among themselves and with me, because I am a member of the family, has made success possible.

There can be no better recognition for what has been achieved in collaboration with farmers who want to and can farm. All honour to the heavenly Father who has made this possible.



**Study groups form the foundation of Grain SA's Developing Agriculture Programme.**

- 61 farmer days were attended by 3 741 farmers.
- Advanced farmers were visited 849 times for one-on-one mentoring.
- 131 radio broadcasts were done by members of personnel.
- 264 000 copies of the *Pula/Imvula* magazine were circulated over twelve months.
- 108 training courses had been held attended by 2 170 farmers and farm workers.
- The Schools Programme, also presented by the Farmer Development section, had visited 363 schools and reached 53 870 learners. (More detailed information about the Schools Programme is included in Chapter 7).

## THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL BUT THE WORKERS ARE FEW: GENERAL ACTIVITIES

Over time a number of core business activities have been integrated into the programme in order to achieve the objectives of farmer development.

### Study groups

Servicing farmers in a group is more cost effective than servicing on an individual basis, and they also learn more from the questions of the other farmers. The study group system was begun at the outset of organised agriculture's farmer development efforts has continued to be the heartbeat of this programme. This is the first contact made with the farmers when the team begins to work in a region. Study group meetings are characterised by relationship building, gathering information and sharing knowledge.

The monthly *Pula/Imvula* newsletter is distributed here and the regional managers discussed the issues of importance in the newsletter. At these meetings information about seasonal issues and best practice knowledge is transferred. It has been possible to demonstrate the effective use of tools and teach safety in handling chemicals and fertilisers. The team has distributed some 4 000 knapsack sprayers to the most rural farmers who would not have accessed them easily otherwise.

Over the years, as the farmers became more advanced, they expressed the need for more advanced information while at the same time the progressive farmers assist the less advanced farmers to progress.



## Advanced farmers

There is still a gap between the more advanced developing farmers and the commercial farmers. All the developing farmers cannot be supported at the same basic level. In the study groups farmers are supported with information and training to get them into best practice production. Many farmers have grown and are now beyond this type of support since they are already farming on a semi-commercial scale. They are however not quite yet positioned to be left entirely to their own devices in the competitive commercial world. These are mostly the small holder farmers (10 ha to 250 tons). We also try to alert these farmers to the importance of marketing and we link them to agents who are willing to walk that road with them. The free market is very challenging for many people and especially for developing farmers.

The purpose of this programme is to support the outstanding candidates who have emerged from the study group system. These farmers need one-on-one support in terms of production planning, management, support in terms of financial applications and reporting et cetera. The Grain SA team also draws up detailed business plans for these farmers when necessary. When the farmer is producing in excess of 250 tons/year, and has met the 'commercial standards' of production, he/she will be handed over to the commercial producers in that region to fast track the integration of the black farmers into the commercial sector. In 2015 the different offices have supported a total of 154 advanced farmers.

The progress towards the New era commercial status has been slower than anticipated as these farmers face many challenges:

### *Production loans*

- Many farmers do not meet the security requirements of the lending institutions (including the Land Bank).
- The farmers do not qualify for multi-peril insurance.
- Should the farmers be lucky enough to qualify for multi-peril insurance, the guarantee is not enough to secure the loan.
- The small margins in dry land grain production make it risky for someone who is learning 'the trade' – there is no gap for mistakes.

### *Tractors and machinery*

- In many areas, mechanisation is not available.
- In cases where there is mechanisation, the condition is often very poor.
- The government has given some areas shared equipment and the management thereof creates poor productivity.
- The use of contractors is widespread and there are huge challenges relating to this which include the timing of operations, the quality of the work being done and the high cost thereof (only the contractor ends up making money).

### *Issues with land and soil*

- In the communal areas there is often insecure tenure (farmers 'use' the unused land of absent farmers as well as their own land and the tenure on this land is not secure).
- The pH of the soil is low (particularly in areas with higher rainfall and higher potential), and in many areas, the phosphate levels are very low as a result of years of cultivation without the application of adequate fertilisers.
- Low potential soils are being cropped (unprofitably).
- In some areas, like the irrigation plots in Taung, four farmers share one centre pivot which creates much tension.

## Demonstration trials and farmer days

The purpose of the demonstration trial plots is to SHOW the developing farmers the results of good production practices: correct soil preparation, correct application of lime (if applicable), correct fertilisation (resulting from the soil sampling), correct plant population and cultivar selection, proper weed and



Farmers receive training in several areas of farming and management.









**The correct application of lime always yields good results.**



**Dr Willie Kotzé**

pest control et cetera. The farmers are able to experience the practices and then do the same on their own land.

*The personnel in the programme will coordinate the establishment of these trials together with other role-players in the industry – the contractor, the seed companies, the fertiliser companies and the agro-chemical companies so that the farmers are exposed to the best possible production information and techniques.* This is a key component towards empowering farmers to continue profitably and sustainably as the vision is they will eventually be supported and guided by the commercial sector representatives from the input supply companies. The exposure of the farmers to the representatives of the input supply companies for the development of relationships is one of the purposes of the farmers' days. The year 2015 saw 87 farmers days held around the country which 5 656 farmers attended.

## **Training courses**

Under the leadership of McPherson and Dr Willie Kotzé, the training programme has steadily expanded considerably. Significant training and training manual development had been done with the funds from the different trusts.

Farming today is business and it requires an in depth understanding of a large number of diverse subjects – from the soil to income tax. Kotzé reported that 189 courses had been offered during the 2009 financial year – 159 for the Maize Trust, eleven for the OPDT, ten for SAB, five for Sorghum and four for Winter Cereal. Each course has been developed to address a specific need that we identified through our interactions with the farmers at the different levels.

Although not all the courses are available in all the languages, a trainer who is proficient in the local language and can explain the course to the farmers is sent to the region.

The courses are structured with a theoretical and practical part. The theory is taught during the morning and the practical is done in the afternoon. Equipment that is available to the farmers is used during the practical training sessions – it does not empower them if they are taught on equipment that they cannot access. It is also good to show them what they can do with the equipment that they have. Altogether 123 courses were presented to 1 985 farmers in the Eastern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and the North West Province during 2015.

## **The 250 Ton Club and Day of Celebration**

Although any development process is a slow and steady journey, it was evident that there was already much to celebrate in the field of Farmer Development. The decision was made to take one day off from facing development challenges, to celebrate and recognise the many different individuals and institutions involved in the field. Furthermore, to inspire and encourage all the farmers The 250 Ton Club was established with different levels of membership:

- Bronze – 250 Ton member



**Some of the developing farmers who became members of the 250 Ton Club in 2008.**



By 2015 the 250 Ton Club had grown to 119 members.

- Silver – 500 Ton member
- Gold – 1 000 Ton member and
- Platinum – 1 500 Ton member.

On 25 September 2008 the FDP of Grain SA and Monsanto SA held its first 'Day of Celebration'. Progress was acknowledged with regards to farmer development and 32 farmers were awarded membership of the 250 Ton Club.

'We thought it fitting to establish a 250 Ton Club to acknowledge the achievement of those who are already producing more than 250 tons of grain/year and who are really close to being true commercial farmers. Many of them will only be part of our programme for another year or two, but their progress needs to be recognised,' McPherson said in a media statement after the ceremony.

Early in 2009 members of the ANC Women's League and representatives of Grain SA met to discuss various issues of mutual concern with the 250 Ton Club members. Grain SA also focused attention on the extensive support it gives to the development of capacitated, sustainable, black commercial farmers through its farmer development programme. They were told about the significant strides made over the years and about the newly established The 250 Ton Club which honoured the progress made by top developing farmers. They met these farmers who had availed themselves of every opportunity to receive the training and grass roots, with field support offered through the programme. The ANC Women's League was pleased to discover that this training is offered to all the participants without charge as the courses are sponsored by the different grain trusts.

In 2009 membership of the 250 Ton Club increased to 42 members, and in 2010 the club boasted 52 members with some members graduating to the 500 Ton and 1 000 Ton categories (26 x 250 Ton members; 16 x 500 Ton members and 10 x 1 000 Ton members). By 2011 there were 58 members in the 250 Ton Club.

By 2015 the 250 Ton Club had grown both in representation and in standing. It has become an important symbol for the farmers against which they measure themselves and strive to achieve the yields which will earn them membership to what they see as an 'elite' group of developing farmers.

#### 250 TON CLUB MEMBERS OVER THE YEARS

	250 Ton Club	500 Ton Club	1 000 Ton Club	1 500 Ton Club	Total
2008	21	7	4		32
2009	23	10	8		41
2010	28	13	10		51
2011	30	17	10		57
2012	30	17	10		57
2013	47	18	14	2	81
2014	66	30	16	3	115
2015	67	31	18	3	119





The 2015 winner of the Grain SA/Absa Subsistence Farmer of the Year was Ngubengcuka Moyo. From the left, congratulating Ngubengcuka, is Jane McPherson (Grain SA Manager: Farmer Development Programme), Ramodisa Monaisa (Master of Ceremonies and Vice-chairperson of the Farmer Development Working Group), Jannie de Villiers (CEO, Grain SA) and Ernst Janovsky (Head: Centre for Excellence Absa Agri Business).



Solomon Masango, accompanied by his beautiful wife, Christina, was the 2015 Grain SA/Absa/John Deere Financial New Era Commercial Farmer of the Year. Jannie de Villiers, Ramodisa Monaisa, Ernst Janovsky and Antois van der Westhuizen (Head: Sales Financing – Sub Sahara Africa, John Deere Financial) congratulated the winner.



The winner of the Grain SA/Syngenta Smallholder Farmer of the Year, 2015 was Dalinwonga Nomwebu.

Since 2008 the *Day of Celebration* has become an annual red letter date for everyone involved in Grain SA's FDP. On this day, presented at a centrally situated venue, nominees for the 205 Ton Club as well as finalists

## Farmer of the Year

Each year a competition is held in all three categories and it is really heartening to see the progress of the farmers. Each year there are also more farmers who wish to compete and it is increasingly difficult to identify a winner as the bar is raised. *It is no longer possible simply to judge them on the production practices and the good commercial practice is becoming the norm.*

## PARTNERSHIPS AND RECAPITALISATION

*No one group can take ownership of the development process.*

There are many role-players in the grain industry and it is important that there are good working relationships as we all share the same goal. The field of agricultural development is wide and it is important to access information and support on all aspects. Through this programme an attempt is made to involve all the various role-players in the agricultural industry in the development of farmers – there is a role to be played by each one in terms of their own speciality.

Co-ordination is essential if there is to be constant and sustained progress. In the interests of long term sustainability, the farmers have to be assisted to get to know all the



various role-players in their field of farming. They must have a network of support that will continue once they reach commercial status.

Good relationships have been forged with personnel from the ARC, the Departments of Agriculture, the Department of Rural Development and Agrarian reform, the input supply companies for seed, fertiliser, chemicals, lime, diesel, insurance, finance and mechanisation, as well as provincial and local government. Each of these has a unique contribution to make to the process of sustainable development.

For many years the programme had concentrated on skills development, training, empowerment and capacity development through the study groups, demonstration trials, Farmers Days, Farmer of the Year competition, advanced farmer programme, training material development, training courses, weekly radio broadcasts and a monthly newsletter. Progress towards commercialisation had been a slow process with the focus being on what was considered 'true development' – developing the individual.

However, the harsh reality of those operating at grass roots level was no longer that if best practices were implemented and best yields were achieved, that all was a happy ending for satisfied farmers. Rather, a financing crisis threatening the hard won farming enterprises was the reality for many developing producers. By 2010 the production cost for grain was in the region of R5 000 p/ha (for direct costs). In reality the costs for the developing farmers were generally higher than for commercial farmers for a number of reasons:

- 1) The soils were often depleted so the fertiliser requirements were higher;
- 2) The farmers did not have collateral to secure loans so were forced to take out input insurance to secure the loans – an added cost;
- 3) The tractors and implements of the developing farmers were old and worn costing more in repairs and maintenance;
- 4) Farmers did not always own all the equipment required for production and contract work had to be budgeted for e.g. harvesting and planting operations;
- 5) These farmers did not have the advantages of economies of scale to bargain on the price of inputs, or negotiate good marketing contracts; and
- 6) Most farmers needed to borrow money for production which added an interest burden.



**Farmers receive fertiliser at the Khumbula Nsikazi Stadium.**



**Jobs Fund maize in Mpumalanga.**



**The difference it makes when you know what you are doing – Jobs Fund maize left and a disastrous result on the right.**





**Video:** A video overview of Grain SA's participation in the Government's recapitalisation project.

Most farmers did not have long term records, most had built on carry-over debt due to the low prices of the 2008 and 2009 seasons and there was a general hopelessness as all were struggling to access production finance. Reports made by developing farmers to the Working Group affirmed the crisis:

*As a result of the poor profitability of grain farming, only a few farmers were financed by the local agribusinesses and then were forced to take out Multi-Peril Insurance, which significantly increased the production costs. A member of the 'Voice of the Farmer' committee reported that the farmers are all struggling with carry-over debt due to the low prices, and high production costs.*

In this area there would be little production and no further development. For these reasons it had become apparent that *something needed to be done differently*. Grain SA had realised that government intervention at the highest level was necessary in order to secure viability and sustainability for developing farmers.

In 2012 the Programme partnered with the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) to empower developing farmers across the country. For the first time holistic business plans – not only the grain production aspects – were drawn up. By September 2012 R36 million was transferred into a separate bank account to be managed between the programme team and the farmers themselves. In order to manage these funds, Grain SA had to register with the financial services board. An internet based accounting system structured by Grain SA enables the management of a bank account for each individual farmer. The bank accounts are with Standard Bank and they are called Third Party Fund Administration (TPFA) accounts. After the duration of the recap process, the farmer 'loosens' the account from Grain SA and can then operate the account on his/her own. In this way, the farmer also builds up a banking record over the duration of the project.

The 2012/2013 initiative focussed on 16 farmers identified in the Free State, North West and Gauteng. Strict financial management ensured the funds were utilised for mechanisation for land preparation, purchasing inputs for production and establishment of the crop. Attention was also given to key infrastructure such as sheds, fences and water et cetera. Recapitalisation continued into 2013 and 2014 with further projects in the Free State, Mpumalanga and the North West which were funded by the DRDLR. Another recapitalisation programme was conducted in the North West in partnership with the Department of Agriculture there.

This process began in 2012 and to date (2015/2016) the FDP has managed R280 million for these farmers and is proud to say that they managed all the funds efficiently in partnership with the farmers and their mentors. Not one cent has disappeared and a clean audit was received from the Auditor General. The project was a huge success but unfortunately politics and other agendas came into play which brought what was originally intended to be a five year programme for the farmers, to a halt.

Grain SA's FDP will in future take on a different dimension in which production financing is essential for new producers.

With the aid of the National Treasury's newly created fund for promoting job creation, the Jobs Fund, the FDP managed to launch a programme during 2015 in terms of which 1 577 smallholder farmers gained access to inputs and mechanisation to cultivate 1 802 hectares.

In the meantime, new partnerships have been concluded with the government with respect to research and farmer development. The database and projects of the Farmer Development division were incorporated with the policy action plan for agriculture of the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

Grain SA's FDP has never claimed to be THE ONLY answer to farmer development. Rather it has always been a desire to build bridges and forge firm relationships between farmers, representatives from the many companies in the sector, finance institutions and agri-businesses. There has generally been positive interaction between Grain SA and the different government departments on both provincial and national level and many warm friendships have grown as a result. Down the years there have also been a number of partnerships between

Grain SA and industry role-players and at farmers days and demonstration trials, the branding and banners of a number of stakeholders will be present.

Although Grain SA's relationship with politicians has not grown much recently, co-operation with the officials has improved and increased because Grain SA can deliver. Despite the political winds and undercurrents, enough affordable food is still a sought-after commodity. Food security remains central – and has become even more important because of the drought and climate change.

Organised agriculture will have to view its partners in a different context in future. Political appointments by the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries on the boards of the grain trusts are expected to lead to a re-evaluation of the funding priorities of the trusts. Input providers who acted as sponsor for agriculture in the previous era will undoubtedly move closer to an organisation like Grain SA to become involved at industry level through funding.

## DATA BASE AND WEB REPORTING

Over the years, a huge amount of insightful information has been gathered about each farmer who is part of the development programme. This comprehensive data includes: Personal information, land access and tenure type, assets (livestock, tractors and implements), production records (not of all farmers) as well as a record of the training courses he/she has completed and study group meetings attended.

All the activities of all the fulltime- and contracted personnel in the programme are reported on the web site on a daily basis. These include study group visits, farm visits, training, demonstration trials, Farmer of the Year competition, mentoring reports and schools visit reports. The information is up to date and 'live' and easily accessible by any member of the management team at all times.

## AT THE HEART OF THE JOURNEY

Developing people, improving farming operations, changing lives and giving the gift of hope – These are the results of work done by a team of passionate people with a reputation for respectful intervention, excellent work, scarce language skills and expertise in the arena of farmer development. This work has been steadfastly supported and encouraged by, strong and visionary leadership from Grain SA CEO, Mr Jannie de Villiers, mandated to do farmer development by the Grain SA congress. Programme Manager, Ms Jane McPherson and her dedicated team who are always ready and willing to champion the cause of developing farmers have taken this dream much further than anyone could ever have imagined.

## IN CONCLUSION

When McPherson assumed her position in 2005, the programme was funded with R2 million by the different trusts and there were four staff members working with Harman. By the end of 2015 the funding to the programme amounted to R24 million, nine regional offices are operating with a personnel component of 26 permanent team members. In addition to this, the programme has at least 15 experienced trainers who are contracted to conduct training sessions, mentorship and run the schools programme.





