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PULA IMVULA

GROWING FOOD • PEOPLE • PROSPERITY

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A WORD FROM...

Dr Tobias Doyer



AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IS TOUGH AND REQUIRES PRODUCERS TO BE RESILIENT AND DETERMINED. THIS SUMMER SEASON, THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR AND SPECIFICALLY GRAIN PRODUCERS FACED SUBSTANTIAL UNCERTAINTY DUE TO THE EL NIÑO DROUGHT RAVAGING ESPECIALLY THE WEST.

For producers this is a solitary battle against the assaults of the elements and the unpredictability of nature, requiring incredible courage and perseverance to navigate through the challenges.

Despite the drought, the grain sector continues to successfully ensure food security for South Africans. While most other countries in Southern Africa face famine due to poverty and a lack of production capacity, South Africans can rest assured.

Grain producers generate a surplus of grain, which can be channelled from exports, livestock production and processing to bolster food security when needed. This underscores the importance of free-market principles, with appropriate support measures to ensure internationally competitive production. These measures include logistics, access to cutting-edge genetics and other technologies, financing and sustaining producers through exceptional weather conditions.

I want to assure our members that they are not alone during this time when difficult decisions must be made. Grain SA tirelessly supports producers across all fronts to ensure that we create an environment where grain producers can farm profitably. This includes insuring an enabling legislative environment, ensuring that researchers focus on the most important challenges facing grain producers and ensuring competitive markets among many other things.

Even though producers are challenged to survive this season, we push tirelessly to improve margins to ensure the survival of our members. Grain SA will continue engaging with the government to provide financial assistance through an agricultural disaster fund, access to affordable credit solutions and affordable income insurance to help producers weather the crisis.

Remember to reach out to your neighbours and farmers' group to share ideas and find encouragement in this difficult time.

– Dr Tobias Doyer is Grain SA's chief executive officer (CEO), who joined the team in January 2024. ■

How to control WINTER WEEDS

THE 2023/2024 PRODUCTION YEAR'S DROUGHT AGAIN EMPHASISES THE IMPORTANCE OF STORED MOISTURE IN THE SOIL. HAVING ENOUGH MOISTURE WILL INCREASE A FARMER'S CHANCES OF REALISING A RELATIVELY GOOD YIELD. IT IS THE FARMER'S RESPONSIBILITY TO CONSERVE THE MOISTURE, MAKING SURE THAT NEXT YEAR'S CROP WILL HAVE ENOUGH MOISTURE AVAILABLE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SEASON.

With the good April rains in the summer production areas, there is a high possibility that winter weeds will be a problem. Many farmers fall in the trap of not controlling winter weeds. They assume that the plough, rippers and animals will control it, but unfortunately cultivation doesn't stop this problem.

These weeds consume moisture and when the farmer wants to control them at a later stage, he will realise that cultivation doesn't control them 100%. The result is that the winter weeds will be out of control in the fields. Consequently, there will be a shortage of moisture – and fields that are too dry to cultivate or plant will eventually lead to a much lower yield.

first rain, which makes rapid growth possible. This growth will utilise the moisture effectively, with the result of fields being too dry to cultivate or plant. Controlling winter weeds is not a luxury but a necessity. In the spring, fields must be clean and no winter weed should be present.

Conyza spp. are common winter weeds that need to be controlled. These include:

- Fleabane (*skraalhans*).
- *Senecio consanguineus* or ragwort (*radiatorbossie*).
- *Argemone ochroleuca* or Mexican poppy (*witblombloudissel*).

CONTROLLING WINTER WEED

The question is how to control winter weed. Combatting winter weed is a necessity and farmers must plan to manage it. Speak to your herbicide representative in advance to find the best options for weed control. Take all the planned cultivation actions into consideration to find the best plan.

If winter weeds become a problem on your farm, implement a crop rotation system with crops such as maize, sunflower and soybeans. These crops give you time to get winter weed under control, using both chemical and mechanical actions. It is important to look holistic at your business and plan accordingly.



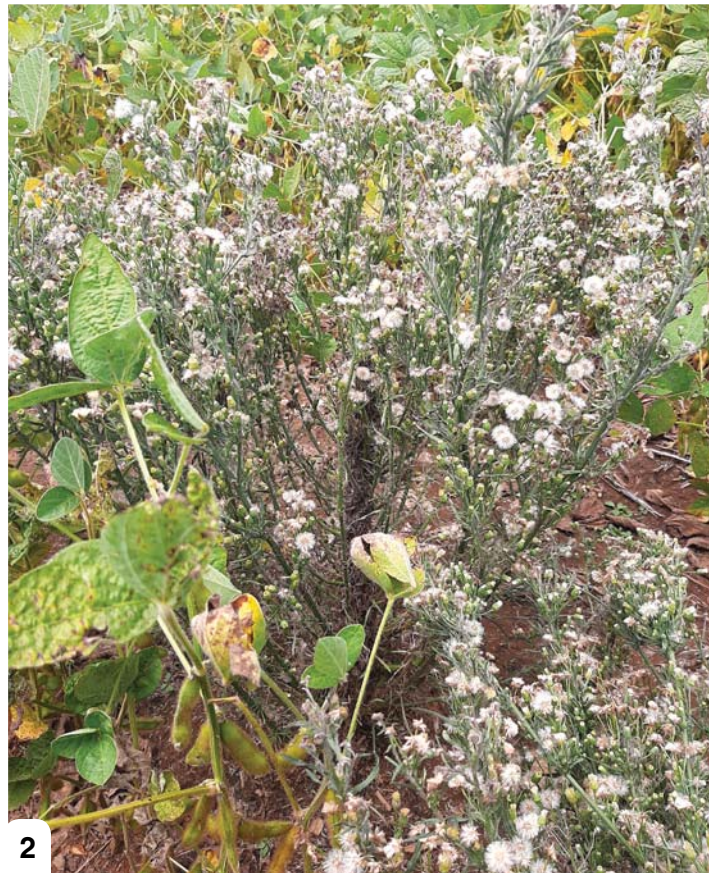
Young *Conyza* plants.

In addition to lower yields, this also causes an increased risk and phone calls from the bank manager. Remember, farmers must manage moisture as it is the most important element in grain production.

WINTER WEED

Winter weed is adapted to winter conditions and can survive and grow in the dry winter periods. These weeds also have the ability to use water efficiently and grow uncontrollably after the first summer rains.

In the winter, these winter weeds do not usually grow above the ground but their roots grow rapidly under the ground. With a well-developed root system, winter weeds can utilise the moisture of the



A flowering fleabane bush.

for better grain yields

Normally a shallow tillage or disc action as early as possible, as well as herbicide application on younger, smaller plants during late March or early April, will be sufficient. It must be emphasised that the winter weeds must still be small, for instance the *Conyza* spp. must still be in the rosette stage for herbicides to work properly.

In maize fields, the application of herbicides can be difficult. Normally an aeroplane or high equipment is needed, but the problem is that the herbicide is not necessarily registered for this practice. This problem makes it very difficult to spray winter weeds successfully. The lower temperatures during June, July and August also influence the herbicides negatively. So this means that the use of implements is not a good option in a conventional production system.

When shallow cultivators are used, farmers must make sure that tines are spaced in such a way that there is enough overlapping to prevent gaps where the winter weeds are not removed. The quicker the fields are cultivated after harvesting, the better winter weeds are controlled.

Controlling winter weeds is not a luxury but a necessity.

If a farmer wants to use herbicides for the control of sedges in particular, scientific studies support the use of glyphosate in mixtures with other herbicides with different effects, versus the alternation or rotation of herbicides in the management of resistance development.

According to label instructions, 2,4D can be sprayed in combination with glyphosate or atrazine. But be warned of the residual effect of atrazine on subsequent crops. Paraquat, a non-selective weed herbicide, can also be used. Ensure that weeds are thoroughly wet, with at least 300 litres of water per hectare.

The use of glyphosate will also help with the control of ragwort (*radiatorbossie*) and Mexican poppy (*witblombloudissel*). Just make sure that you talk to your herbicide representative to make the best decision for winter weed control.



3

An argemone flower, which is also known as Mexican poppy or witblombloudissel.



4

A seedling of the ragwort plant.



5

An adult ragwort bush.

If farmers want to take the chemical route, make sure that the calibration of the sprayer is done correctly. Ensure that the recommendations on the label are followed and that enough water is used. The golden rule is: Spray winter weeds when they are still small – don't wait too long because if they are too big, it is very difficult to control. ■

PIETMAN BOTHA,
INDEPENDENT AGRI-
CULTURAL CONSULTANT



Weather patterns influence maize prices

AS SOUTH AFRICA NAVIGATES THROUGH ITS CURRENT GRAIN MARKETING SEASON, PROLONGED DROUGHTS AND RECENT UNFAVOURABLE RAIN CONDITIONS HAVE POSED SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES FOR LOCAL FARMERS, WHICH IS IMPACTING PRODUCTION. HOWEVER, THESE LATE AND INCONSISTENT RAIN PATTERNS HAVE SUPPORTED PRICES IN THE LOCAL MARKET.

The drought's impact extends beyond South Africa, affecting neighbouring countries such as Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe, which have declared states of disaster. These countries may increasingly depend on South African exports to meet their demand.

South Africa's Crop Estimates Committee (CEC), whose main function is to provide regular and accurate estimates of the crop production levels in South Africa, has reduced its earlier forecasts for maize and other summer crops due to recent summer heatwaves from the El Niño.

According to the CEC report, maize production for 2024 is projected to be 13,255 million tons. This forecast represents a decrease of about 7,69% from the previous estimate of 14,359 million tons, with an expected yield of 5,03 t/ha. Compared to the 2023 crop, the estimated maize production for 2024 is 19,32% lower, amounting to 3,174 million tons less.

The three primary maize-producing regions – the Free State, Mpumalanga and North West – are anticipated to contribute 79% of the total maize crop for 2024. For the 2023/2024 marketing season, exports are projected to include 548 000 tons of processed maize products and 3 210 000 tons of total whole maize (NAMC, Supply and Demand Estimates, March 2024).

Possible drought-induced changes in the grain may include:

- **Decrease in supply due to reduced agricultural output:** Drought can lead to lower yields and overall reduced agricultural production of maize. Farmers may also harvest smaller or poorer quality crops.
- **Drought-induced pricing fluctuations:** When drought affects maize production, it can lead to price fluctuations in the market. Initially, prices may rise due to the decreased supply caused by the drought. However, if the drought persists or affects a large portion of the maize-growing regions, prices may fluctuate more dramatically over time, depending on factors such as the severity and duration of the drought, as well as market responses.

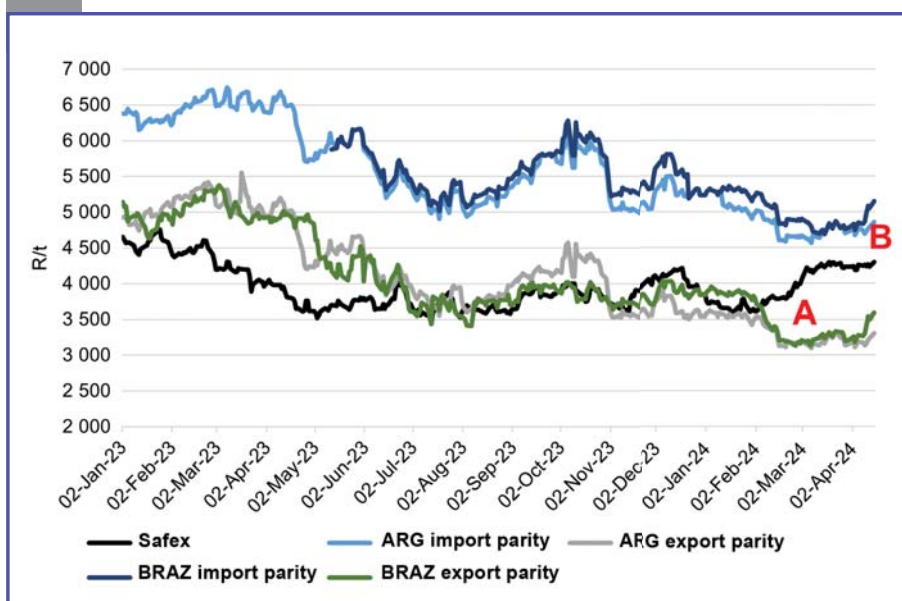
- **Changes in consumer behaviour:** Consumers may respond to the higher prices and decreased availability of maize by changing their purchasing behaviour. They may seek alternative food options, reduce consumption of maize-based products or switch to cheaper substitutes. This change in consumer behaviour can further impact the demand and pricing dynamics in the maize market in the long run.
- **Imports to stabilise markets:** In response to reduced domestic production and increased prices, countries may choose to import maize from other regions to stabilise their markets and ensure an adequate supply. Importing maize can help to meet the demand, alleviate shortages and mitigate the impact of the drought on local consumers and food security. However, relying on imports also introduces dependencies on external markets.

Graph 1 shows the parity price movements of yellow maize delivered in Randfontein for the past year. Furthermore, the graph shows that for the 2023/2024 marketing year, prices are moving towards import parity (Brazilian and Argentinian import parity prices). The graph is further explained below:

- **Point A** is the point when the South African Future Exchange (Safex) price is at export parity, which is when the cost of maize locally can compete internationally. South Africa will remain at export parity when the country has surplus stock that exceeds the local demand (dates ranging from May 2023 to February 2024). This could also limit extensive exports that result in local deficits.

1

Parity prices of yellow maize delivered in Randfontein.



Source: Grain SA
Data correct on 16 April 2024



- **Point B**, however, is the point when the Safex price moves towards import parity. This is when the cost of importing maize is cheaper than locally produced maize. When a country has a shortage of stock, often when the demand exceeds the local supply, prices will move towards import parity (February 2024 to April 2024).

IN CONCLUSION

Farmers are navigating through a complex landscape marked by intense and unpredictable climate variations, reduced crop forecasts and fluctuating market prices. These challenges highlight the importance of resilience, adaptability and strategic planning for developing farmers as they strive to maintain their livelihoods and contribute to food security.

For developing farmers, navigating these shifting market dynamics requires flexibility, resilience and strategic planning. This can be done through adapting production practices, diversifying crops, exploring niche markets, coming up with and implementing rigorous marketing plans or investing in value-added products to respond effectively to changes in the demand, pricing and consumer behaviour following a drought. Through innovation and determination, developing farmers can turn these challenges into opportunities for growth and sustainability. ■

LERATO RAMAFOKO,
AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIST
INTERN, GRAIN SA



WORDS OF
WISDOM



*A country without a farmer is
like a tree without a fruit.*

~ MBALI NWOKO
CEO of Green Terrace



CONGRESS 2024:

MAKING PLANS TO THRIVE AMID CHALLENGES

GRAIN SA'S 2024 CONGRESS ASKED THE FOLLOWING QUESTION ON 13 AND 14 MARCH: 'WHAT KEEP FARMERS UP AT NIGHT?' AND THE OVERALL FOCUS WAS THAT FARMERS CAN MAKE PLANS. CONGRESS SERVED AS AN EXCELLENT PLATFORM FOR GRAIN SA MEMBERS, STAKEHOLDERS, POLICY MAKERS, RESEARCHERS AND EXPERTS IN THE INDUSTRY TO COME TOGETHER AND DISCUSS RELEVANT ISSUES AFFECTING THE GRAIN INDUSTRY.

Over the past year, the South African grain and oilseed industry has been characterised by a combination of issues and breakthroughs. This year's theme aimed to equip farmers on how to manage these difficult conditions – whether it is seasonal challenges, climate-related or personal.

The agenda was presented in three main sessions. It kicked off with a presentation by David Hughes, vice-president of the International Farm Management Association, who gave Congress attendees a glimpse into the challenges that Argentine grain farmers must face.

Panel discussion topics were carefully selected to empower and assist farmers in their decision-making amidst challenges and to ponder on critical issues shaping the grain industry in South Africa. The panel discussions asked fellow producers how they maintain a sustainable production environment.

During the election, Grain SA chairperson, Derek Mathews, was re-elected unopposed. He will be supported by re-elected chairpersons, Richard Krige and Jeremia Mathebula. This team is ready for the task ahead, of which the most important is to help ensure economic sustainability for grain farmers in the country.

BREAKAWAY SESSIONS

Several important industry matters were discussed during the breakaway sessions. Obstacles in the grain industry were thoroughly examined. Here are some of the points that were discussed:

Maize

- **Exports:** Given the current infrastructure and capacity, South Africa is doing very well when it comes to exports, but this can improve with better infrastructure and the management of obstacles.
- **Transport:** As far as white maize is concerned, rail transport remains a problem and therefore road transport is more often used. Abnormal loads are investigated, but approval and permits remain an ongoing problem. Not all the loading places' infrastructure is suitable for these loads.
- **Grading regulations:** The grading regulations have been officially published in the *Government Gazette*.
- **Crop estimate:** The National Crop Estimates Committee's (CEC's) figures indicate limited white maize stocks – and with the

Ramoso Pholo, Grain SA board member for Region 28, was chosen as the best speaker 'from the floor' by members of the media. His plea for help to farmers in his area who are suffering heavily from the drought – and this after they were ravaged by severe floods in the previous season – struck a deep chord.



Clifford Mthimkulu was elected as the new board member for Region 31.



The use of electronic voting processes paved the way for constructive feedback after each session, creating the opportunity to gather important input and opinions from members.





Leading the Congress: *Jeremia Mathebula (vice-chairperson), Nico Vermaak (company secretary), Derek Mathews (chairperson), Dr Tobias Doyer (CEO) and Richard Krige (vice-chairperson).*

consumption figure and exports to neighbouring countries, stocks were close to a break-even point. However, the carry-over stock helped with these levels. There may be a negative impact on stocks in the future if the harvest weakens further.

Sunflower

- Sclerotinia: Feedback was given on the activities of the South African Sclerotinia Research Network (SASRN). Tactics and new projects to manage the disease, as well as the permissible percentage of Sclerotinia on seeds, were discussed.
- Planting dates: Dr Safiah Ma'ali from the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) in Potchefstroom gave feedback on sunflower planting dates and environmental factors such as drought stress and how this affects the oil content. Results of ARC trials prove that the correct planting dates allow farmers to take advantage of cooler soil temperatures and boost plant populations.



Some of the friendly faces of Phahama Grain *Phakama's Farmer Development Team: Jacques Roux (regional development manager: Eastern Free State), Liana Stroebe (operations and training manager) and Johan Kriel (regional development manager: Western Free State).*



Friends of Pula Imvula: *Lehlohonolo Bakwa (communications intern), who is part of Pula's editorial team, and Phumzile Ngcobo, assistant regional manager.*

THE NEXT SEASON

Grain SA ensured Congress attendees that the organisation will continue working towards what is important to its members, namely to focus on economically successful and sustainable grain production. Grain SA as an industry organisation commits to tackle the points mentioned during the Congress, grow the organisation through them and convey an encouraging but purposeful message of hope to all farmers. ■

EDITORIAL TEAM

Producers should **UNITE** to **SURVIVE**



David Hughes (centre), the keynote speaker at the 2024 Grain SA Congress, with Dr Tobias Doyer (CEO) and Derek Mathews (chairperson).

THE REALITY THAT PRODUCERS FACE CHALLENGES IS A UNIVERSAL PHENOMENON SPANNING CONTINENTS – A FACT THAT WAS ONCE AGAIN UNDERSCORED AT THE 2024 CONGRESS OF GRAIN SA.

Keynote speaker David Hughes, vice-president of the International Farm Management association of Argentina, elucidated South African producers regarding the shared points of interest between them and their Argentine counterparts, particularly concerning challenges in the agricultural sector in both countries.

With a family legacy spanning 150 years in agriculture, Hughes currently owns two farms in the Buenos Aires region where maize, soybeans and wheat are cultivated. He has extensive expertise as a farm manager and consultant in Argentina and is an active member of AACREA, an Argentine farmers group dedicated to benchmarking, testing new technology and enhancing agricultural business practices.

Additionally, he is a partner and president of Traulen Co SA, a farm management and consulting firm offering various services, including accounting, tax accounting, managerial accounting and managerial services.

Hughes is also a founding member and current president of Argen Trigo, the Argentine wheat chain association, where the representatives of research, input companies, producers, flour mills, exporters, brokers, future markets, and other related services work on long-term strategies for the industry.

RESILIENCE

He emphasised the resilience and innovation of producers, citing the adaptive strategies Argentine producers have implemented in response to challenges such as inflation, high export taxes (up to 31% on soybeans), poor infrastructure, and currency devaluation.

Attendees were surprised to learn that on the day of Hughes's talk (12 March), the Argentine Reserve Bank had cut the repo rate by 20%. 'In my lifetime, I have seen the Argentine peso losing 13 zeros,' he said, referring to the government devaluating the peso. 'I do not

like the peso, I try to create my own money – in the shape of maize, soybeans and wheat.'

Transport costs pose another significant challenge, with expenses to harbours sometimes reaching up to 25% of the produce's value. Fortunately Argentine harbours are privatised and efficient.

'As Argentinian producers we realise that we have to help one another to survive.' Strategies these producers have put in place to assist them in saving costs include the following:

- Producers unite to form research and study groups, and share knowledge. 'The more knowledge we have, the better we are aligned to face challenges and remain resilient.'
- As all Argentinian banks are government-owned, producers approach private investors to invest for a percentage of the yield. Producers also attempt not to get financing from banks.
- The use of silo bags, which allows for better bargaining power.
- No-till conservation farming, and the planting of cover crops.
- Planting later or earlier than the norm.
- Informing government and politicians about the challenges producers face in order for them to make better decisions.
- Producers in general do not own machinery and implements – contractors are used for anything from harvesting to spraying.
- Gathering and keeping as much information as possible.

There are notable parallels between South Africa and Argentina, including a lack of leadership and poor institutional support. Hughes stressed the importance of collaborative problem-solving among peer groups to address these challenges effectively. ■

KARINA MULLER,
SA GRAAN/GRAIN CONTRIBUTOR.
FIRST PUBLISHED IN
SA GRAAN/GRAIN, APRIL 2024.



Several factors work together to ensure **quality fuel**

PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE IS IMPORTANT, ESPECIALLY WITH RESPECT TO THOSE ASPECTS OF THE PRODUCT THAT ARE IN CONTROL OF THE FINAL USER. SPECIFICATIONS AND STANDARDS ARE PUT IN PLACE TO CONTROL ASPECTS OUT OF THE IMMEDIATE CONTROL OF THE CONSUMER AND TO ENSURE PRODUCTS OF CONSISTENT QUALITY. THESE STANDARDS ARE REVIEWED PERIODICALLY TO KEEP UP WITH TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND TO ENSURE FIT-FOR-PURPOSE FUELS.

There is a story about a technical assistant at one of the major oil companies who was called out by a producer who complained of diesel contamination which was affecting the operation of his machines. The technician dutifully made his way from Johannesburg to the farm and travelled down a dirt road towards the diesel storage area, where he found a horizontal drum atop a structure allowing the producer to gravity feed his machines. On approaching this structure, the technician immediately turned around and drove back to his office.

After witnessing this, the annoyed producer phoned the technician's manager to complain about what had happened. When questioned, the technician replied that there was no problem with the fuel – the producer was the problem.

He had wasted his time travelling halfway across the country to attend to a problem which was of the producer's own making. He had propped up the structure on one side to ensure all fuel would drain towards the outlet – this sounds logical to maximise the use of available diesel. However, the design of these drums is such that the fuel outlet is situated some way off the base so as to allow any water in the fuel to settle to the base of the drum so that water-free diesel can be dispensed to equipment.

The producer's actions had, in effect, negated this design consideration, allowing any water at the bottom of the drum to be dispensed into the equipment with the diesel. This episode illustrates a number of issues: the design of fuel-handling equipment; the importance of product knowledge; and related to this, basic housekeeping and cleanliness.

All these aspects work together to deliver fuel that should be fit for purpose and provide peace of mind to the consumer of the product. Regulations and standards are put in place to provide for the consistency of product, what is required of the manufacturers of fuel and related equipment, and protection in terms of safety, health and the environment.

Housekeeping and cleanliness are closely related – as illustrated in this example, water was the issue. However, it extends to wider product integrity aspects which include dirt, microbiological growth and adulterants. Moreover, there are other factors such as viscosity, sulphur content, lubricity and cetane which can affect performance in use. These factors can affect the reliability and longevity of machinery. Oil companies go to extraordinary lengths to ensure that diesel delivered to their consumers satisfies all the requirements associated with the local diesel standard – SANS 342 – and more.

VISUAL INSPECTION

For the average consumer many of the parameters provided in SANS 342 are beyond their control and can only be determined from



Farmer Boy Nzimande at his diesel tank. It is important to do regular inspection and draining of these tanks.

laboratory testing. Therefore, only visual inspection of the fuel can provide an initial assessment of fitness for use covering three main areas – appearance, the presence of water and the presence of dirt.

Appearance

An initial assessment of the fuel must show that it is bright and clear. This means that the fuel must be translucent and clear of any contaminants such as water or particulates. Undyed diesel is normally a straw colour or light greenish yellow, but can be 'water white' – looking like water. Some, but not all companies, dye their diesel blue or purple which is indicative of the grade of diesel – blue indicates a maximum sulphur content of 50 ppm (w/w) while purple indicates 10 ppm (w/w). In all cases it must be possible to see through the fuel without noticing any particulate matter or water droplets present in the fuel.

It should be noted that during cold weather the fuel may not be bright and clear, but could be cloudy due to the presence of waxes that have precipitated from the diesel because of the cold. This is a natural occurrence and when the fuel heats as the weather warms, the waxes will redissolve and the fuel will become 'bright and clear'. This process is accelerated when the engine is started and warmed by passed fuel that is returned to the tank.

Several factors work...

Presence of water

Water, the issue affecting our producer's story causes corrosion, but also reduces the ability of the diesel to act as a lubricant. Diesel itself contains very small amounts of water from its production, but it is normally fully dissolved into the product when it meets the SANS 342 standard. However, if additional water is introduced into diesel through the supply chain by whatever means, it may drop out of the diesel when it becomes cold and then present itself as free water.

Modern engines have sophisticated water filters to minimise the amount of water passing through to the engine, but even these have operability limits and water can break through if present in sufficient quantity in the fuel. Furthermore, non-approved additives can also deactivate the water separator filter, thus limiting the ability to prevent free water from entering the fuel injection system, exacerbating the problem. Over time this water causes corrosion of the fuel system, affecting fuel lines and injectors.

Corrosion products can block injectors which are manufactured to very fine tolerances and will lead to incorrect fuel delivery into the cylinder in terms of both volume and spray pattern, resulting in increased consumption. Eventually the injectors will fail and will need replacement. It is thus obvious that water management is critical to machine operability, fuel consumption and the lifespan of equipment.

Oil companies take extraordinary measures to ensure the integrity of their logistics systems to minimise or eliminate the introduction of any water into the fuel. Consumers themselves can take measures to reduce any water introduced after delivery. This can be done by ensuring that fuel storage and dispensing equipment are placed in areas where the unwanted ingress of water is avoided, such as storm water run-off into underground tanks and the draining of low points in above-ground storage and distribution systems.

Best practice further includes the regular inspection and draining of storage tanks and drums, ensuring inlets are sealed and that vents operate correctly. It is imperative to regularly check these systems to ensure that water cannot enter.

Presence of dirt

Dirt in diesel comes from a variety of sources, including dust, poor storage systems that include faulty tank venting, corrosion products from tanks and vessels and poor housekeeping of distribution systems which include pipelines, transfer lines, trucks and storage tanks. The presence of dirt is measured by total contamination for which the standard (SANS 342) provides for the maximum amount of particulate matter at 24 mg/kg of fuel.

The presence of particulate matter in diesel can block fuel filters and is a source of abrasive material that may cause wear and damage to the components in the fuel system, such as pumps and injectors – with the same outcomes as provided above.

It is obvious that good housekeeping measures are necessary to ensure cleanliness of systems handling fuel and to prevent the ingress of dirt into these systems. This would include periodic inspection to ensure such cleanliness.

BACTERIAL CONTAMINATION

As mentioned above, diesel does contain a trace amount of water, but more may be introduced through the supply chain or in storage. This can happen from water present in the atmosphere that is absorbed into diesel during storage, or from condensation on the inside of tanks and/or from water leaks. Over time water may accumulate in

sufficient quantity to drop out of the diesel and settle at the bottom of the storage vessel.

Water at the bottom of a tank will create an interface between the water and the diesel where bacterial growth can occur. However, the possibility of this occurring is dependent on the time spent in storage and the quick turnover of tanks will mitigate against potential bacterial contamination. Nevertheless, the introduction of biodiesel into the diesel pool may exacerbate the risk of bacterial contamination as biodiesel contains numerous fatty acid compounds upon which bacteria and fungi thrive.

The introduction of biodiesel blends is gaining increasing focus as a way to decarbonise the fuels pool in the fight against climate change. Furthermore, the increase in imports of diesel over the years may result in contaminated diesel from ships being discharged into shared logistic systems.

Only a small amount of free water is necessary to allow for microbial growth. If this occurs, it will give rise to the formation of sludge and slime. These can block filters and nozzles and cause corrosion of fuel systems in machinery and the containment vessel from the organic acids formed by microbial action.

Treatment normally requires the use of approved biocides to kill the contaminants, but it is obviously important that the biocide used must be compatible with the fuel and all system components and not alter the properties of the fuel itself. At some stage a decision will need to be made regarding cleaning of the tank to remove any residual slime and sludge as a result of the contamination.



DIESEL ADULTERATION

Of major concern at present is the adulteration of diesel with illuminating paraffin. Entities blending paraffin into diesel seek to profit from the duties and levies administered on diesel which are not administered on paraffin. During 2023 these duties and levies amounted to approximately R6/ℓ, providing a healthy profit for any unscrupulous operator.

It should be noted that the blending of paraffin into diesel outside a licensed manufacturing warehouse at any level is illegal and if detected is subject to sanction. Oil companies mark their paraffin with a South African Revenue Services approved tracer (also called the A1 marker). If this marker is detected in diesel fuel above 1 mg/ℓ, then the inference is that the diesel has been illegally adulterated with paraffin. However, despite the use of this marker, the incidence of adulteration has ballooned over the past years with reported sales of paraffin more than doubling since 2017.

The blending of paraffin into diesel has a number of deleterious consequences to machinery and storage systems:

- It can reduce the flash point of diesel to below the maximum allowed (55°C), increasing the risk of fire around facilities designed for diesel storage but now handling products with increased volatility.
- It will reduce the viscosity of diesel which can have disastrous effects on both fuel pumps and injectors.
- The lubricating action of diesel will be compromised. This will affect injector performance, resulting in incorrect fuel delivery and spray patterns to cylinders, leading to increased fuel consumption, noisy operation and the formation of black smoke.

- Injector failure can occur, which can also result in engine failure. Engine failure occurs if the injector fails in the 'open' position, meaning the continued dribble of diesel onto the cylinder head, causing piston crown failure as the fuel burns on the crown itself.
- It can lead to decreased power if the injector fails in the 'closed' position – effectively taking one cylinder out of operation.
- The cetane number of fuel will be reduced, providing for slower starting and noisy operation.
- It can increase the sulphur content of the fuel, which may result in black smoke production from tail pipes.

The detection of adulterated diesel by a layperson is very difficult, if not impossible. Only laboratory testing will ascertain whether the diesel has been adulterated or not. Apart from testing for the A1 marker, adulteration can also be detected via testing for viscosity, sulphur content and distillation.

For the layperson, the following symptoms may be indicative of paraffin adulteration:

- Engines will be slow to start.
- Noisy operation of equipment.
- Lack of power.
- Increased fuel consumption.
- A heavily discounted diesel fuel price due to the seller escaping the duties and levies of the paraffin blended into the diesel.

If this occurs, it would be prudent for the consumer to contact their supplier to enquire further as to what remedial measures may be undertaken.

CONCLUSION

To operate as designed, engines rely on the quality of fuel supplied to meet the prescribed standard – SANS 342. The increased sophistication of diesel machines and the proliferation of diesel adulteration have meant that consumers really need to pay heed to delivered fuel quality as well as to price. Without these considerations, the wear and breakdown of components could be anticipated, leading to costly repairs and downtime.

To mitigate against these effects, there is an increased requirement on the bulk consumers of diesel to pay extra special attention to their deliveries and to the housekeeping at their storage systems. Systems and procedures should be considered to reduce the risk of contamination and to ensure that fit-for-purpose fuel is used. Your diesel supplier should be in a position to advise you of such systems and procedures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Southern African Institute of Tribology and South African Petroleum Industry Association Fuels Technical Committee. ■



**KEVIN BAART, HEAD:
STRATEGIC PROJECTS, SAPIA.
FIRST PUBLISHED IN
SA GRAAN/GRAIN, APRIL 2024.**



TRAIN FARMWORKERS

to use pesticides responsibly

CROP PROTECTION IS A VITAL PILLAR IN THE CONTINUOUS PURSUIT OF OUR PRODUCERS TO PROVIDE ENOUGH FOOD FOR THE GROWING POPULATION, BUT IT SHOULD NOT POSE A RISK TO HUMAN HEALTH OR THE ENVIRONMENT. THAT IS WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT THAT EVERYONE WHO WORKS WITH THESE PRODUCTS ARE PROPERLY TRAINED IN THE RESPONSIBLE USE THEREOF.

This kind of training cannot be treated as a 'nice to have' and it is our collective duty as an industry to make the necessary information available to those who need it. Thankfully, with the dawn of the digital era, the tools available to reach as many people as possible are becoming more accessible.

TRAIN THE TRAINER

Last year, 2023, was the first year that CropLife SA embarked on an initiative to train as many people as possible in a 'train the trainer' responsible use module. The ultimate goal of these sessions is to equip those in the industry who regularly interact with producers and farmworkers, or who may offer other services to them, to be in a position to transfer the knowledge obtained in the module to those who need it most.

The training was offered in a webinar format of which there were three dates to choose from. Subsequently the attendees had to complete an assessment to obtain their certificate of completion, as well as the accompanying training material. In addition, the module is a standard module on the CropLife SA CPD platform where crop advisers or technical personnel of CropLife SA member companies can complete their assessment at any time during the cycle to obtain 'certified responsible use trainer' status.

Training consists of numerous aspects pertaining to responsible use, such as wearing the correct personal protective clothing, the safe mixing, application, storage and transport of crop protection products, what to do in an emergency and what should be on the label. The Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) became a legal requirement as from September 2022 and is stipulated in the Regulations for Hazardous Chemical Agents No. R280 of 29 March 2021.

It requires that labels and safety data sheets of crop protection products follow a standardised approach in communicating the hazards of the chemical that are critical for producers and farmworkers to take note of.

Hazards associated with a particular chemical, their nature and severity, are communicated through a number of elements, such as hazard statements, hazard pictograms and signal words on both the label and the safety data sheet of the product. In addition, the regulations pertaining to agricultural remedies that were published in August 2023 also stipulate requirements that must appear on the main and secondary panels of the label, such as a poison information centre number, emergency numbers, registration number and shelf-life or expiry date, to name a few.

So why is the label so important? According to Regulation No. R1716 of 26 July 1991, the use of a pesticide for any other pur-

pose or in any other manner than what is instructed by its label, is illegal. So it goes to say that people working with these products must know how to interpret the label and where to find critical information. The new GHS layout will also signal certain actions that need to be taken by the producer or farmworker: For instance, all toxic products with the GHS signal word "DANGER" must be locked in a separate cage in the pesticide store.

Other topics that are covered in the training include compliance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1993 (Act No. 85 of 1993) which compels farmworkers and producers who mix and apply pesticides to wear the appropriate personal protective clothing, as well as the extended producer responsibility regulations of



It is so important that employees who work with pesticides are properly trained in the responsible use thereof.

the National Environment Management: Waste Act, 2008 (Act No. 59 of 2008) which requires that all empty pesticide containers be triple rinsed and recycled.

Over the past year, CropLife SA and its certified trainers offered responsible use training to nearly 6 000 producers and farmworkers. This is only the start – as more people are trained, the stewardship snowball just gets bigger.

CropLife SA will continue to offer these webinars and training sessions during the course of 2024 and producers are encouraged to keep an eye out on the website, www.croplife.co.za, for more information. Together we can ensure that each person who is busy protecting our food crops, also knows how to protect themselves, their loved ones and the environment. ■

ELRIZA THERON, ADVOCACY & COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, CROPLIFE SA. FIRST PUBLISHED IN SA GRAAN/GRAIN, APRIL 2024.

SAGraan
Grain



Stock theft under the spotlight

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF STOCK THEFT IN SOUTH AFRICA AMOUNTS TO MILLIONS OF RANDS. IT IS NOT LIMITED TO THE COMMERCIAL SECTOR ALONE. IT IS NOT ONLY THE ECONOMIC LOSS OF A STOLEN ANIMAL, BUT ALSO ITS REPRODUCTIVE VALUE THAT GETS STOLEN. THEREFORE, STOCK THEFT PRESENTS A DIRECT AS WELL AS AN INDIRECT ECONOMIC LOSS TO THE LIVESTOCK OWNER.

CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH STOCK THEFT

Stock theft is a specialist crime and requires specialist investigating officers. The lack of capacity within the South African Police Service (SAPS) and supply of vehicles to the stock theft units remain problematic. To successfully prosecute a stock theft case, it is important that, apart from the Vis-Pol official, the stock theft investigator reaches the scene urgently.

The investigation and sentencing of a stock theft case count under the most difficult because it occurs outdoors, and critical evidence is easily destroyed. Cases are frequently thrown out of court for various reasons, for instance when the farmer's affidavit differs from his statement in court. It is therefore imperative that the first statement is correctly recorded. Farmers have the right to make the statement in the language of their choice and to ensure that the factual content is correct before it is signed.

Stock theft is currently also associated with brutality and animal cruelty. These days stock theft is committed by armed and dangerous syndicates. It is therefore imperative that stock farmers also report animal welfare and abuse in their statements, because the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty against Animals (NSPCA) will be involved and it may lead to aggravated penalties.

Stock theft is regarded as a profitable crime. Animals are mostly stolen in rural areas and transported to urban areas, especially metropolitan areas, where they are presented at auctions. Although slaughtering for the pot does occur, stock theft in South Africa is essentially a syndicate crime and should be categorised as such by the SAPS.

Farmers themselves are also guilty, as a very high percentage of animals are unmarked. The marking of an animal (branding/tattooing) ensures ownership – an aspect that is critical to successfully resolve a stock theft case and obtain a court sentence. Once again, this renders stock theft an extremely difficult crime to solve if animals cannot be linked to the owner. All livestock owners must apply for a registered brand/tattoo mark with the Registrar of Animal Identification.

Apart from the economic losses associated with stock theft, the transportation of animals also poses a major risk for the animal health status of the national herd, because livestock can be stolen in a controlled/notifiable animal disease area and transported to a non-infected area. It is also very important that the driver has the necessary section 6 and 8 documentation when transporting animals on a national road.

The SAPS stock theft units are hampered by enormous capacity and logistical challenges. Vehicles present the biggest problem, especially in provinces where long distances must be covered. The servicing of vehicles is another problem, as sometimes all the vehicles of the units have to be serviced at the same time, or units have only one or two vehicles available at a specific time.

As already mentioned, there are very good investigating officers, but in some cases members of the SAPS are also directly linked to stock theft matters. Stock theft is a specialist crime and therefore requires well trained investigators. The rural communities are very concerned about the great exodus of specialist investigating officers who retire, and this matter has been addressed by the National Stock Theft Prevention Forum.

There is a perception that inexperienced prosecutors work with stock theft cases. However, the Justice College of the National Prosecution Authority has started to launch specific training courses to empower prosecutors to effectively prosecute stock theft cases.

HOW TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM

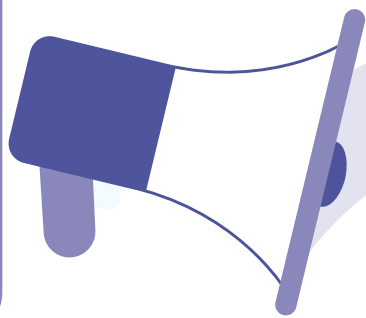
The National Stock Theft Prevention Forum revived its strategic plan during its last meeting, and it was resolved to focus on the following four priorities:

1. Take action to increase the marking (branding/tattooing) of animals within the provinces to 80%.
2. Design a model of integrated provincial meetings with crime prevention as a priority through the sharing of information and intelligence, building of relationships, especially with the SAPS, and to work towards prioritised outcomes across all structures within the provinces.
3. A structured national plan of action by all role-players to identify, prioritise and communicate problems in order to inform farmers, prosecutors, livestock auctioneers and members of the SAPS on the core procedures associated with effective stock theft prevention and control.
4. A renewed effort to influence the attitude of livestock owners to be more involved with rural safety structures in supporting the activities of all role-players within the forum.

The existing relationship with stock theft coordinators on a national and provincial level must be extended and strengthened. Cooperation is of utmost importance because it leads to mutual success in solving stock theft cases.

A solution for stock theft problems in South Africa can only be reached if everybody cooperates. ■

LOUIS WESSELS, CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL STOCK THEFT PREVENTION FORUM. PUBLISHED IN THE RPO NEWSLETTER, APRIL 2024.



HAVE YOU HEARD?

THE FMD FIGHT IS ON AGAIN

Foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) was detected in the Eastern Cape at the end of April, making it the fourth province in South Africa to have active cases of the disease. The director of Animal Health at the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), Dr Mpho Maja, confirmed that an outbreak occurred on a farm near Humansdorp.



She stated that the affected farm was placed under quarantine.

This brings the number of active cases of FMD in South Africa to 167 across the Free State, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga. Cases in Gauteng, North West and Limpopo have been resolved and closed by the World Organisation for Animal Health. Before 2019, South Africa had an FMD-free zone without the need for vaccination. To date, only the Western and Northern Cape provinces have remained FMD-free without vaccination. Gauteng has been regarded as an FMD-free area since 13 March 2024.

NEWS FROM THE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT



The 16th Annual Agricultural Research Symposium (AARS) was held in March. Dr Godfrey Kgatle, Grain SA's research coordinator, chaired the session 'Innovations in crop production'. The symposium and expo were hosted by the Gauteng Department of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment (GDARDE), with the theme 'Research for an innovative agri food sector and

economic growth'. It is aimed at creating an environment and platform where research findings, results and new technology are shared and transferred to stakeholders.

Pfano Musetsho is a new member of Grain SA's research department. She joined the team as a research intern in April 2024 after first gaining experience at the Technology Innovation Agency, where she assisted with managing research programmes and reviewing the progress of research projects.



YOUNG SA JOURNALIST HONOURED

The International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ) named ten outstanding young agricultural journalists to receive the IFAJ/Alltech Young Leaders Award. Among them was one South African – Duncan Masiwa, assistant editor of *Food for Mzansi* magazine. Duncan will receive his award at the IFAJ's Global Congress in Interlaken, Switzerland, in August 2024.



Photo: Food for Mzansi

WIN R2 500

Make someone's day by telling our readers all about your agricultural hero. The 'My Hero' series, a competition by Grain SA and John Deere, is your chance to acknowledge the heroes who contributed to your farming journey. By nominating someone who helped you to develop into the farmer you are, you can win a cash prize of R2 500. Scan the QR code to fill in the form or visit the website sagrainmag.co.za. ■



Corner Post

BY LOUISE KUNZ, ASSISTANT EDITOR

AFTER COMPLETING HIS SCHOOL CAREER, KOPANO LENTSWETSHIPI (35) JOINED HIS FATHER, EZEKIEL, ON THE FARM IN NORTH WEST. KOPANO HAS GREAT ADMIRATION FOR EZEKIEL, WHO INTRODUCED HIM TO FARMING WHEN HE WAS JUST A YOUNG BOY. 'HE TAUGHT ME THE BASICS OF FARMING AS I WORKED ALONGSIDE HIM ON THE FARM.'

The father-and-son duo has been working side by side since 2009, sharing responsibilities as well as all the ups and downs each new season brings. Kopano loves working with his father and says being part of this family business makes him extremely happy. He trusts that both his sons will develop a keen interest in farming, as they accompany their father and grandfather on the farm.

To achieve his long-term goal of becoming a commercial farmer, he is trying to gain as much knowledge as possible about agriculture. 'You will never know everything, but when you learn something, you must put it into practice – otherwise the knowledge is wasted.'

This season has been a particularly difficult one, as North West was severely impacted by the drought and heatwaves. Although the Lentswetshipi team harvested 5 t/ha of maize last season, Kopano expects a yield of no more than about 1,5 t/ha this season. He doubts whether they will come near the previous sunflower yield of 1,1 t/ha.

The Farmer Development Programme has played a huge role in Kopano's development as a farmer. Through study group sessions, courses and training he has gained a wealth of knowledge that has been employed to improve his production.

'Phahama Grain Phakama (PGP) has helped us largely to improve the standard of our crops. We have learned the importance of doing things properly.'

KOPANO'S STORY

WHO HAS PLAYED A ROLE IN YOUR SUCCESS?

Apart from my father and the Farmer Development Team, the 2018 New Era Commercial Farmer of the Year, Vuyani Lolwane, played a huge role in my farming career. He used to tell me that I should not try to farm alone but must take hands with my father. It was very good advice. Vuyani also encouraged me to join Grain SA. I am sad that he passed away in 2022 and could not see me grow as a farmer.

HAS THIS CHALLENGING SEASON AFFECTED YOUR PASSION FOR FARMING?

No, not at all – it is part of being a farmer. The drought and heat have been very difficult, and now it looks as if we must fight Sclerotinia in our sunflower crops. Challenges help one to make plans and to develop.

DO YOU AGREE THAT WE NEED MORE YOUNG FARMERS?

Yes, definitely! When I became a farmer, very few young people in the area were interested in farming, but I can see a change in their attitude. Farming is hard work, but it makes a difference. Putting food on the table – whether it is just for your family or village, or contributing to food security in South Africa – is essential. The young people are beginning to see that farming can change lives. ■

KOPANO'S 3 TOP TIPS

1. Listen to your mentors and to everyone who knows more than you. Knowledge will make you successful.
2. Do the right thing at the right time, otherwise you are just wasting time and money.
3. Take care of your land – make sure your soil is healthy.



FARM FACTS

Farm: Communal land in Weltevrede Village
Nearest town: Lichtenburg
Region: North West
Size: Plants on 530 ha
Type of farming operation: Mixed – crops (maize and sunflower) and livestock (cattle, sheep and goats)

PGP'S CONTRIBUTION

- Joined Grain SA in 2019
- Attends Mooifontein Study Group
- Member of 250 Ton Club: 2023

Training courses completed:

Has completed several courses including:

- Introduction courses: Maize and sunflower production
- Advanced courses in maize and sunflower production and marketing
- On-farm maintenance and support: Tractors and implements

A mentor's view:

Du Toit van der Westhuizen, regional development manager in North West, has been mentoring Kopano since 2019 and says that he always listens to the advice and guidelines he offers. 'He is keen to improve as a farmer and rather than making a mistake, he asks if he is unsure of something. Kopano tries his very best to apply what he learned. He works conservatively with money and will plan carefully before buying something.'

Du Toit van der Westhuizen



A programme that is changing lives



Plan ahead to stay sustainable

IN HIS CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT, DEREK MATHEWS, IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE GRAIN SA MANAGEMENT TEAM, GAVE AN OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR 2023. THIS OVERVIEW OF THE PAST GRAIN PRODUCTION YEAR CLEARLY ILLUSTRATED THE PRESSURE ON FARMING MARGINS.



While a high international demand for grains and oilseeds led to increased market prices, input prices reached record highs. Similarly, climatic conditions caused both gains and losses. The summer rainfall areas experienced a fairly wet season and although some parts were waterlogged, it was still an excellent year for crops like soybeans, with record yields and a record harvest.

Changed circumstances in the last 20 years, the active free market and international competition have forced Grain SA to review its founding documentation to ensure the organisation remains the mouthpiece of the grain farmer, geared for future adaptability. This action led to approval for the way forward of a Group of Entities, with Grain SA as a non-profit organisation, a private company, a development entity and a trust.

Grain SA's chairperson, Derek Mathews, delivering the chairman's report at the 2024 Congress.

Grain SA's fresh, new brand identity was successfully launched across communication platforms. The core of the new look was also extended to the different entities, confirming the collective nature of the organisation.

With specialised requirements and the high cost of research projects, Grain SA has joined hands with several private and government partners. The focus is still on identifying needs, obtaining funds and facilitating research to turn it into the best resources in the industry.

Mathews further emphasised that research projects undertaken by farmers at ground level are another important factor for sustainability, which also includes developing farmers. Climate change is almost certainly the biggest challenge experienced – not just in the last season, but over the last few seasons, where extremely erratic conditions prevailed that really affected outputs. As an experienced development entity within the Grain SA group, Phahama Grain Phakama shared information on techniques to counter a constantly changing environment. Despite challenges, this led to amazing breakthroughs.

The chairperson's report emphasised the resilience of farmers who try again and again, and it is those farmers who emerge victorious. This persistence was recognised at Grain SA's Day of Celebration, the Grow for Gold competition and the Grain Producer of the Year events, with perseverance triumphing once again in 2023.

Mathews concluded that Grain SA will continue to grow and adapt – and above all, continue to make plans to keep farmers sustainable.

– Article written by Valerie Cilliers, editor of SA Graan/Grain. ■

AT GRASS ROOTS



The drought and severe heat have made this a very difficult season for Sello Mavundla (second from the left). With him are Jacques Roux, regional development manager in the Eastern Free State, and representatives of the Standard Bank Project during a farm visit.



Although this farmer in the Dundee region wasn't one of the farmers who suffered crop losses due to heat and drought, he is battling with poachers entering the property and stealing the maize.



Mathew Mlotshwa, a farmer in the Louwsburg area, checking the soil content of his soybean crop during a visit from mentor Timon Filter. Apart from one field, all the fields were ready to be harvested.



The Mthethwa's from the Dundee region are part of the Kgodiso Project. During a farm visit, mentor Chris de Jager reported that the maize crop was looking very good. The farm received good rains in March, but with the days getting shorter and cooler, the crop maturity was slowing down.



Encouraging farmers to persevere

THE Phahama Grain Phakama (PGP) regional development managers and mentors visited 55 advanced and project farmers between 20 March and 16 April. Apart from giving advice, one of the most important aspects of farm visits is to encourage the farmers to persevere despite challenges.

To achieve the same goal, study group visits (which are subsistence farmer orientated) also took place. The aim of these meetings, which were held at the beginning of April, was to collect the new year's membership fees and update the active members on the database, as well as discuss the coming season's Beyond Abundance Project.

In the Louwsburg area eleven farm visits occurred. Mentor Timon Filter reminded farmers to follow up on processes to prevent wasting time – for example, when parts are ordered to fix a tractor or to keep in touch with the harvesting contractor to make sure he arrives at the right time.

On the farm of Mlotshwa Mathews Mfanimpela (a SACTA project participant) in the Louwsburg area, the soybeans on one field is basically ready, while the other field needs about two more weeks. Timing is everything and he is determined to get it spot-on this season.



Eric Wiggil (regional development manager) visited four farms in the Kokstad area. On Nomlala Siyabonga's farm the maize is drying nicely. The 66/66BR short season cultivar has done well to pull through this dry spell.



At the Salubrinza Study Group in Mpumalanga, the renewal of membership was on the table. Arrangements were also made for a visit by students from the Netherlands later in April. The students want to find out more about the challenges and success stories of smallholder farmers in South Africa.

Invest in TRAINING

IN the period from 20 March to 12 April twelve training courses were presented in the Western Free State, Mbombela, Louwsburg, Dundee, Lichtenburg, Maclear and Kokstad. Of the 109 farmers who attended the training, a total of 101 were found competent after being evaluated and observed.

The courses presented were:

- Practical skills courses – planter and boom-sprayer calibration (seven courses).
- Introduction to grain marketing (five courses).



Paul Wiggill presented a one-day course on planter and boom-sprayer calibration at Gadale Farm near Kokstad in the Eastern Cape. The attendees said the information was clear and workable formulas were given in the field.



Lani Kruger presented an introduction to grain marketing course at the Machadodorp Library in Mpumalanga. These attendees found the course insightful and are looking forward to using their new-found knowledge.



Congress 2024: We were there!

Photos by Lizel Snyman.