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Land ownership and the challenges we face

Grain SA magazine for
developing farmers

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There are reportedly currently more bus drivers than farmers in the United States. It may seem a strange comparison but it does make one ask the question: "What is more likely to happen first – a bus driver who needs to eat – or a farmer who needs a ride on a bus?"

Food is the answer every time! It is a basic need of every human being right beside oxygen and sleep. The planet needs nutritious food and it needs intelligent hard working people to produce it.

Land is a limited resource which will become increasingly more in demand and also

more scarce as the population increases. The responsibility as to what happens on that land also increases as the pressure to produce more and more food on less available land grows. So why do people want access to land? There are two main reasons:

1. Accommodation – a place to call home. A piece of land where one can build a house and live in peace and security where one has all the necessary amenities to do this, e.g. water, electricity and sanitation.
2. Production – a place to grow food for own use and for profit. The agricultural activities will range from:

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NKGONO JANE SAYS...

During this summer crop production season, we have been involved in a project to help 855 subsistence, resource poor farmers to plant 1 ha of maize each. All these farmers are on communal land and although they do not own the land, they have the use of the land. This is really the essence of farming – it is about the use of the land. There are so many different forms of land tenure and the pros and cons of each system can be discussed in detail. However, regardless of the tenure, it is the use of the land that is important – land that is not being used is no asset to anyone and cannot contribute to either household or national food security.

There is a lot of talk about land redistribution and dispossession of land. This is not my debate. As the development team of Grain SA, we get to deal with the results of this land redistribution – having access to land is an important part of being able to farm. However, the land is only one aspect – you also need the knowledge of how to use the land, access to mechanisation and access to production inputs (or the money to buy them). If these things are not in place then the land cannot be used and our entire country will lose – we will lose food and fibre, we will also lose the contribution to the economy, and sadly, we lose the hope that people have in their hearts to become farmers. We simply have to have a holistic approach to the whole issue of land transformation and farmer development.

It is almost easier to help the very small subsistence farmers as mentioned above, who only plant 1 ha each as they are able to “pop out” the money for the inputs for that 1 ha (or save it, or borrow it locally). They use hand held tools and their own energy to do the work. These people used to be content to get 1 ton from the hectare and that was enough to feed the family for the year – we are seeing that they too will achieve yields in excess of 4 tons/ha. The real challenge is the farmers who have access to more than 50 ha of arable land – they require production inputs to a value of more than R300 000 without mechanisation. This they do not have and cannot borrow. These are the new farmers who should be contributing to the national food security and the economy of the country and yet they cannot do anything.

I do hope that if we continue to work on maintaining good relations with the Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development that together we will be able to address this huge challenge. 🌱

Deal with LIVESTOCK THEFT

Aworrying concern to farmers is LIVESTOCK THEFT. Be it cattle, sheep or whatever, it is something that is on the increase. Apart from being obliged to brand or tattoo your livestock it is also very important to number your livestock individually for identification and management purposes.

referred to in the article regarding the unfriendly government. Perpetrators will become aware of your actions and will make them wary to steal from you. They realise that within a couple of hours you will be aware of theft and could be followed. 🌱

From experience it is highly advisable to have your livestock counted on a daily basis. This will most certainly reduce theft and you become a manager par excellence as

Article submitted by Marius Greyling, Pula Imvula contributor. For more information, send an email to mariusg@mcgacc.co.za.



Pula Imvula's Quote of the Month

*“I am not afraid of storms,
for I am learning
how to sail my ship.”*

~ Louisa May Alcott

1 Land ownership and the challenges we face

- Subsistence, i.e. a small piece of land which may be communal or rented on which to plant food crops and possibly run small numbers of livestock to sustain the family; and
- Commercial, i.e. developing the farming enterprise to produce on larger scale to sell to the markets both local and export. It is a fact that a very small number of mega-farms usually operating as agri-businesses are producing the majority of the food grown in the world today.

Farmers in South Africa are also experiencing the pressure to grow their businesses and it is increasingly more critical for their survival that they utilise all the agricultural land suitable for production to its full potential. The problem that most farmers sit with is that the cost of operating and producing on that land often exceeds the value of the produce produced on it. That is why the question "What are we going to do with the land?" is so critical – even if you have acquired land through one of the government schemes such as PLAS or LRAD. Whatever the scenario is, there are still costs and responsibilities to prove one a worthy and efficient farmer and to be able to run a successful business that enables one to keep possession of that land. This means being able to make rental payments, cover production costs as well as continuously pay for newer equipment and other necessary farm improvements. The same business rules apply as in any normal commercial environment – if you have bought a piece of land and cannot meet the interest and capital repayments to the financing institution then that land will be repossessed and resold to someone else.

Let's look at some of the common problems relating to owning and operating a piece of commercially viable agricultural land.

1. We cannot just allow the land to lie fallow. There is too much pressure to earn from the land so farmers need to make the investment work for them.
2. It's necessary to carefully consider what will be done on the land. Research is an important part of successful enterprise. Most farmers conduct an environmental impact assessment (EIA) to discover what activities are most suited to the area.

3. Decisions about which production practices should be employed and which will be more profitable must be made.
4. Market research must be done in order to establish the viability of different products. This includes analysing consumer needs and demands as well as looking at future trends along with government policies.
5. Careful cost analysis must be done. This includes overhead costs – those costs incurred anyway even before you start planting on the land. Further one must carefully estimate the direct production costs relating to these enterprises and then ask the question: "Is it possible to make a profit from this business?"

These are only some of the considerations that must be taken into account when deciding to embark on acquiring land either by renting or through purchasing it.

It is true that farming as a way of life is very appealing. One is one's own boss and along with that come numerous advantages and privileges. But also with these privileges come many burdens and responsibilities and it is only the farmer himself – or herself – who is accountable since farms are mostly one-man operations and at the end of the day, even if it is other people who make the mistakes, the farmer is alone in carrying the full responsibility for the overall success – or failure – of his business!

Six important rules to remember

Rule #1: Avoid debt – as much as possible!

It's not often possible for a farmer to operate completely debt free but it is important to remember that borrowing money costs money. Many great farmers were forced to abandon their dreams when they couldn't pay their debts when the bank came calling.

Rule #2: Identify your market before you start producing

Where are you going to find consumers for your produce? How far away is the market? How will you store your produce and what will that cost you? If you store your grain in a silo you pay for that service, what will it cost? Have a solid marketing plan prepared well in advance.

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Land is a limited resource which will become increasingly more in demand and also more scarce as the population increases. The responsibility as to what happens on that land also increases as the pressure to produce more and more food on less available land grows.

Rule #3: Match the land to its best suited use

It is important to work in harmony with nature. Discovering crops which flourish under local conditions and in the regions soils will give the most promising results.

Rule #4: Grow with passion

Simply put, you need to love doing what you are doing. Farming is hard work with long hours and low returns so farmers need to be motivated by more than money and tradition.

Rule #5: Set reasonable goals

Farming is a constantly evolving operation and although every farmer dreams of fabulously smart machines contributing to slick operations, it's important to exercise patience. Rome wasn't built in a day!

Rule #6: Read. Ask questions.

Share your knowledge

Reading is often the last thing on a farmers mind but it is a serious mistake to neglect this. One must keep up with modern trends and learn about new technologies. Ask questions from the experts, pick the brains of older more experienced farmers and make them your mentors. Then share what you know, generously. 🍷

Article submitted by Jenny Mathews, Pula Imvula contributor. For more information, send an email to jenjonmat@gmail.com.

TO TRADE or not to trade...

In a previous article we discussed that it is important to be market oriented. Production and marketing are not two separate processes as some like to think; rather it is one continuous process of bringing raw materials to the point where they have usefulness to a consumer.

It is accurate to say that nothing should be produced that is not wanted by somebody else. We are operating in a free market system which requires farmers to negotiate the best price for their produce.

The trading environment is complex and littered with foreign terminologies and unusual buying and selling patterns. With an increasing influence from global competition in the markets and the opportunities offered by the potential buying and selling on the Agricultural Derivatives platform from the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE), it is more important today than ever before that a farmer is well informed about marketing opportunities and pricing strategies available to him.

This trading platform is what is known as a commodity derivatives market and is regarded as an effective tool for producers to manage market opportunities and price risk within the South African agricultural markets. The exchange connects buyers and sellers and provides transparent price discovery. All transactions are secure and assured through the structure. Farmers can hedge their grain to secure a desirable price for their product at a

desirable date in the future. This exercise can reduce their vulnerability to volatile markets and so protect them from possible falling spot prices at the time of harvest when the market may be flooded or oversupplied. Future contracts do have an expiry date and at that time both the buyer and the seller have to honour the position they traded.

Basic SAFEX terminology explained

- A producer will use **FUTURE CONTRACTS** to hedge his risks against price volatility. The future contract means he agrees to sell a specified number of tons to the market on a specific, agreed future date. Essentially the farmer sells the maize he plans to produce at a predetermined price. He has to stick to this commitment and deliver the agreed tons regardless.
 - Another trading tool is **THE OPTION**. The two types of options traded on SAFEX are put options and call options.
 - **CALL OPTIONS** give the buyer the right to buy maize at the predetermined price in the future while **PUT OPTIONS** give the buyer the right to sell maize at the predetermined price in the future. Options are used to protect producers against fluctuating prices.
 - Call options provide protection from rising grain futures prices. If grain producers/sellers buy call options after selling cash grain, they are positioning themselves to gain from rising grain futures prices. 'Puts' provide protection from falling grain futures prices.
- The market trades actively every weekday morning from 9h00 to midday. It is possible to monitor the movement of the market almost minute by minute as it is live on the internet; but it is more normal for producers to entrust a middleman, called a **BROKER**, to do the intense market analysis and make the best decision on his behalf. Importantly all stakeholders will also closely monitor the movement of the grain prices in the United States by monitoring the activity at their derivatives market, The Chicago Board of Trade (CBT). We are heavily influenced by the movement of the grain price there and if there is a sharp drop in price in America, we can generally expect our markets to follow that trend in the near future and the opposite holds true too. It is a good idea for farmers to arrange with their local agribusiness to sms the closing prices from the CBT to their cell phones every morning after the close of trade over there as well as the results of the trading on the local market. You can arrange to have the prices sent to you during the day and then when the market closes. This will empower you in your decision making for when you sell your grain.

Article submitted by Jenny Mathews, Pula Imvula contributor. For more information, send an email to jenjonmat@gmail.com.

It's time for a post season assessment

March is always a good time of year to unpack and assess how things operated during the busy season. As farmers there are always aspects of our operation than can be improved. But in order to improve we need to know what requires improvement.

I suggest that a good practice is to dedicate a couple of days this month to do a personal performance assessment where we can do exactly this and make a record of things to improve on for the next busy season.

Farmers are very good at "damage control" and thinking on the spot in times of breakdowns and mechanical dramas. This is an excellent quality to possess if an emergency arises, but the question needs to be asked; how many of these dramas could have been avoided with effective pre-season planning, maintenance and management. I was recently listening to a radio talk by a political analyst and in his talk he suggests that in these times of political and general agricultural instability and unrest, the best thing that a farmer can focus on is to keep doing what he is doing and to do it to the best of his ability. Try to make your farming operation as efficient and as successful as possible.

So what aspects of our operation should we take a look at in our post season assessment?

- To have a good understanding of how the running of your business went this season, take a walk around the farm starting in your office moving to the shed then to the shed yard and finally through the fields and crops.
- As you walk around you should be writing down points such as; the tools in the shed need to be sorted, or old chemical drums and fertiliser bags need to be cleaned or disposed of etc.
- Assess your planting equipment. By this time they should already be cleaned, serviced and packed away under protection.
- Take stock of all inputs which are left over such as seed, chemicals, fertiliser, make a note of these and pack them away safely to be used again in the future. You should take these left overs into account when placing your orders for the next season.
- Identify what needs to be filed away or submitted to the bookkeepers in the office

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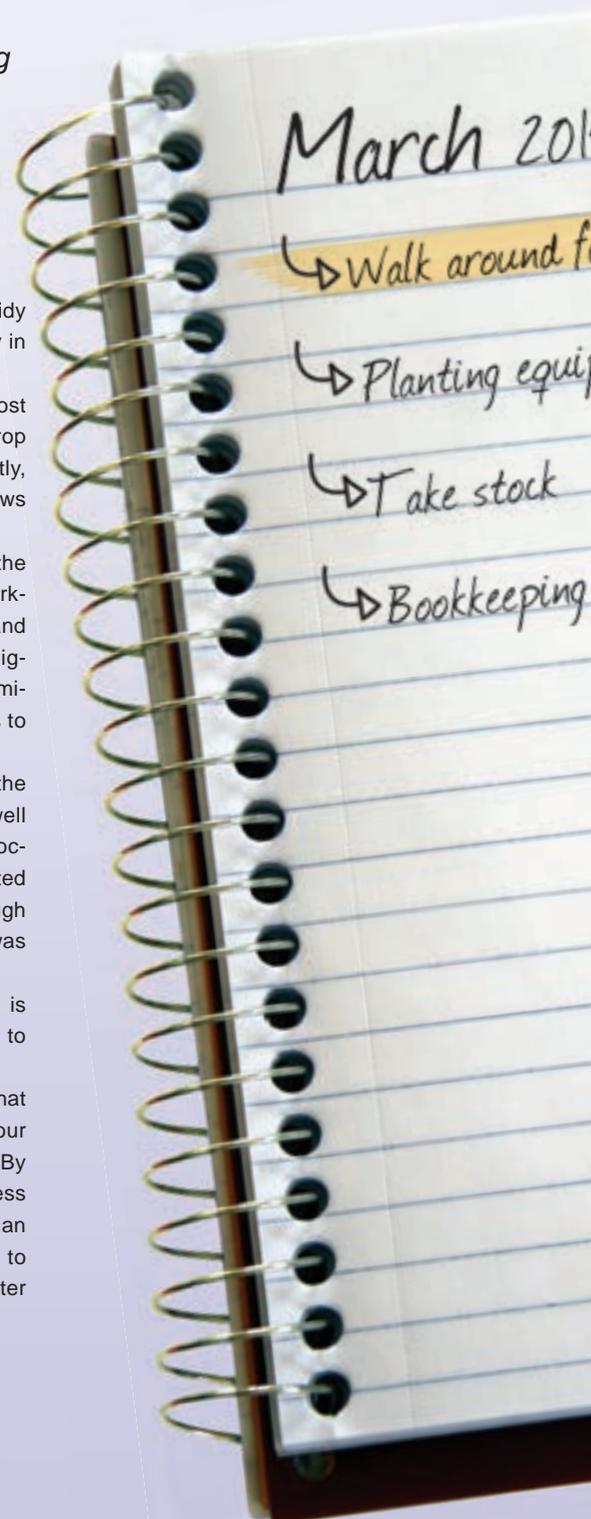
The best thing that a farmer can focus on is to keep doing what he is doing and to do it to the best of his ability. Try to make your farming operation as efficient and as successful as possible.

and organise it so that it is a clear and tidy space to work in. You cannot think clearly in a space that is disorganised.

- In the lands is where you will spend most of your time. Look at things like your crop stand. Was the planter calibrated correctly, were there missed lines, were your rows nice and straight etc.
- Look at things like weed control. Was the spray well set and were all the nozzles working well. If there are strips of weeds here and there then you know that your driver was ignoring a blocked nozzle or something similar. These small errors are easy problems to iron out in the next season.
- Look at the plants and the colour of the leaves. Was your fertiliser application well distributed and sufficient? If you see the occasional spot where the plants are stunted and yellow then you know that not enough fertiliser was applied or the spreader was not spreading evenly.
- Ultimately what you need to determine is whether or not your crops responded well to your practices.

Once all your notes have been made on what could be improved then you can start your planning for the next planting season. By knowing exactly what aspects of your business need the most attention, you can now plan your time accordingly. If we continually try to improve we will only become better and better at what we do.

**Article submitted by Gavin Mathews,
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Back to the drawing board

If one drives to Orania situated on the Orange River in the Northern Cape from Bloemfontein during the last few weeks of November one nears the town from the south. As one drives on, through the main town and north and northeast over the bridge, straddling the Orange River, you are presented with quite a breathtaking view of multiple centre pivots with high yielding green to gold wheat undulating in the light breeze.

The crop looked wonderful this year although some farmers further east in the Hopetown area virtually had the crops wiped out with violent hail storms.

It is very apparent that these farmers with farming businesses near Orania are amongst the best irrigated wheat farmers in the world. The potential wheat yields looked to be 7,5 tons/ha or more. Actual yields realised were in the region of 7 tons/ha harvested and would have been 8,2 tons/ha without the hail damage. In past seasons a yield of 10 tons/ha has been realised when planted in June directly after maize. Yields on some farms were less than expected and might have been caused by the variable cold nights and loss of critical heat units needed to fill the ears in the growing season. By now most of these pivot lands will have been planted to maize in the first few weeks of December after harvesting of the wheat.

If you are at all interested in studying the production of irrigated wheat under centre pivot please make contact with a few farmers in the area. Go and see for yourself how it's done and talk through all of the production factors that they have to take into account in producing 10 tons/ha.

“Consider all production factors and study and analyse them in detail to enable you to optimise your yields.”

Future price scenario

South Africa's total commercial wheat production is hovering in a stable plane at around 1,760 million tons. The futures prices for July 2015 are R4 065 per ton and R3 819 for September 2015. Remember to factor in the transport differential for the Western Cape or other

area's to arrive at a farm price per ton sold. At a yield of 8 tons/ha, and transport differential of R200 per ton a gross income of R28 960 will be realised. This could be elevated to R36 200 per hectare with a 10 ton crop.

“If you are at all interested in studying the production of irrigated wheat under centre pivot please make contact with a few farmers in the area. Go and see for yourself how it's done and talk through all of the production factors that they have to take into account in producing 10 tons/ha.”

Work out your costs, possible yields, income and gross margins accurately. In general irrigated wheat farmers are continuing to plant which indicates that the crop is still profitable although electricity rates will play a large role in the outcome.

Production factors for the coming irrigated wheat crop to be planted in June 2015

If you were disappointed with your irrigated wheat yields it is a good time to review some of the important production factors. It is assumed that you have thoroughly considered the status of your centre pivot as regards efficiency and that it is able to provide sufficient water to the future wheat crop. If your aim is to produce as near to 10 tons/ha as possible it must be appreciated how much water the crop will require. Any problems with water application at flowering time will be disastrous. Check all working parts, wheel bearings, tyre condition, test nozzle delivery and droplet size and all electrical and electronic controls.

Soil profiles in the pivot lands

It is advisable to re-visit your soil profiles for any pans or below surface silt zones that might restrict the full exploitation of soil available to the root system of the wheat plants.

Fertility

Take many soil tests within the pivot areas and do a detailed soil analysis to pick up any potential nutrient

Ensure that all nozzles work properly.



IRRIGATED WHEAT

deficiencies that might have occurred with the extraction of 10 tons of wheat and 14 tons of maize per hectare every year. The soils' current fertility levels must be critically assessed.

Fertiliser

A crop of eight tons/ha will need 240 kg's of nitrogen, 40 kg's of phosphate, 50 kg's of potassium and 14 kg's of sulphur to be available throughout the growing season.

Wheat will extract 22 kg of nitrogen, 3,8 kg of phosphates, 4,30 kg of potassium and 2,50 kg of sulphur per ton of seed produced. Work out the total amounts for your own yield planning. 210 kg's of nitrogen, applied in four feeds, as a minimum will be required to produce 8 tons/ha.

Conclusion

Consider all production factors (of which only a few have been mentioned above) and study and analyse them in detail to enable you to optimise your yields. 🌱

Article submitted by a retired farmer.



Timely maintenance will ensure water efficiency and have an impact on yield.

RESEARCH AND TRANSFORMATION FUNDING

At a meeting held on 21 October 2014 the board of trustees of the Winter Cereal Trust passed resolutions with respect to the provision of funds in support of a variety of research projects pertaining to winter grains, as well as for other purposes, like transformation programmes and capacity building in the industry.

Applications for support from the levy funds are assessed by technical committees for wheat and barley. The composition of the committees offers all sectors of the industry an opportunity to gain insight into the employment of funds. The composition of the committees is available on the website of the Winter Cereal Trust (www.wintercerealtrust.co.za).

The board of trustees manages levy funds according to the principle that funds available for research at the end of a financial year must be employed for projects with merit in addressing the needs of the industry. The aim is not to accumulate funds while essential research is neglected.

The funds provided by the Trust were collected by way of statutory levies, combined with

interest earned, and are left over after provision has been made for administrative expenditure and for the Trust's obligation with respect to the partial funding (13,6%) of the annual budget for the SA Grain Information Service (SAGIS).

Research

Approximately 58 projects will receive support from the Winter Cereal Trust for research into wheat, barley and oats in the coming year. Here are a few examples of the types of research projects envisaged:

Wheat

- Wheat breeding programmes;
- National wheat cultivar assessment programmes;
- Technology transfer programme;
- Assessment of pre-harvest budding of wheat;
- The long-term influence of tillage methods on soil under wheat production in the Eastern Free State;
- Establishment of conservation tillage practices of summer crop production systems in the summer rainfall areas;

- Control of Karnal Bunt;
- Assessment of wheat breeding material for resistance against the Russian wheat aphid;
- Early warning system for controlling the transfer of Barley yellow dwarf virus in wheat under irrigation;
- Aphid repellents to restrict the transfer of Barley yellow dwarf virus in wheat by aphids;
- Optimisation of the effectiveness of herbicide;
- Development of a molecular testing method for rapid in-season herbicide testing;
- Herbicide tolerance of South African wheat cultivars;
- Quantification of the yield gap between genetic potential and commercial yields of irrigation wheat in South Africa;
- Investigation of the production dynamics of eight (8) crop rotation systems, including wheat, canola, lupins and grazing species in the Swartland;
- An economic and biological assessment of short and long-rotation wheat and grain/grazing production systems in the Southern Cape; and

Research and transformation funding



An example of a cultivar trial plot.

- Controlling problem weeds in winter grain and medic grazing crops with currently registered and unregistered products.

Barley

- Barley breeding programme;
- Comprehensive disease management strategy for malt barley;
- Optimisation of production practices in South African malting barley cultivars with the emphasis on the introduction of new cultivars; and
- A preliminary investigation into the causes of the rapid decline in germination energy in barley during post-harvest storage.

Oats

- Oats development programme.

Other employment of funds

The board of trustees again made funds available to compile a report on the quality of the local wheat crop. This report will be compiled by the SA Grain Laboratory, which will also conduct a survey on the quality of imported wheat. Support for these surveys is based on actual costs incurred.

Funds were also made available for a proposed sensory assessment of the influence of

newly proposed fortification levels on wheat products.

Limited funds are also provided for capacity building in organisations involved in the winter grain industry.

Bursaries are awarded to students for studies relating to the winter grain industry. The conditions for the awarding of a bursary include that the bursary holder must be employed by an organisation in the winter grain industry for a period equal to the number of years for which a bursary was awarded. If this does not happen, the total value of the bursary awarded to the student will be recovered from the student concerned.

Transformation

The Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries proclaimed the levies to be statutory levies, provided that 20% of the levy income is used to develop emerging black farmers. The board of trustees committed themselves fully to complying with this condition and annually reserves 20% of the levy income (for that financial year) for transformation purposes.

Transformation programmes administered by the ARC: Small Grain Institute, Grain SA, SAB

Barley Farm and GWK Ltd were supported over the past few years.

Funds provided to the farmer-development programmes of agricultural businesses are channelled through the Grain Farmer Development Association (GFADA). Strict criteria apply in the selection of emerging farmers who may participate in the programmes mentioned. The aim of these intensive development programmes is to assist farmers who have the potential of becoming part of the commercial stream. Farmers involved in these programmes receive support with respect to soil correction and insurance premiums. The agricultural businesses managing the programmes qualify for mentorship fees. Other donors are also involved in these programmes.

Interested persons can obtain information on projects funded by the Winter Cereal Trust on the website of the Trust: www.wintercereal-trust.co.za.

Article submitted by Ishmael Tshame, Administrator: Winter Cereal Trust. For more information send an email to ishmael.tshame@wctrust.co.za.



Wheat farmers from the south *put their heads together*

“I believe that farmers in the Southern Cape will have mixed feelings about 2014.” Parts of the region had varying amounts of rain at the beginning of the season, but again it was less than an ideal start to our rainy season. The rain was followed by severe cold and very wet conditions in the west, which never reached the east.

However, the rain we did receive allowed the crops to develop very nicely and the potential seemed to be established very well at the beginning of the season. Nonetheless, the rain in parts of the east stayed away. The rain that fell in summer, particularly in January, managed to pull the crops through, however. And yet, the highest rainfall since 1994 was recorded in June 2014. In contrast, in the far west above normal rainfall was recorded only in January and June 2014, while the rest of the months were below average.

As far as wheat is concerned, yields and quality differed in various regions and districts. The hot weather and available moisture in the ear filling stage led to these differences. If cost is analysed in relation to long-term average

yield and Safex prices, everybody luckily knows and realises that the wheat industry is balanced on a knife point. The decreasing hectares in the interior where there are alternatives in the form of summer crops are proof of this. This led to a meeting of role players in the industry on 11 November 2014, convened by the Winter Grain Technical Committee of the Winter Cereal Trust. The event was attended by more than 80 people from the wheat industry.

The millers, bakers, silo industry, agents, consumer council, Safex, government and producers were represented and the meeting was led by Rod Blondin from Safex. The attitude of the group was excellent and everybody agreed that the industry will have to change to save itself from going under.

This meeting was followed by a technical group meeting on 25 November 2014 that further discussed the proposed changes. However, the negotiations and hard work started on 15 January 2015, with everybody's proposals having been circulated beforehand and three breakaway groups discussing and negotiating further changes. The three groups discussed each proposal and negotiated a core and a focus area, which remained their main focus.

The first group discussed and negotiated the release of new cultivars, release criteria and the period before release (currently three years of trial data), while the second group discussed grain storage, and the last group the grading sliding scale, Safex (base grade of trading and sliding scale) and cash trading.

We look forward to the developments and hope that meaningful change will result, with some bringing immediate relief and improvements. Unfortunately some of the proposed changes (new cultivars with increased yields and lower quality) will require time to really make a difference.

The grain industry undoubtedly faces challenges in the future. However, be assured that your representative and the staff at Grain SA will do everything they can to try and make changes and manage them to the benefit of producers. ●

Article submitted by Richard Krige, Grain SA Member of the Executive and Chairperson of Region 27. For more information, send an email to boontjieskraal@com2000.co.za.



A wheat field just outside Caledon.



Grain SA interviews...

Solomon Masango

Solomon Masango is a farmer in the Carolina area and a member of the newly formed Carolina Study Group. He farms on communal land where he rents the arable areas from the group. In return he makes hay for the group's cattle and supplies crop residue for winter grazing. Through dedication, hard work and eagerness to learn, he has come of age as an emerging farmer and has overcome the difficulties of being a farmer on rented land.

“*My knowledge about agriculture and my eagerness to learn is the cornerstone of my enterprise.*”

Where and how many hectares are you farming?

I farm on 420 ha of arable land in the Carolina area, planting 130 ha of maize, 280 ha of soya and 10 ha of sugar beans. I also rent grazing for my 129 head of beef cattle.

What motivates/inspires you?

I believe that farming is my life and destiny and that I belong nowhere else. I learn something new each day, and also like to experiment with new ideas, like looking at narrow rows for soya and later also maize.

Describe your strengths

My knowledge about agriculture and my eagerness to learn is the cornerstone of my enterprise. Ethical business practices helped me to get a good credit record, thus enabling me to get finance for inputs through Afgri. The farm has good soils and is situated in a high rainfall area. Land not being farmed by other farmers does get available more and more, enabling me to expand.

What are your weaknesses?

Land tenure creates uncertainty for future stability. Not having own land creates doubt as to for who soil fertility is undertaken in the long term.

What was your crop yield when you started farming?

I averaged 3,5 tons/ha during the first year with maize, and I am now producing 6 tons/ha during an average to good season. Soya yields more than 2 tons/ha.

What do you think was the main contributor to your progress and success?

There are many partners in my farming, like training by Afgri, and the newly formed study group of Grain SA. This enabled me to farm scientifically, with fertilising programs according to soil analysis and a liming program. Weed control programs are in place due to advice from Lowveld Agro Chem and Grain SA. Crop rotation plays a major part, and recently I changed to no-till farming, having bought an 8-row no-till planter and a new crop sprayer.



Becoming a commercial farmer in the next five years is Solomon Masango's dream.

Where do you see yourself in five year's time?

In five year's time, I see myself as a commercial farmer. I am already close to being one. I have good relations with neighbours, who are willing to help me.

What advice do you have for young aspiring farmers?

With crop farming soil is the most important. Firstly, look after the protection of your soil and soil fertility, and the rest will follow. Always walk a straight line with ethical business practices and do not take short cuts.

Article submitted by Naas Gouws, Development Co-ordinator of the Grain SA Farmer Development Programme. For more information, send an email to naas@grainsa.co.za.



Make hay

– *even if the sun does not shine*

To be the owner/manager of a farming business is without a doubt one of the most challenging careers to follow. Farmers face ever increasing costs of inputs, fluctuating commodity prices (one year the price is high to be low again the next year), uncertainty about the weather, the occurrence of natural disasters and inefficient security measures.

Furthermore, farmers in South Africa, whether commercial or smallholder, are also confronted by a government that is agriculture unfriendly. This is experienced by lack of funding, lack of subsidies, at times unavailability of much needed vaccines, substandard infrastructure such as roads and railways, provision of electricity, water infrastructure and quality of water. Furthermore, in South Africa there are some 88 laws that influence farmers. And where the government unfolds a plan to be of assistance very little eventually comes from it. The Government's Fetsa Tlala support programme for smallholder farmers which was kicked off by President Zuma during October 2013 is left in the dark due to lack of funding and expertise. Lastly, government's extension services are virtually non-existent. Farmers have also experienced that during natural disasters assistance from government is either lacking totally or comes very late and are never sufficient.

“ *In South Africa there are some 88 laws that influence farmers.* ”

Be assured that this will not change in the present year under the present leadership of government. South African farmers will continue to face a hostile and uncertain political environment. Already government is looking at a new law regarding land reform and investigating the application of minimum wages for workers.

However this negative environment will force you to convert the negative to a POSITIVE ADVANTAGE should you wish to succeed as a farmer. You will have to face all of this and really become a manager par excellence. You can



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Make hay – even if the sun does not shine

either sit under a tree drinking coffee and complain, or you can get up and do something. THE CHOICE IS YOURS. Nobody else is going to do it for you. It is up to you to manage all of this in such a way that you will still be there when the rain comes.

When you talk to some of the country's top farmers you realise that they don't have time to be depressed about circumstances they cannot directly influence. With their eyes on the future they focus instead on what they can change. They make plans, tighten their belts and live and work with hope in their hearts. Remember the saying "in Boer maak 'n plan."

THE QUESTION IS: "WHAT CAN I DO?" You must get your management on a high level where management implies to plan, organise, implement and control.

Plan your business properly and culminate all your physical plans in a budget and then organise and implement according to your plans and budget. As far as implementation goes "Do the basics right" and maintain costs according to your budget. You must become a champion maize and/or wheat and/or soybean producer and/or livestock farmer.

To be able to control (compare what was done with what was planned) you need records – how many hectares where planted, plant population, how much fertiliser was used, and seed and so forth. Thus, also improve your record-keeping system.

“*Plan your business properly and culminate all your physical plans in a budget and then organise and implement according to your plans and budget.*”

In all of this you must be the creative entrepreneur – "What can I do better, how can I be more productive, or haven't I got a product that can be marketed as a niche product? Make a plan. Take note in a recent publication from international auditors Moore Stephens, they listed "seven deadly sins" that result in the failure of businesses. They are also applicable to agriculture. Some of these sins are: No business plan, overspending, poor administration, poor cash-flow management and lack of overall management. All these aspects have been discussed over the last couple of months in our articles on management.

Despite all the negatives of being a farmer there is a bright future for farming. World over, the population is growing – more people need more food. Do you want to share in this bright future? Stop complaining about government, do something, help yourself. 🌱

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