AUGUST 2023

# PULA IMVULA

**GROWING** FOOD • PEOPLE • PROSPERITY

GRAIN SA MAGAZINE FOR DEVELOPING FARMERS

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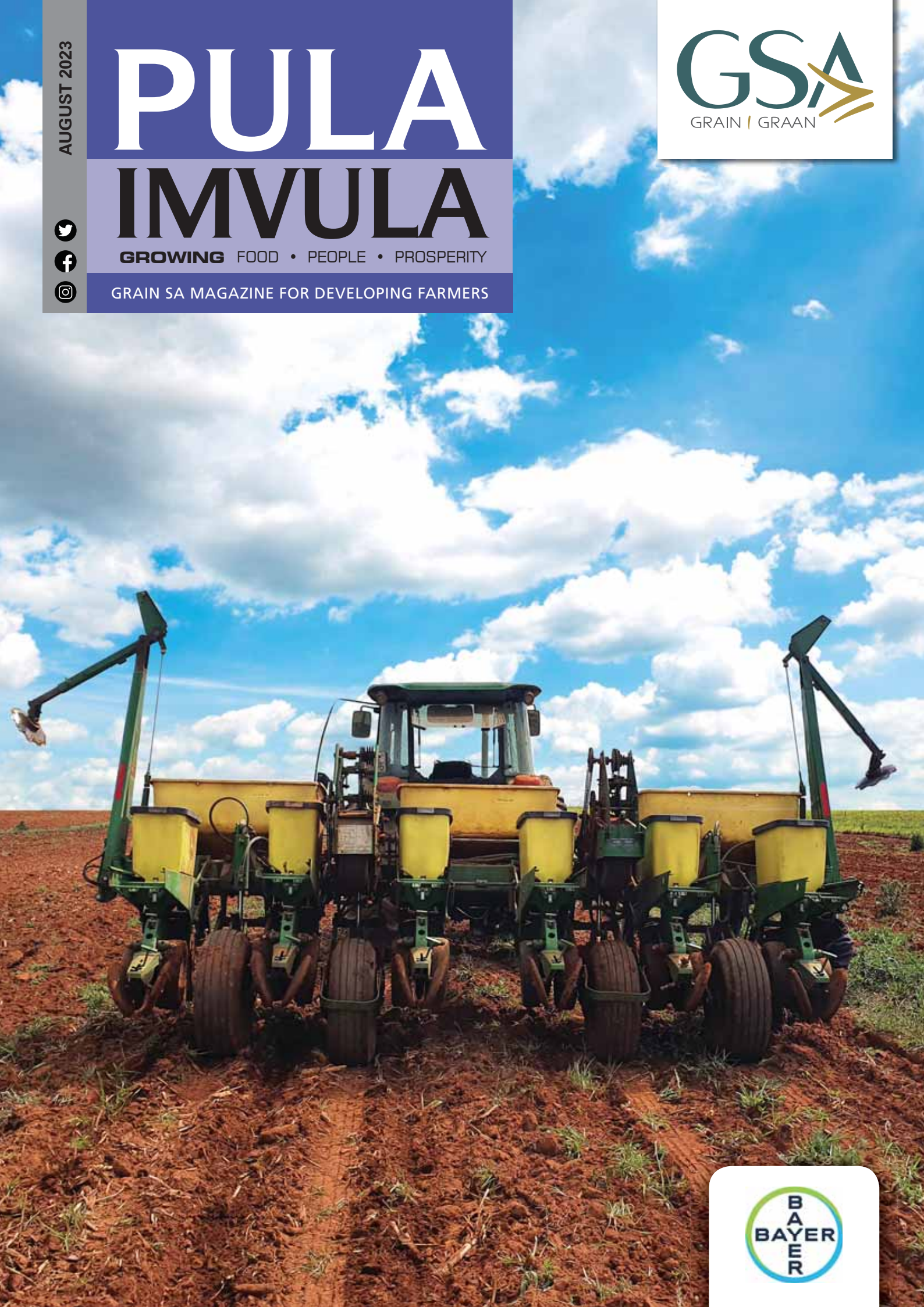

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# PULA IMVULA


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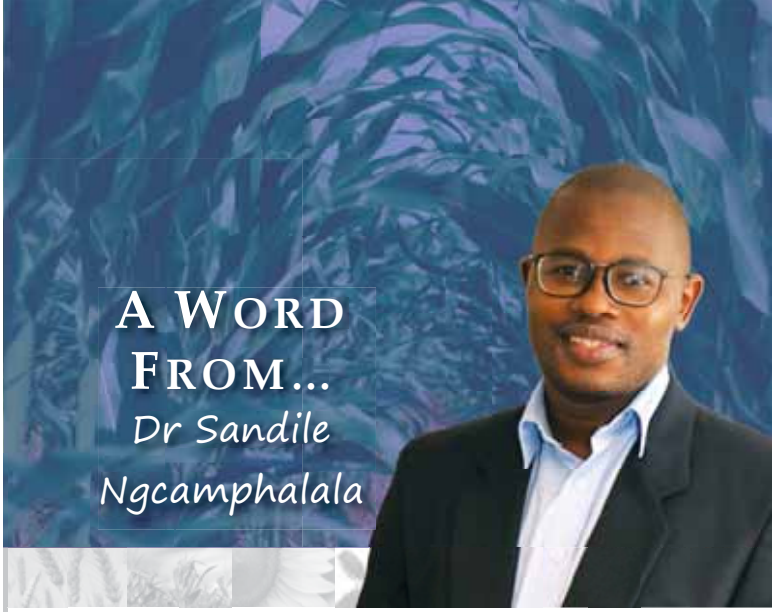
*Photo: Farmer Development team.*









# A Word From... Dr Sandile Ngcamphalala

MOST FARMERS ARE BY NOW DONE HARVESTING AND ALREADY PREPARING FOR THE NEW SEASON. CONGRATULATIONS FOR MANAGING TO GET THE CROP OFF THE LANDS. IT WAS PARTICULARLY TOUGH FOR SOYBEAN AND DRYBEAN FARMERS, AS MANY COULDN'T GET INTO THE FIELD TO HARVEST DUE TO CONTINUOUSLY WET CONDITIONS.

While it was a great season for many farmers, there were also numerous farmers who experienced an extremely difficult season. The dry spells experienced since last December until the first week of February meant delayed planting for many.

It just never stopped raining until the first week of June. The crop couldn't thrive in the very wet and mostly cold conditions, especially in the KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Free State regions. Most farmers in the eastern parts of the country watched as their crop was wasted in fields that were inaccessible for harvesting. In many cases, manual labour had to be utilised to try and rescue the crop.

> Climate variability is a reality for all grain farmers in South Africa. The weather has become increasingly more unreliable in most areas.

Climate variability is a reality for all grain farmers in South Africa. The weather has become increasingly more unreliable in most areas. Predictions indicate a much drier season, but we can't control the prospects.

Anything is possible. The least we can do, is to plan properly, prepare and plant in time. As we conclude the harvesting season, I want to convey a word of support and solidarity, as we already plan for the new season.

To our partners, we remain grateful for your collaboration, continued generosity and financial support to the programme. With your support, we continue to stand and farmers are supported. As we conclude the 2022/2023 season and look forward to 2023/2024, let's continue to collaborate and unite to ensure a profitable and sustainability grain industry. This industry feeds the nation, is one of the biggest employers and is at the core of our country's stability and future.

*– **Dr Sandile Ngcamphalala is the Farmer Development lead at Grain SA.***

# CALCULATE THE COST BEFORE YOU PLANT

A FARM MUST BE SEEN AS A BUSINESS AND RUN ACCORDINGLY. FARMING IS NOT ONLY ABOUT THE PHYSICAL WORK BEING DONE TO PRODUCE THE CROP, BUT MUST ALSO MAKE A PROFIT. STRICT MANAGEMENT RULES MUST BE ESTABLISHED, IMPLEMENTED AND FOLLOWED TO ENSURE THAT FARMERS CAN PRODUCE PROFITABLY AND SUSTAINABLY.

In the January 2023 issue of *Pula*, the article 'Plan ahead for the planting season' was published. In this article, detailed information was provided to compile your own production cost. In the July issue of *Pula*, the article 'Prevent unplanned financial surprises' appeared, where the fixed cost dilemma was discussed in detail.

Planting is a time-sensitive game and choosing the correct planting timeframe can be tricky. So, when is it practical to plant? To answer this question, you must look at input costs and income.

## INPUT COSTS

Farming input costs are all the costs incurred to produce a crop. To make it more applicable to agriculture, input costs are defined as all the costs related to the production and harvesting of crops such as fuel, fertiliser and agricultural chemicals.

Input costs can be divided into two different categories, namely:

- **Fixed cost**, which does not change with an increase or decrease in the number of goods and services produced or sold. In agricultural terms, these are the costs that a farmer must pay, regardless of whether or not he produces. These are monthly or annual costs such as electricity line hire, rent, salaries and the cost of living – expenses that will remain the same on a monthly or yearly basis.
- **Variable cost** changes in proportion to how much a company produces or sells. In agricultural terms, this is the cost that increases if production increases. These costs will increase or decrease when production increases or decreases. Examples of these are fuel, seed, agricultural chemicals and fertiliser.

**1** ***Producer price estimate for Central and Western Higveld dryland maize, sunflower and soybeans for the 2023/2024 production year.***

| Current producer grain price determination for the best grade at the nearest silo (R/t) * | Maize at R3 900/t | | | Sunflower at R8 600/t | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Planning yield (t/ha)** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **1** | **1,5** | **2** |
| Gross value of production (R/ha) @ average price of crop | 11 700 | 15 600 | 19 500 | 8 600 | 12 900 | 17 200 |
| | | | | | | |
| **Directly allocatable variable costs (R/ha)** | | | | | | |
| Seed and seedlings | 1 551,58 | 1 706,74 | 2 017,06 | 582,45 | 776,60 | 873,67 |
| Fertiliser | 3 605,11 | 4 806,81 | 6 008,51 | 2 004,03 | 2 383,08 | 2 951,65 |
| Lime | 219,38 | 219,38 | 219,38 | 219,38 | 219,38 | 219,38 |
| Fuel | 1 737,48 | 1 799,52 | 1 861,56 | 1 463,24 | 1 505,97 | 1 548,69 |
| Repairs | 773,83 | 782,32 | 790,82 | 675,59 | 679,84 | 684,09 |
| Herbicides | 1 096,01 | 1 096,01 | 1 096,01 | 433,27 | 433,27 | 433,27 |
| Pesticides | 710,48 | 710,48 | 710,48 | 91,04 | 91,04 | 91,04 |
| Input insurance | 512,46 | 683,28 | 854,10 | 188,39 | 282,58 | 376,78 |
| Price hedging | 582,57 | 678,64 | 781,98 | 171,45 | 194,95 | 221,89 |
| Contract work | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Crop insurance | 268,81 | 358,41 | 448,01 | 173,90 | 260,85 | 347,80 |
| Aerial spraying | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Production credit interest | 552,89 | 642,08 | 739,40 | 300,14 | 341,38 | 387,41 |
| **Total directly allocatable variable costs (R/ha)** | **11 610,59** | **13 483,67** | **15 527,31** | **6 302,87** | **7 168,93** | **8 135,67** |
| **Total overhead costs (R/ha)** | **3 606,79** | **3 606,79** | **3 606,79** | **3 039,97** | **3 039,97** | **3 039,97** |
| **Total cost per ha before physical marketing (R/ha)** | **15 217,38** | **17 090,46** | **19 134,09** | **9 342,84** | **10 208,90** | **11 175,65** |
| **Margin per hectare before marketing costs and profit (R/ha)** | **-3 517,38** | **-1 490,46** | **365,91** | **-742,84** | **2 691,10** | **6 024,35** |
| **Total cost per ton before physical marketing (R/ton)** | **5 072,46** | **4 272,62** | **3 826,82** | **9 342,84** | **6 805,94** | **5 587,82** |

** (Price minus total marketing cost)*

**In short, total cost = variable cost + fixed cost.** In farming terms, the total cost to produce the crop is equal to the overhead expenses such as rent, upkeep, electricity line hire, levies and taxes, plus expenses such as the cost of seed, fertiliser, fuel and agricultural chemicals.

## INCOME

Income is the amount of money or property received for goods sold or services delivered.

**Gross income** for agriculture is the total amount of money that a farmer receives for the product that he produces and delivers. In practical maize terms, it means the Safex price less transport differential less the costs at the silo – in other words, the net farmgate price times the yield is your gross income.

**Net income** can also be referred to as profit. It is the income after all expenses have been subtracted. Expenses include all expenses incurred such as taxes, fuel, levies, fertiliser and subtractions.

**Net income = gross income minus expenses.**

## WHEN IS IT NOT VIABLE TO PLANT?

The goal of any farmer should be to produce products in such a way that he can cover the cost of his crop and living expenses – and have enough left to either plant the crop cash, or to serve as an asset which helps him to get a loan.

Farmers should therefore use the following equation to test the viability of planting:

**Profit/loss = income minus expenses**

In farming terms, this means that the net income (profit) is equal to the money a farmer receives from selling his product minus the cost of production.

It is very important for farmers to do their homework properly before they commit to planting a crop. This means that the farmer must be accurate in his prediction of costs and income, as an inaccurate prediction of these concepts can lead to inefficiency and loss.

## COST FOR THE 2023/2024 SEASON

How much is it going to cost to plant a hectare in the 2023/2024 production year?

**Central and Western Highveld production regions**

In **Table 1,** the cost for maize, sunflower and soybeans for the Central and Western Highveld production regions is shown for the different yields. These costs are an example – it can differ drastically from this calculation. The prices for fertiliser, herbicide, pesticide and fuel

| Soybeans at R7 800/t | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | **1,5** | **2** |
| 7 800 | 11 700 | 15 600 |
| | | |
| | | |
| 908,04 | 1 362,05 | 1 589,06 |
| 254,78 | 254,78 | 235,91 |
| 255,42 | 255,42 | 255,42 |
| 1 711,77 | 1 803,54 | 1 598,16 |
| 1 542,86 | 1 630,26 | 1 717,66 |
| 941,85 | 941,85 | 941,85 |
| 961,07 | 961,07 | 961,07 |
| - | - | - |
| 278,68 | 347,52 | 410,29 |
| - | - | - |
| 804,99 | 1 207,48 | 1 609,98 |
| - | - | - |
| 382,97 | 438,20 | 465,97 |
| **8 042,43** | **9 202,17** | **9 785,37** |
| **3 279,63** | **3 279,63** | **3 279,63** |
| **11 322,06** | **12 481,8** | **13 065,00** |
| **-3 522,06** | **-781,8** | **2 535,00** |
| **11 322,06** | **8 321,2** | **6532,50** |

can still change before planting. Every farmer must compile his own budget and then decide accordingly.

- According to Table 1, the price for a 3-ton yield must be at least R5 072,46 and with a 5-ton yield, the farmer's price must be at R3 826,82 to break even.
- For sunflower, the breakeven price for 1 ton per hectare must be R9 342,84 and for a 2-ton yield, it must be R6 805,94.

> Farming input costs are all the costs incurred to produce a crop.

**Eastern Highveld production regions**

In **Table 2**, the Eastern Highveld production region's cost for maize and soybeans at different yields is shown. These costs as mentioned are an example and can also differ drastically from this calculation. Every farmer must compile his own budget and then decide accordingly.

- According to Table 2, the price for a 4,5-ton yield must be at least R4 330 and with a 7-ton yield, the farmer's price must be at R3 608,09 to break even.
- For soybeans, the breakeven price for 1,5 ton per hectare must be R10 324,60 and for a 3-ton yield, it must be R6 248,81. In the soybeans budget, the fertiliser (or fertiliser correction) has been included.

***CHRISTIAAN VERCUIEL, AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIST, GRAIN SA AND PIETMAN BOTHA, INDEPENDENT AGRICULTURAL CONSULTANT***

**2** ***Producer price estimate for Eastern Higveld dryland maize and soybeans for the 2023/2024 production year.***

| Current producer grain price determination for best grade at nearest silo (R/t) * | Maize at R3 900/t | | | Soybeans at R7 800/t | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Planning yield (t/ha)** | **4,5** | **5,5** | **7** | **1,5** | **2,00** | **3,00** |
| Gross value of production (R/ha) @ average price of crop | 17 550 | 21 450 | 27 300 | 11 700 | 15 600 | 23 400 |
| | | | | | | |
| **Directly allocatable variable costs (R/ha)** | | | | | | |
| Seed and seedlings | 2 644,75 | 3 359,49 | 4 074,27 | 1 518,91 | 1 518,91 | 1 772,06 |
| Fertiliser | 5 722,23 | 6 965,02 | 8 829,21 | 4 806,53 | 5 483,88 | 6 431,50 |
| Lime | 272,97 | 272,97 | 272,97 | - | - | - |
| Fuel | 1 519,65 | 1 581,68 | 1 663,03 | 1 337,81 | 1 380,53 | 1 442,57 |
| Repairs | 784,86 | 793,78 | 807,16 | 602,89 | 607,35 | 616,28 |
| Herbicides | 1 504,78 | 1 504,78 | 1 504,78 | 1 617,11 | 1 617,11 | 1 617,11 |
| Pesticide | 960,26 | 960,26 | 960,26 | 420,38 | 420,38 | 420,38 |
| Input insurance | 330,73 | 404,23 | 514,47 | 242,98 | 323,97 | 485,96 |
| Price hedging | 802,76 | 925,37 | 1 091,76 | 294,36 | 322,97 | 374,41 |
| Contract work | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Crop insurance | 579,20 | 707,91 | 900,98 | 785,01 | 1 046,68 | 1 570,02 |
| Aerial spraying | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Production credit interest | 756,11 | 873,77 | 1 030,94 | 581,30 | 636,09 | 736,51 |
| **Total directly allocatable variable costs (R/ha)** | **15 878,25** | **18 349,27** | **21 649,84** | **12 207,27** | **13 357,86** | **15 466,80** |
| **Total overhead costs (R/ha)** | **3 606,79** | **3 606,79** | **3 606,79** | **3 279,63** | **3 279,63** | **3 279,63** |
| **Total cost per ha before physical marketing (R/ha)** | **19 485,04** | **21 956,06** | **25 256,63** | **15 486,90** | **16 637,49** | **18 746,43** |
| **Margin per hectare before marketing costs and profit (R/ha)** | **-1 935,04** | **-506,06** | **2 043,37** | **-3 786,90** | **-1 037,49** | **4 653,57** |
| **Total cost per ton before physical marketing (R/ton)** | **4 330,01** | **3 992,01** | **3 608,09** | **10 324,60** | **8 318,75** | **6 248,81** |

** (Price minus total marketing cost)*

# Don't take SHORTCUTS to save money

IT IS IMPORTANT TO VIEW YOUR FARMING ENTERPRISE AS THE SMALL BUSINESS IT REALLY IS AND ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THERE ARE IMPORTANT ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES THAT MUST BE MANAGED REGARDING YOUR DAY-TO-DAY FINANCES.

A scary statistic for start-ups or small enterprises is that most will fail within the first 18 to 24 months. Often poor financial management is a major contributing factor to this.

You might think that you are saving money by managing your cashflow yourself, but this aspect is often neglected and not everyone has the required skillset to do it. An accountant or bookkeeper has the expertise to correctly record the cashflow from different accounts, and track invoices for expense accounts and income.

## ACCOUNTANT VS BOOKKEEPER

It is important to understand the difference between an accountant and a bookkeeper, as they are two related but distinct professions:

- Bookkeepers record a business's day-to-day financial transactions, whereas accountants focus more on the big picture. Bookkeepers record and organise financial data, while accountants analyse, interpret and summarise financial information. Bookkeepers do not analyse these numbers or offer financial advice.
- Accountants have more training, experience and responsibility. Their experience in tax law, auditing and financial planning is invaluable, as they can offer more in-depth advice to businesses. They have the authority to audit, compile and sign off a business's financial statements.
- Accountants can handle more important matters such as data management, financial analysis and the generation of financial reports. They also ensure that your company meets the South African Revenue Service (SARS) regulatory compliance.
- Bookkeepers handle financial administrative tasks. They are responsible for consolidating books, following up on overdue payments, processing payments for suppliers, and can even process the payroll and complete UIF/PAYE. The more work they do on your behalf, the more they will charge you per hour.

For basic financial and administrative tasks, it's normal to start by hiring a bookkeeper since they charge a significantly cheaper hourly rate. Your bookkeeper will usually work in relationship with an accountant, or even in the office of an accountant's practice.

## IMPORTANT TO KNOW

- If you need to get funding for your business – and in some cases to open a bank account – you need to have financial statements. They present the business's financial information in a structured way that is easy to understand.
- It is compulsory for small, medium and large businesses to submit signed financial statements to SARS with the submission of their ITR14 (company tax return). These are submitted via SARS e-Filing when the ITR14 is submitted and must be signed off by the public officer.
- The minimum requirement of the financial statements is that they contain a balance sheet, income statement and notes.
- The submission of financial statements is optional for companies classified as dormant, body corporates or microbusinesses (turnover less than R1 million). ■

***JENNY MATHEWS,***
***MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT***
***SPECIALIST AND EDUCATOR***

WORDS OF WISDOM

*There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work and learning from failure.*

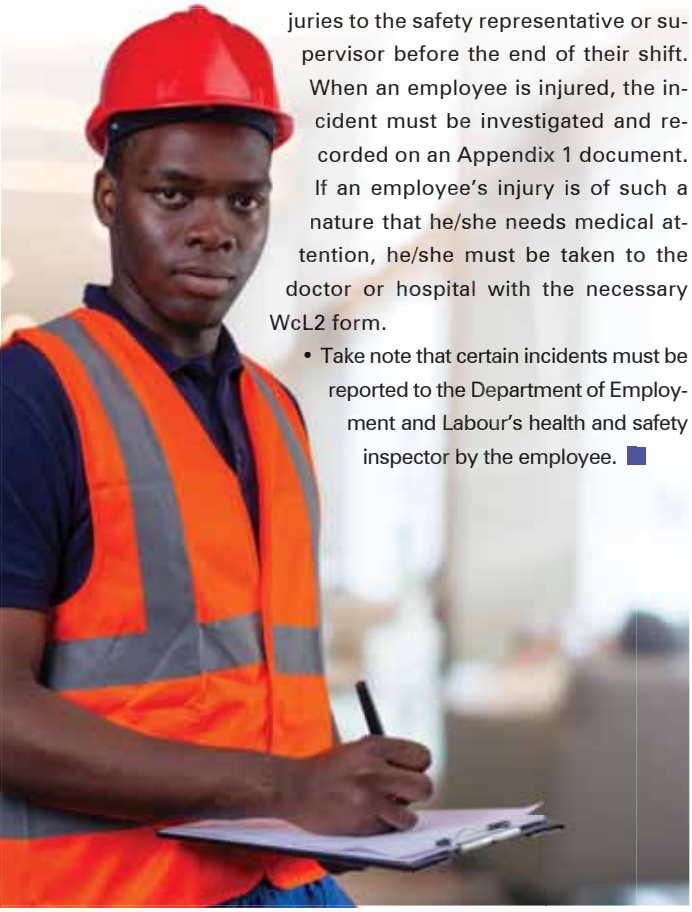
~ COLIN POWELL
former United States secretary of state

# Safety: *Incidents*

THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT STIPULATES THAT EMPLOYEES MUST ESTABLISH A SAFE AND HEALTHY WORKPLACE FOR THEIR WORKERS. HOWEVER, EMPLOYEES SHOULD ALSO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN SAFETY.

Here are some guidelines to apply:

- The employer must compile a risk analysis that is updated regularly when the work environment and relevant tasks change.
- An induction plan must be implemented with all new employees. The plan must be reviewed annually.
- Employees must also see that the environment they work in, is safe. Equipment should be inspected monthly, and faults should be reported. Any equipment deemed unsafe should only be used again after it has been repaired.
- If there are more than 20 employees, a safety representative who received formal training must be elected to represent the workplace. There should be one safety representative for every 50 staff members.
- Employees must report all incidents or injuries to the safety representative or supervisor before the end of their shift. When an employee is injured, the incident must be investigated and recorded on an Appendix 1 document. If an employee's injury is of such a nature that he/she needs medical attention, he/she must be taken to the doctor or hospital with the necessary WcL2 form.
- Take note that certain incidents must be reported to the Department of Employment and Labour's health and safety inspector by the employee.



*CHARL SAAYMAN, HEALTH AND SAFETY CONSULTANT AT MEGA HEALTH AND SAFETY*

# Animal health

ACCORDING TO THE RED MEAT PRODUCERS' ORGANISATION (RPO), AN ANIMAL HEALTH PLAN IDENTIFIES RISKS TO ANIMAL HEALTH, EFFECTIVELY PRIORITISES THESE RISKS AND PUTS IN PLACE STRATEGIES TO REDUCE AND/OR ELIMINATE THEM, THEREBY REDUCING THE CHANCE OF DISEASES OCCURRING.

The loss of a cow can easily amount to as much as R10 000, so one dead cow is one too many for a cattle farmer. In most cases, this loss could have been prevented if the farm's animal health plan was in place and implemented on time. A health management programme for a cattle farmer keeps the money in the bank.

Farmers should use the animal health plan as a management tool, and not see it as a daily chore that adds no value. The RPO recommends that an animal health plan must be based on farm-specific experiences and problems, as farming operations differ. It must be able to assist the farmer in identifying and controlling the specific health problems of the individual farm for which it has been designed, to improve and maintain animal welfare.

> It is important that every farmer must implement a good animal health programme.

The implementation of an animal health plan entails much more than just saving the animals. It can help the animals to stay in condition, to produce a heavier weaner calf, and also helps the cow to get pregnant again. A cow that does not calve, leads to a big financial loss for the farming operation – and 5 kg per calf lost in growth on 100 calves can cause a loss of R15 000, which is a large amount of money.

A calving percentage that increases from 70% to 80%, also leads to a huge difference. With a weaner calf price of R30 per kilogram, this difference can mean R66 000 extra. One can definitely use this money for something!

It is not only the animal health plan that can enhance the calving percentage. When all aspects of farming are done correctly, it will insure a good calving percentage. Enough high-quality feed at the right times is critically for good calf growth and to maintain a good calving percentage.

It is important that every farmer must implement a good animal health programme. In **Table 1**, an example of a health management programme for a spring calving system is shown.

The RPO shares two fundamental and basic foundations of any effective animal health plan:

- A competent vet or livestock specialist.
- A farmer who is committed to the programme, has a good recordkeeping system and complies with the recommendations of the vet.

Once you have your programme ready, consult with your veterinarian and amend it to suit your farming operation. The veterinarians usually have a system with relevant information in place, where all the disease outbreaks are stated.

Farmers have a responsibility to produce safe products, and your animal health plan is crucial to your sustainability.

# plan curbs LOSSES

**1** *Health management programme for a spring calving system.*

| MONTH | SEPT | OCT | NOV | DEC | JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **COWS** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Production | Calves | | | Serve | | | Pregnancy | Weaning | Selling old and non-pregnant cows | | | |
| Vaccination programme | Vibriosis Rift Valley fever | RB51 non-pregnant cows | | | | | Multimun with Se | Pasteurella BVD | Black quarter, botulism and anthrax | Vit A, D, E | Rift Valley fever | Lumpy skin disease, *E.coli* |
| **HEIFERS AND BULL CALVES** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **MONTH** | **SEPT** | **OCT** | **NOV** | **DEC** | **JAN** | **FEB** | **MAR** | **APR** | **MAY** | **JUN** | **JUL** | **AUG** |
| Age (months) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| Production | | | | | | | | Sell weaners and bull calves | | | | |
| Vaccination programme | | | | BM heifers | Black quarter, botulism and anthrax, Pasteurella BVD, IBR P13 (heifers) | | Multimun with Se | | RB51 2nd vaccination heifers | Vit A, D, E | Rift Valley fever | Vibriosis, BM heifers, lumpy skin disease |
| **HEIFERS 1 - 2 YEARS** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **MONTH** | **SEPT** | **OCT** | **NOV** | **DEC** | **JAN** | **FEB** | **MAR** | **APR** | **MAY** | **JUN** | **JUL** | **AUG** |
| Age (months) | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 |
| Vaccination programme | | | | | | RB51 | Multimun with Se | | Blackleg, botulism and anthrax | Vit A, D, E | Rift Valley fever | Lumpy skin, Pasteurella, BVD, IBR, P13 |
| **HEIFERS 2 - 3 YEARS** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **MONTH** | **SEPT** | **OCT** | **NOV** | **DEC** | **JAN** | **FEB** | **MAR** | **APR** | **MAY** | **JUN** | **JUL** | **AUG** |
| Age (months) | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 32 | 33 | 34 | 35 | 36 |
| Vaccination programme | Vibriosis | | | | | RB51 | Multimun with Se | | Blackleg, botulism and anthrax | Vit A, D, E | Rift Valley fever | Lumpy skin, Pasteurella, BVD, IBR, P13 |
| **FIRST CALF COWS** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **MONTH** | **SEPT** | **OCT** | **NOV** | **DEC** | **JAN** | **FEB** | **MAR** | **APR** | **MAY** | **JUN** | **JUL** | **AUG** |
| Age (months) | 37 | 38 | 39 | 40 | 41 | 42 | 43 | 44 | 45 | 46 | 47 | 48 |
| Vaccination programme | Vibriosis | | | | | RB51 | Multimun with Se | | Blackleg, botulism and anthrax | Vit A, D, E | Rift Valley fever | Lumpy skin, Pasteurella, BVD, IBR, P13 |
| **INTERNAL PARASITES THAT OCCUR REGULARLY IN CATTLE** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **MONTH** | **SEPT** | **OCT** | **NOV** | **DEC** | **JAN** | **FEB** | **MAR** | **APR** | **MAY** | **JUN** | **JUL** | **AUG** |
| Round worms | All animals; note the young animals in particular | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Liver fluke | Strategic treatment: All animals | | | Tactical treatment: All animals | | | | Strategic treatment: All animals | | | | Strategic treatment: All animals |
| Conical fluke | | | | | | | | Look out for conical fluke in these months in particular | | | | |
| Tapeworm and coccidia | | Tapeworm: Whole year suckling calves | | | | | Coccidia: Whole year young calves (3 weeks+) | | | | | |

*PIETMAN BOTHA, INDEPENDENT AGRICULTURAL CONSULTANT*

# HOW TO PREVENT RODENT damage to implements

ANIMALS NEED A FEW THINGS TO SURVIVE: FOOD, WATER, SHELTER, A PLACE TO LIVE, A PLACE TO BREED AND AN ESCAPE ROUTE IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY. RODENTS LIKE BROWN AND BLACK RATS AND HOUSE MICE HAVE ADAPTED OVER TIME TO FIND ALL THEIR LIVING NEEDS IN MAN-MADE ENVIRONMENTS.

Brown rats and house mice are the most common rodents that plague human environments. Black rats, also known as roof rats, are rare in South Africa. Most farmyards have mice and rats, and storage facilities on farms are an ideal living space for these creatures. Animal feed, building materials, tractors, implements, dripping taps, wood and rubbish found in and around storage units are like a magnet for these creatures.

## DAMAGE CAUSED BY RATS AND MICE

Rodents gnaw and their front teeth (gnawing teeth) never stop growing. They use these teeth to finely nibble food and they also gnaw on any reasonably hard material to keep their teeth sharp and the right length. Any wood (even roof beams) can fall prey to rats and mice, while cardboard boxes are gnawed for nesting material.

However, the biggest damage is caused when these little pests get into the engines of vehicles and implements, and damage or even gnaw off electrical conductors (wiring). The same can also happen with the wiring of buildings, which can lead to short circuits that can cause dangerous fires. Rodents urinating on food, pose serious health risks for humans and animals.

Local markets and export markets are also favourable places for rodents. Rodent control must be applied with great urgency to prevent rodent-borne pathogens being spread through fresh food.

## KEEP NATURE SAFE

Barn owls and spotted eagle-owls are common farmyard residents. In the summer months, there can even be common buzzards in farmyards hunting rodents. Although snakes make most people run away, they should be welcomed in warehouses as they feed on rodents and can eliminate these pests for the farmer. Remember that dogs and cats are not only pets, but also keen rodent hunters.

The last thing that needs to happen is for the owls, birds of prey and predators to get secondary poisoning from rat poison. These poisons must therefore be chosen and used with great care, as dogs are inclined to eat anything that looks or smells like food. If rat poison is not used according to the label, dogs can be poisoned and even die from it.

## LET OWLS HELP YOU

Owls are highly effective rat and mouse catchers. Barn owls are more focussed on mice than rats. If a breeding pair has chicks in a nest (sometimes as many as eight in one brood), they will catch up to 60 mice each night. A pair of spotted eagle-owls with two chicks can catch up to eight rats and probably more than 20 mice every night. It is therefore worthwhile to attract owls to a farmyard where there are storage facilities.

Many farmers erect owl houses where owls can nest – some even build the boxes themselves from inexpensive wood. JoJo Tanks also provides a five-star owl box that is made from extremely durable high-density polyethylene and is virtually indestructible. These boxes can be mounted against the outer wall of the warehouse or shed, or stand on a 4 m high pole, anywhere in the farmyard.

Barn owls and spotted eagle-owls are tolerant to the presence of people and even noisy dogs such as Jack Russells. If barn owls defecate in the storage facilities (which can be quite large amounts), the best solution to prevent them from sitting there is to put thin binding wire on the beams. However, first erect the owl boxes and simply put

*The use of rodenticide is sometimes unavoidable.*

up some additional 4 m high poles as seating around the storage facility. Another plan is to hang a canvas under the beams where they sit, so that the droppings fall on it and not on tractors and implements.

## USING RAT POISON

Start using rat poison if rodents multiply so rapidly that even the owls cannot keep these pests under control. A few golden rules for the safe and responsible use of rat poison include:

- Only registered rat poison may be used. People who mix carbamate insecticides with food to kill rodents not only act illegally, but also create a significant risk with such illegal uses.
- Always place rodent baits such as wax blocks, pasta blocks, pellets and grain baits in bait containers in spaces where they are completely out of reach of dogs and children. Dogs and children are extremely curious and will investigate and may even eat the bait, sometimes with fatal consequences.

> The biggest damage is caused when these little pests get into the engines of vehicles and implements, and damage or even gnaw off electrical conductors (wiring).

- Try to use the rodent bait when there are no owl chicks in nests. Owls then catch fewer rodents, which will reduce the risk of secondary poisoning.
- Use rat poison that poses little or no secondary poisoning risk to owls. There are several of these poisons available in South Africa. Some 'experts' claim that all rat poisons cause secondary poisoning of owls. This is blatant nonsense by uninformed people who have no idea of the principles of toxicology.
- Use highly attractive rat poison formulations in farm storage units where food is stored, otherwise rodents will not eat the bait. Pasta baits are usually very successful where there is a lot of food. Place wax blocks in bait containers in engines and implements as a constant buffer against rodents damaging electrical wiring while the tools are not in use.
- There is also a spore powder available that can be used in rodents' burrows or pathways. Rodents pick up the spore powder in their fur and ingest it when they clean themselves.
- Liquid bait can also be used successfully, but it may only be supplied by dealers who have licences for the sale of dangerous substances and keep a poison register.
- Regardless of which poison is used, the risk of secondary poisoning can be further reduced if you get rid of the dead rodents. Four mornings after the first application, inspect the inside and outside buildings for dead or dying rodents. Collect and dispose of them.

Rat poison containing coumatetralyl, difenacoum and cholecalciferol have a very low risk of secondary poisoning of owls. Please note that all these poisons, like the others that are less safe for owls, are deadly for dogs.

To determine if there are rodent infestations, it is important to do a weekly inspection of the storage facilities on the farm. When droppings, an unpleasant urine smell or gnawing marks are noticed, rat poison should be used. ■

***DR GERHARD VERDOORN, OPERATIONS AND STEWARDSHIP MANAGER, CROPLIFE SA.***
***FIRST PUBLISHED IN SA GRAAN/GRAIN, AUGUST 2022.***

# REDUCE LIVESTOCK losses due to veld fires

VELD FIRES ARE COMMON IN SOUTH AFRICA AND ACCORDING TO LOCAL STUDIES, WILL INCREASE IN FREQUENCY OVER THE NEXT THREE DECADES. FARMERS ARE EMOTIONALLY AND FINANCIALLY AFFECTED BY FIRES, SUSTAINING LOSSES INCLUDING FEED, FACILITIES, LIVESTOCK AND THE FUTURE PERFORMANCE OF SURVIVING LIVESTOCK EXPOSED TO SMOKE.

The decision-making process about treating animals affected by fires needs to integrate several factors, including the severity of the burn wound and its clinical prognosis, the availability of skilled personnel to care for the animals, adequate shelter, feed and water, the cost of treatment and long-term consequences for their reproductive performance due to smoke exposure.

Offering prognostic hope for moderately burned animals without neglecting their welfare, as contemplated in local legislation, can help mitigate the sense of loss that farmers experience in these situations.

## BURN INJURY IN LIVESTOCK – MORE THAN SKIN BURN

Live tissue burns are the most common lesion observed on livestock victims of veld fires. These lesions occur due to direct contact with flames or heat radiation from flames. The management of severe burn lesions is difficult due to the type of care and resources needed, costs involved and the length of the healing time.

A massive loss of fluid and electrolytes leads to shock in animals with partial-thickness burns (second degree) of more than 15% of their total body surface area (TBSA) and/or more than 5% of their TBSA full-thickness burns (third degree). Hence, life-saving intravenous fluid therapy (resuscitation) is necessary in these cases. Moreover, smoke inhalation can severely affect the respiratory system and increase the severity of the burn injury, although it may not be detectable over the first seven to ten days.

## ASSESSING ANIMALS, ASSIGNING PRIORITIES

During veld fires the first challenge is accessibility to the affected area, followed by resources to move animals to safer ground. The first approach in such situations would thus be to visually identify animals that would benefit from being moved to receive care immediately, and those that need to be euthanised immediately (first-line assessment). At this stage, injured animals will be mainly evaluated on how they present (comatose vs alert) and mobility (can walk vs can't rise/walk).

Comatose sheep have been reported to have a hopeless prognosis within the first 24 hours, especially if combined with severe burns on their lower legs and heavy swelling on the head and front limbs. In general, burned animals with an inability to stand and move have been correlated with poor survivability, hence euthanasia is indicated.

It is important to bear in mind that, in most cases, treatment will be done based on veterinary resources available on a mobile setting – this means identifying animals with the best chance of response to treatment is a priority. Thereafter, a more detailed treatment plan can be developed according to the evolution of the patient.

### Clinical signs to consider in second-line assessment

The second stage would be to physically examine animals identified as possibly benefitting from treatment intervention. Some will be in burn shock, need intravenous fluid and have respiratory affectation, although this process can take up to two weeks to be evident. Farmers should seek veterinary advice regarding treatment needs to make cost-effective decisions.

## EVALUATION OF BURN LESIONS

When evaluating burn lesions, it is important to determine the extent and depth of the burn body surface, which will provide an indication of the severity of the injury and will help in determining the case prognosis.

The following anatomic areas have been defined as percentages of the total body surface: Head 7%, back 7%, left costal wall and left abdominal wall 24%, right costal wall and right abdominal wall 24%, udder 4%, ventral thorax and abdomen 7%, each foreleg 4% (8% for both), each hindleg 6% (12% for both), perineal area 6% and tail 1% – see **Figure 1**.

The survivability of the animals is associated with the percentage of the body that is affected, and decreases with the extent of the burn wound:

- 10% to 20% TBSA partial-thickness burns: 100% survivability, although these animals will need basic fluid therapy.
- 20% to 50% TBSA partial-thickness burns: Approximately 87% survivability with intensive care, which will include aggressive fluid therapy, maintaining a clean wound with daily nursing and pain relief.
- 50% to 70% TBSA combined partial-thickness and full-thickness burns: 27% survivability under specialist care.

In all cases the survivability substantially decreases with smoke inhalation and critical location burns.

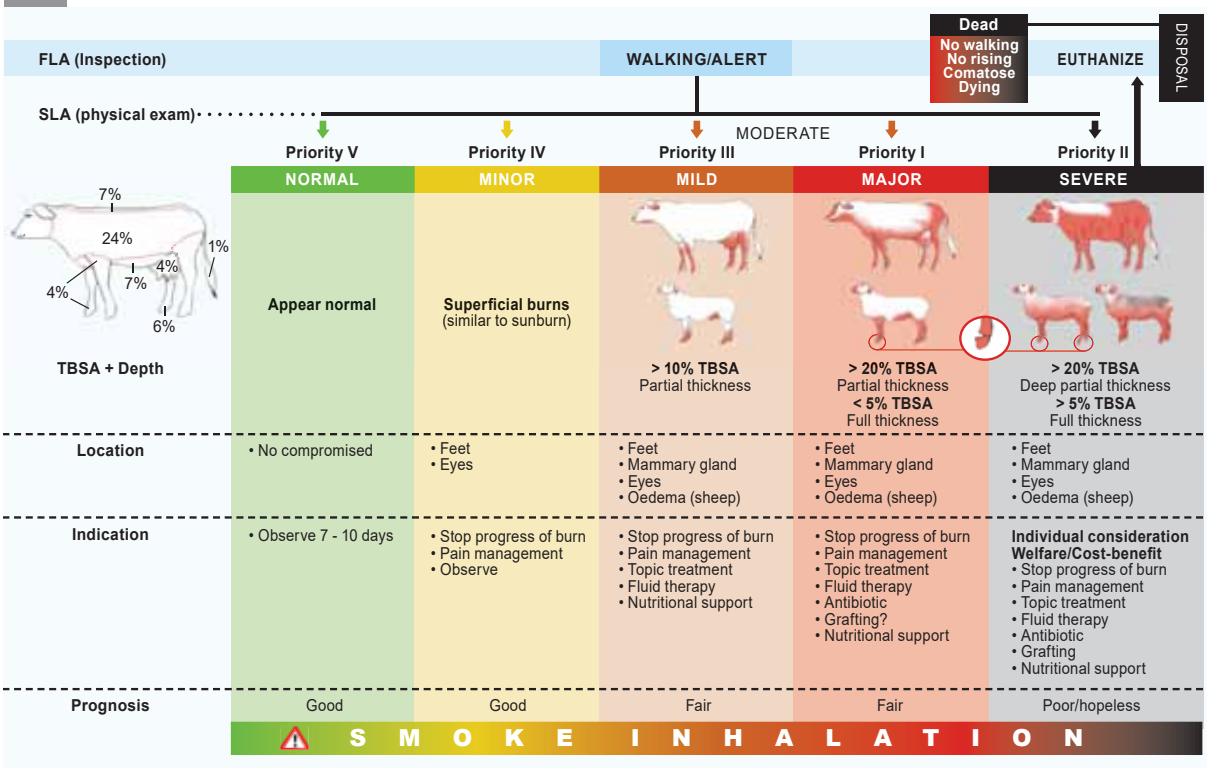
### Pay special attention to the location of burn injuries

Burn injuries are commonly found in the face, ears, mouth and lower body (limbs, feet and udder) in ruminants. Sheep not shorn will have wool protecting their skin, but bare areas will be fully exposed.

Movement-restrictive lesions on the limbs, such as affected claws, prompt the need to provide feed and water within reach, and special soft bedding. Moreover, these can eventually be movement-restrictive for the animal due to scarring constriction once healed.

When reassessing animals, those with more than one lost claw should be euthanised, as the condition is painful and prone to fly strike and/or secondary infections. Hence, damage to the legs is an important indicator of the survivability in sheep. However, burned legs in restricted areas not associated with swelling have been reported to heal with appropriate care in approximately 30 days.

**1** ***Triage burns in ruminants.***




*Note: Uses the most used predictors of survivability in burned animals: %TBSA, depth of burns, oedema location on first 24 hours (sheep), limbs/feet affectation (sheep and cows), respiratory affectation/SI, mammary gland/age (cow).*

Monitoring the body weight is also an indicator of survivability. Endoparasite control in burned sheep under treatment is important, as it can become an added complication due to immunosuppression. Control measures for these ailments should always be considered in the treatment plan.

Cattle feet burns are more serious than in ovine animals. Cattle will not move to eat under these circumstances, hence nursing injured cattle will be a costly and lengthy process. Euthanasia is indicated when the animal shows severely affected limbs and/or no improvement despite treatment, along with a worsening body condition.

Burned udders also need special consideration, as they may be important for future performance.

Mature dairy cows affected by teat burns heal quicker and more satisfactorily, with less anatomic distortion and successful return to normal lactation in comparison to heifers. The healing time for extended superficial burns in adult cows is about four months and usually has a good prognosis, although it needs pain management.

Partial-thickness burns have a poorer prognosis when the time for recovery for subsequent lactation (especially in heifers) is three months or less – bending of the teat and obstruction of the teat canal have been reported as a complication in young animals, which makes the prognosis poorer. Topical treatment with emollients and antibiotics is advocated, and systemic antibiotics should only be used in cases of complications such as mastitis.

## FIRST AID FOR BURNS

- Once established that the animal will be treated, the first action will be to stop the progress of the burn wound by applying running cold water (not chilled) for about ten to 15 minutes. This will reduce the temperature of the tissue and stop the lesion progress.
- Meanwhile, if the case requires it, a qualified professional should open intravenous access to institute fluid therapy, pain and anti-inflammatory management, as well as systemic antibiotics, if required. Cases where there is respiratory affectation, need to be evaluated by a veterinarian to decide on the best approach.
- After cooling and gently cleaning the burn lesion, apply abundant topical cooling gel, antibiotic cream with aloe vera and/or local anaesthetic, and cover with nylon film to avoid contamination, until a veterinarian can evaluate the animal.

## CONCLUSION

Fires will unavoidably occur more frequently worldwide, hence disaster management preparedness is necessary to contain losses, and a transdisciplinary group of trained professionals should work towards the recovery of the affected community.

Categorisation of burned animals should follow welfare and cost-effective premises, as this is amongst the core considerations in the context of production animals. Case prognosis based on burn severity is only one of the considerations for decision-making, as other factors – such as the location of the burn, smoke inhalation and the availability of resources during recovery – play an important role in the success of the decision. This approach will greatly reduce losses due to mismatching needs and resources in the aftermath of veld fires. ■

***DR CLAUDIA L CARDOSO AND PROF RHODA LEASK, BOTH FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF PRODUCTION ANIMAL STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA'S FACULTY OF VETERINARY SCIENCE.***

# Forecasts point to return of El Niño in 2023

THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANISATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS (FAO) WARNED IN ITS REPORT, PUBLISHED ON 26 APRIL 2023, THAT THE CLIMATE PHENOMENON KNOWN AS EL NIÑO IS EXPECTED TO RETURN IN 2023.

This warning follows a triple La Niña phenomenon where the world experienced a third consecutive La Niña event in 2022 and early 2023, a rare occurrence that has happened only twice since 1950, the report stated.

A possible return of El Niño in the second half of 2023 could lead to dry weather conditions in key cropping areas of Central America, Southern Africa and Far East Asia, while excessive rainfall and possible flooding are foreseen in Near East Asia and East Africa.

According to the FAO, the return of El Niño in 2023 could have serious consequences for countries that depend on agriculture, especially in regions of the world that are already struggling with hunger and poverty.

With extreme weather affecting food production, there could be further disruptions to food supplies and significant price increases. 'Already in 2022, the number of people facing acute food insecurity was projected to reach up to 222 million in 53 countries/territories, the highest level on record according to the latest Hunger Hotspots report,' the FAO report stated.

One of the areas most likely to be affected is Africa, where many countries are already facing food insecurity due to conflict, climate change, and other challenges. El Niño could exacerbate this situation, leading to a further deterioration of food security and an increased risk of famine.

The FAO is urging governments, aid agencies, and the private sector to prepare for the return of El Niño and to take steps to mitigate the potential impact on food supplies. This includes investing in drought-resistant crops, improving water management systems, and strengthening early warning systems for extreme weather events.

It is not yet clear how severe the next El Niño will be or which areas of the world will be most affected. However, the FAO believes that it is crucial to take action now to ensure that vulnerable communities are prepared for the potential impact on their food supplies. (See full report in link below for recommended anticipatory actions for governments most affected.)

### WHAT IS A LA NIÑA AND EL NIÑO EVENT AND HOW DOES IT AFFECT AGRICULTURE?

La Niña events are commonly associated with wetter conditions in Australia and drier conditions in the United States of America (USA), South America and East Africa.

During the recent triple La Niña event, widespread flooding occurred in Australia where, according to the report, bumper wheat crops were recorded in 2021 and 2022, while drought conditions curbed wheat and maize yields in the USA as well as in Near East Asian countries.

According to the FAO report, the effects on grain production in East Africa were particularly devastating, with several countries experiencing multiple seasons of failed crops that triggered famine alerts in Somalia in the first half of 2022. The 2023 La Niña event officially dissipated in March 2023.

El Niño is caused by a warming of the Pacific Ocean and can have a major impact on the climate in different regions of the world. The phenomenon has been linked to droughts, floods, and extreme weather conditions, which can lead to crop losses, food shortages, and price increases.

Rainfall patterns during El Niño events tend to be the reverse of La Niña. For example, in East Africa and Near East Asian countries there is a tendency for wetter conditions. Conversely, drier conditions are generally observed in West Africa, Southern Africa, India, South East Asia, Australia, the northern areas of South America and Central America. ■

*VALERIE CILLIERS, EDITOR, SA GRAAN/GRAIN.*
*FIRST PUBLISHED IN SA GRAAN/GRAIN, JUNE 2023.*

# An agricultural showcase of innovative agriculture

NAMPO 2023, WHICH WAS PRESENTED FROM 16 TO 19 MAY, WAS THE NAMPO OF OLD THAT THE AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY OF SOUTH AFRICA HAS COME TO KNOW AND APPRECIATE OVER THE PAST 55 YEARS.

A total of 81 945 visitors entered the gates this year to visit NAMPO Park near Bothaville in the Free State. As always there was ample opportunity for conversation, interaction with the 823 exhibitors and an opportunity for families to enjoy agriculture in a safe, hospitable environment. Close to 200 planes and 75 helicopters landed on NAMPO Park's runway during the week.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Thoko Didiza, visited NAMPO on Friday, 19 May. During a meeting with organised agriculture and the Free State MEC for Agriculture and Local Development, Minister Didiza said agriculture has found a home in the Free State thanks to NAMPO.

On the first day of NAMPO, Grain SA introduced a new corporate identity and logo for the group. The new logo contains the mathematical "≥" sign which implies that the organisation's members together, are stronger than the single voice out there. This unified voice resonates authenticity and relevance, and the refreshed logo speaks of the dynamics of grain and oilseed production in South Africa. Although the new identity graced the site during NAMPO, it will be phased in over time.

## 2024 OUTLOOK

The show dates for next year have been confirmed for 14 - 17 May 2024. Grain SA intends to pay attention to the matters such as improving the flow of access control at the gates in terms of the ticketing system. The organisation would also like to promote the use of NAMPO Park's buildings and facilities as a business park throughout the year. ■

***PULA IMVULA EDITORIAL TEAM***

***Jerry Mthombothi, regional development manager from the Mbomebela office, and Ramoso Pholo, Grain SA board member (Region 28), paused for a photo during their NAMPO duties.***

***The research team of Grain SA, dr Godfrey Kgatle, dr Miekie Human and Stefan Links with Nolo Bakwa, the communications intern, who is handling the Farmer Development Programme's Twitter account as well.***

***NAMPO offers a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with friends and other agricultural enthusiasts.***

*Photos by Lizel Snyman.*

***Derek Mathews (chairperson of Grain SA) and Jeremiah Mathebula (vice-chairman of Grain SA) welcome minister Thoko Didiza to NAMPO.***

# HAVE YOU HEARD?

## PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

**Dr Sifiso Ntombela** was appointed as the new executive director at the Animal Feed Manufacturers Association AFMA. He is an agricultural economist with more than a decade's experience in strategic planning, agricultural policy, and economic modelling. He has been the National Agricultural Marketing Council's (NAMC) chief economist responsible for trade research and policy advisory. Dr Ntombela also still serves on the agricultural advisory body for the National Planning Commission and acts as vice-president of the Agricultural Economics Association of South Africa.

## IN MEMORIAM

**Nomvula Xaba** (46), transformation manager at Potatoes SA, passed away on Monday, 29 May 2023, due to lung complications brought on by Covid-19. She joined Potatoes SA in June 2011 and accomplished the establishment and phenomenal expansion of the transformation programmes.

**Francis Davidson** (75), previously a mentor of Grain SA's Farmer Development Programme in the Maclear area, in the Eastern Cape passed away on 13 June. He was brutally attacked on 26 April and succumbed to his injuries.

## CHOLERA SAFETY MEASURES

The outbreak of cholera in May this year has made everyone aware of the significance of clean water. The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shared these five basic prevention steps, which will greatly reduce your risk of getting cholera in areas where it is spreading:

1. Be sure you drink and use safe water. If bottled water is not available, use water that has been properly boiled or filtered to remove bacteria.
2. Wash your hands often with soap and safe water.
3. Use toilets or safely managed sanitation facilities. If you do not have access to a toilet, dig a pit toilet at least 0,5 m deep and 30 m away from water.
4. Cook food well and peel fruits and vegetables.
5. Clean up with soap and treated water – whether it is the kitchen or bathroom.

## SOUTH AFRICANS AT GLOBAL MEETING

IGC CONFERENCE: Heleen Viljoen (economist) and Stefan Links (research coordinator), two of Grain SA's team members, visited London to attend the International Grains Council (IGC) Conference on 12 and 13 June. The theme for the conference was: *Achieving food security for importers in volatile world markets.*


ISF CONGRESS: A total of 1 265 delegates from 60 countries visited the Mother City, Cape Town, on 5 to 7 June for the ISF World Seed Congress 2023. The congress was hosted by the International Seed Federation (ISF) under the theme 'Shared roots, greater heights'. The event brought together seed role-players from all over the world, allowing them the opportunity to form relationships and new partnerships, exchange genetic material and develop new markets.

Gugulethu Mahlangu, an award-winning farmer and aquaponics horticulturist, was one of the keynote speakers at the opening of the three-day congress, which was held at the Cape Town International Convention Centre in the Western Cape.

*Source: Food for Mzanzi, 6 June 2023*

***Gugulethu Mahlangu (in the middle) with ISF president Marco van Leeuwen (left) and Süleyman Yavuz Ilgün, ISF board member from Turkey.***

# Corner Post

BY LOUISE KUNZ, ASSISTANT EDITOR

THE AMERICAN MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER AND WRITER, DENIS WAITLEY, SAID: 'COMMITMENT IS THAT TURNING POINT IN YOUR LIFE WHEN YOU SEIZE THE MOMENT TO ALTER YOUR DESTINY.' THIS IS EXACTLY HOW SIYABONGA NOMLALA (42) FROM FRANKLIN IN KWAZULU-NATAL CHANGED HIS DREAM INTO A REALITY.

Although he had no background in farming, Siyabonga knew he was a farmer at heart. Once he completed his schooling, he worked for Joshua Doore and later managed the Franklin filling station. However, the desire to start farming grew stronger, so he started investigating a farming career in 2008.

After receiving funding from the local municipality, he quit his job and began erecting tunnels on land he leased from the municipality. With the mentorship of a neighbouring farmer, Richard Mingay, he planted his first seed in 2020 and realised his dream to become a crop farmer.

Although he would like to develop into a commercial farmer, he is first focussing on being a successful smallholder farmer who can support himself. 'For now, I am happy just learning more about agriculture as I develop. One day I would love to be a commercial farmer, but the bigger your operation is, the higher your costs are and the more money you must spend. I would rather have a 100% success rate on my 50 ha, than have 50% success on 1 000 ha!'

In 2020 his path crossed with two members of Grain SA's Farmer Development team, when Richard arranged a meeting. They were impressed by Siyabonga's dedication and hunger for knowledge. Although it was not possible to accommodate him in one of the programmes yet, they were able to arrange funding for him.

After a successful first maize season, where he realised a yield of 9 t/ha on 30 hectares, Siyabonga is eager to improve even more has planted a 10-hectare soybean trial this season.

## SIYABONGA'S STORY

### HOW DID YOUR PATH CROSS WITH GRAIN SA?

Uncle Richard, who was my mentor, introduced me to Grain SA. He told Luke Collier (regional development manager in the Kokstad region) and Eric Wiggle (one of Grain SA's mentors) that I had potential and asked them to meet with me.

### WHAT ROLE HAVE THEY PLAYED IN YOUR FARMING SUCCESS?

They made a huge difference in my life. Through Grain SA I learned about soil analysis. Although my soil was fertile, I had no knowledge of soil health, which can help produce a healthier crop. I also learned about the importance of crop insurance. You cannot plant if you do not have insurance. I was hit by hail and was then extremely glad to have insurance.

### WHAT DO YOU GROW IN THE TUNNELS?

I have eight tunnels where I grow tomatoes, red and green peppers and spinach. I used to water by hand, but now there is a borehole. The first seedlings I planted were not good quality, so I visited a nursery to inquire about high-quality seed. This taught me a valuable lesson – to get advice and information from experts before I make another mistake.

### DO YOU OWN ANY EQUIPMENT?

Yes, I am the proud owner of a small tractor and some basic implements.

**SIYABONGA'S THREE TOP TIPS**

1. Begin small – focus on what you have, not what you want.
2. Ask for advice and always put in 100% effort.
3. Do the right thing at the right time – do it right or not at all.



## FARM FACTS

**Farm:** Municipal land
**Nearest town:** Franklin (in the greater Kokstad local municipality)
**Region:** KwaZulu-Natal
**Size:** 100 ha
**Type of farming operation:** Crops – plants maize and soybeans, potatoes and cabbage, which he sells to the local market, and other vegetables in tunnels.

## GRAIN SA'S CONTRIBUTION

- Joined Grain SA in the 2021/2022 season
- Ongeluksnek Study Group

**Training courses completed:**
He has not been able to attend a course yet but is planning to do so soon.

**A mentor's view:**
Luke Collier, regional development manager at the Kokstad office, says Siyabonga is committed to his farming operation. Even though it is a small operation, he is still determined to make a success of it. Because he is meticulous in what he does, he achieved a good yield. He is eager to learn and a hard worker who doesn't focus on challenges.

*Luke Collier*

# A programme that is changing lives

## Farm visits support plans for a busy time

**THE MONTH OF MAY SAW THE SUMMER CROPS REACHING THEIR PEAK, AS FARMERS WERE BUSY WITH MANY DIFFERENT TASKS WHILE THE SEASON DREW TO A CLOSE. NOT ONLY WAS IT NECESSARY TO ORGANISE THE ACTUAL HARVESTING OF THE CROPS, IT WAS ALSO IMPORTANT TO PAY ATTENTION TO THE LOGISTICS.**

Farmers must look for the most cost-effective way to get the crops off the field and the money into the bank. Grain SA regional development managers and mentors are actively involved in these processes, assisting farmers in finding the best solutions.

The team supports the participating farmers with informed decision making and expert opinions. The organisation acts as watchdog to ensure there are no chancers taking anyone for a ride on high contracting prices or confusing marketing schemes.

During May, 129 farm visits took place, where the team assisted farmers in diverse decision-making activities which include:

- Crops were monitored for moisture and readiness to harvest.
- Fields were assessed to decide on the optimal harvesting mechanisms.
- Contractors were sourced and negotiations were conducted where necessary.

New season planning goes hand in hand with the closing of a season, so soils are tested and decisions are made to decide which crops will be planted next. Consequently, decisions are made about the necessary treatments, such as the liming of soils and other soil corrections that must be done.

Safe storage of the crop is essential – otherwise it is a weak link in the chain and negatively impacts yields, profits and the safety of the food source. Marketing the harvest successfully can be complicated and the best options must be found for each farmer within his unique set of circumstances.

Even while it is a busy time out in the fields, the farmer needs to keep careful track of his income and expenses. It is time to balance the books, pay back all loans, honour debts and assess which crops were profitable. Some farmers find themselves in a strong enough position this year to consider expanding their hectares. This involves negotiations for access to land and necessitates the careful drawing up of new lease agreement contracts, which are important for farmers to access financial support going forward.

It is also the time of the year when drawing up accurate inventory lists must be done. This will help you see what you own, what you have at your disposal, what you owe in the big picture and what must be paid off in the immediate future. It is helpful for the budget plan for the new season to list all the inputs that are left over in the farm store from the past season.

## AT GRASS ROOTS


*At Jeremiah Obrey Nkosi's farm, Maquabi Agricultural co-op, it was time for setting the soybean harvester.*

*For Musa Thomas Sibiya, Grain SA board member for Region 29, this all forms part of a day's work: Fixing punctures, doing contract work, harvesting soybeans, fetching diesel and some discussions on the side.*

# Practical skills from courses

**DURING** May, four practical skills courses about planter and boom-sprayer calibration were held in the Dundee region. These sessions were all sponsored by the Maize Trust and Paul Wiggill, from the Bergville area, was the trainer.

Paul reported that most of those farmers plant by hand, so the training entailed the use of a backpack. 'On the surface everybody think it is very simple, but one must follow procedures for correct results. Many people just chuck chemicals in and do not even wash the container, and some did not know how to repair the backpack if it fails, but now they do.' He said that the farmers are willing to learn and asked many questions.

Some feedback from the farmers:

- We learned how to plant according to specifications, the required distance between the seeds and the amount of fertiliser that must be applied. We also learned about the calibrations of the sprayer and how to check whether the amount of seed and fertiliser we are using, is correct.
- The theory was very informative and presented in a way which was easily understood. Sums were made easy for us and we were given charts to work off, which helps a lot. We also learnt how we can measure our lands, which is important to know before you start spraying.
- During the practical session, we were all involved and had to do all the demonstrations. This was good cause it made us aware of how to repair any problems we may have with the backpack.

*At the training day at Mhlungweni, farmers learned how to repair a backpack.*

*Farmers learned more about calibrating and spraying for better weed control during the course at Mkhekeni.*

*These farmers who attended the course at Siyalima Siyaphambile were keen to learn.*

# Resilient farmers REMAIN HOPEFUL

**FARMERS** are busy in the fields, so only six study group meetings were held in the various regions. The focus was on monitoring the crops in the region, learning from the season as it draws to a close and planning for the new season.

Driefontein Study Group members farming in Mpumalanga met with their mentor, Timon Filter from the Louwsburg regional development office, on 17 May. This area struggled with the rainfall this season.

Many fields are prone to be wet fields, so this season was tough. The price for the inputs was a struggle and now with the harvests not looking the best, most farmers are worried about how they will afford inputs again, but they remain resilient.

'What a privilege to visit my farmers – I could encourage them to keep going and not give up. This is a good time to see what happened and what we could have done differently, to try and grow in our knowledge and expertise as farmers of substance. Our hope is always to find our next commercial farmer out of those groups,' says Timon.

*A few of the Driefontein farmers who are mentored by Timon Filter.*

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