

JANUARY 2025

# PULA

# IMVULA

**GROWING** FOOD • PEOPLE • PROSPERITY

PGP MAGAZINE FOR DEVELOPING FARMERS

**PGP**  
PHAHAMA GRAIN PHAKAMA



## Editorial team

### PHAHAMA GRAIN PHAKAMA: PRETORIA

PO Box 74087  
Lynnwood Ridge  
0040  
■ 086 004 7246  
■ www.grainsa.co.za

### EDITOR AND DISTRIBUTION

#### Jane McPherson

■ 082 854 7171 ■ Office: 012 943 8285  
■ jane@grainsa.co.za

### PUBLISHING PARTNER

#### INFOWORKS MEDIA PUBLISHING

##### Assistant editor – Louise Kunz

■ louise@infoworks.biz

##### Team leader – Johan Smit

■ 082 553 7806 ■ Office: 018 468 2716  
■ johan@infoworks.biz

##### Publishing – Elizma Myburgh, Joritha Hechter



## PGP Farmer Development Programme

### REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT MANAGERS

#### Free State

JACQUES ROUX  
■ 082 377 9529 ■ jacques@grainsa.co.za

#### Mpumalanga

JERRY MTHOMBOHI  
■ 084 604 0549 ■ jerry@grainsa.co.za  
■ Office: 012 943 8289 ■ Lanelie Swanepoel (Office assistant)

#### KwaZulu-Natal

GRAEME ENGELBRECHT  
■ 082 650 9315 ■ graeme@grainsa.co.za

#### PHUMZILE NGCOBO (Assistant: Dundee)

■ 060 477 7940 ■ phumzile@grainsa.co.za  
■ Office: 012 943 8287 ■ Nkosinathi Mazibuko

#### North West

DU TOIT VAN DER WESTHUIZEN  
■ 082 877 6749 ■ dutoit@grainsa.co.za  
■ Office: 012 943 8290 ■ Lebo Mogatlanyane

#### Eastern Cape

ERIC WIGGILL  
■ 082 620 0058 ■ eric@grainsa.co.za  
■ Office: 012 943 8277  
■ Luthando Diko (Office assistant: Kokstad)  
■ Cwayita Mpotyi (Office assistant: Mthatha)  
■ Lindie Pretorius (Office assistant: Maclear)

#### Western Cape

MJ SWART  
■ 072 090 7997 ■ mj@grainsa.co.za  
■ Office: 012 943 8285 ■ Hailey Ehrenreich (Office assistant)

Articles written by independent writers are the views  
of the writers and not that of PGP.

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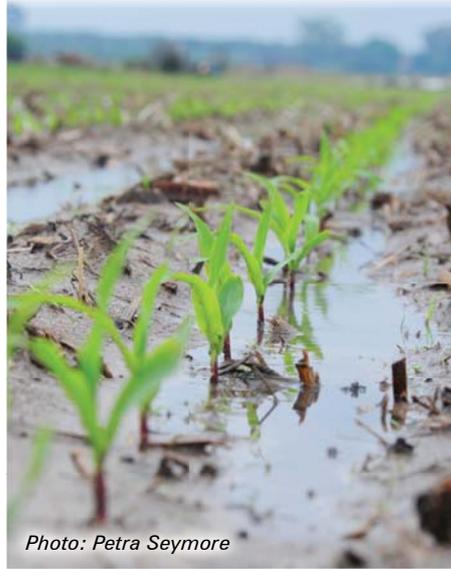


Photo: Petra Seymore



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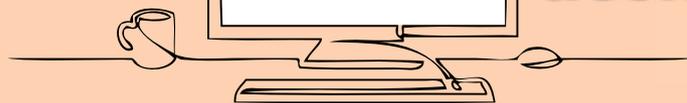
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From the **PGP** desk



2025



• H A P P Y • N E W • Y E A R •

**HAPPY** NEW YEAR TO ALL THE HARDWORKING FARMERS OF THE FARMER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME!

As we step into this new year, may it bring you strength, good health and a season of abundant harvests. Your dedication, resilience and commitment to feeding the world are truly admirable.

We hope this year's season is full of favourable weather, rich soil and bountiful crops that exceed expectations. May your efforts bear fruit in every field, and may you find joy in the work you do.

Here's to a year of growth, prosperity and the satisfaction of seeing your labour thrive.

Wishing you all the best in the coming season!

We should never forget that farming is one of the most important jobs on earth – everyone needs food and it is the fruits of your labour that enable so many other people to eat.

All the best for a fruitful year ahead! ■

*Jane McPherson*  
PGP ADVISOR

The *Pula* editorial team wishes all our readers a prosperous 2025. All the best for a prosperous year ahead!

# AWARDS CELEBRATE

## our top grain farmers

**T**HE 2024 GRAIN SA GALA AWARDS FUNCTION WAS HELD AT THE BIRCHWOOD HOTEL IN BOKSBURG ON FRIDAY, 1 NOVEMBER 2024. THE EVENT WAS A MAGNIFICENT CELEBRATION, HONOURING ALL GRAIN FARMERS WHO CONTRIBUTE TO THE CONTINUED GROWTH OF GRAIN PRODUCTION IN SOUTH AFRICA.

'It is with joy and pride that we celebrate the innovation and dedication of grain farmers in South Africa at the 25th Grain Producer of the Year function. The nominees in each category have pushed boundaries and adopted best practices, which allowed them to excel in their field. This evening belongs to them and they are the reason why we are here tonight,' said Richard Krige, vice-chairperson of Grain SA, when he welcomed the guests.

He also thanked Syngenta for sponsoring the evening and believing in the awards. 'These awards are not only about the yields achieved, but also about the collective impact of successful farming in our communities. It highlights the power of unity, innovation and perseverance.'

### 2024 GRAIN PRODUCER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Grain SA's annual Grain Producer of the Year award is one of South Africa's most prestigious agricultural recognitions. Established by Grain SA and

sponsored by Syngenta, this award aims to honour outstanding commercial farmers who demonstrate innovative farming practices, contribute significantly to the agricultural sector as well as their communities, and maintain high standards of sustainability and productivity.

Dr Tobias Doyer, chief executive officer of Grain SA, reminded guests that winning the Grain Producer of the Year award is not only a mark of distinction but also serves as an inspiration for other farmers. 'Recipients often become role-models within the agricultural community, encouraging others to adopt modern, sustainable practices and contributing to the overall development of South Africa's grain industry.'

He added that the award underscores the vital role that grain farmers play in securing South Africa's food supply and their contribution to the country's economy, highlighting the resilience and innovation within the agricultural sector.

Luc Henry, the newly appointed managing director of Syngenta, said in his keynote address that South African farmers are pioneers of agriculture who set a high standard of excellence. 'We celebrate South Africa's leading growers tonight for the way in which they adopt innovation and strive towards growth, inclusion and engagement,' he said.

Derek Mathews, chairperson of Grain SA, was given the task of announcing the winner in the category Grain SA/Syngenta Grain Producer



*The Grain SA/Syngenta Grain Producer of the Year for 2024, Michael Allen (middle) with his wife, Carol, at his side. With them are Derek Mathews, Luc Henry from Syngenta and Dr Tobias Doyer.*



*Jeremia Mathebula and Derek Mathews from Grain SA, Antois van der Westhuizen (John Deere Financial), Dr Langelihle Simela (Absa Agri Business) and Thabi Nkosi (chairman of the board at Land Bank) congratulating the Grain SA/Absa/John Deere Financial New Era Commercial Farmer of the Year, Petrus Ranko Tsoetsi and his wife, Philia.*

of the Year. He congratulated the finalists and reminded the audience that it is the resilience of South African farmers that sets them apart.

'We are extremely proud of our grain farmers and their achievements within this vibrant sector,' he added before announcing father and son duo, Michael and Gareth Allen, as 2024's Grain Producers of the Year.

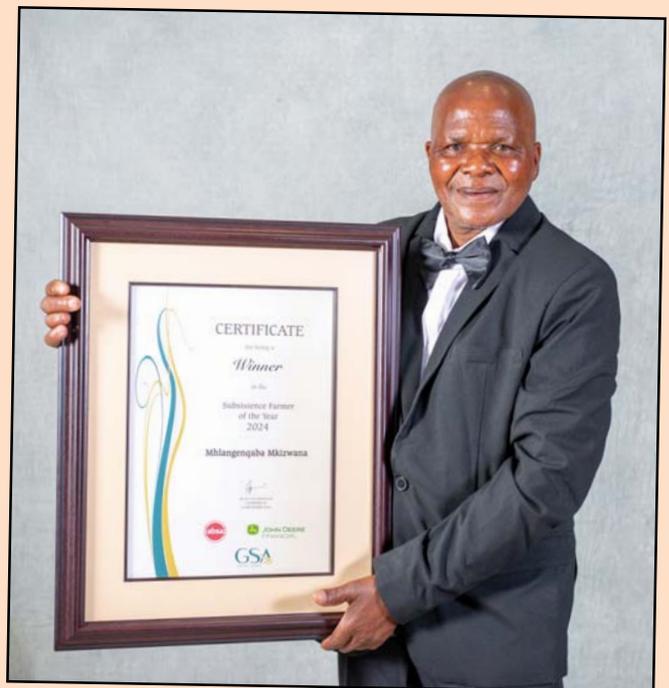
In accepting, Michael thanked Grain SA and Syngenta for sponsoring the award. 'We cannot do without the valuable partnerships with key role players in the grain value chain. I am a great supporter of organised agriculture, which I believe requires engagement that starts in your own office, moves to your neighbour, then your farmers' union and finally organisations such as Grain SA. We cannot farm without organised agriculture and being part of it is a great honour.'



**Jerry Mthombothi** (regional development manager at the Mbombela office) and **Alfred Gondo**, Grain SA Potential Commercial Farmer of the Year.



**Ranko** and his mentor, **Jacques Roux**, PGP regional development manager at the Free State office.



**Mhlangenqaba Mkizwana**, the Grain SA/Absa/John Deere Financial Subsistence Farmer of the Year.



**Jim Besabakhe Masemola**, Grain SA/Land Bank Smallholder Farmer of the Year, and his regional development manager, **Jerry Mthombothi**, on the left.

### FARMER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Another highlight of the gala awards was the introduction of the winners in Grain SA's Phahama Grain Phakama (PGP) Farmer Development Programme competition. This programme aims to bridge the gap between subsistence farming and commercial farming, addressing both technical and business challenges that new farmers face.

The following winners were also celebrated at the Grain SA gala awards:

- **Petrus Ranko Tsoetsi**: Grain SA/Absa/John Deere Financial New Era Commercial Farmer of the Year (250+ tons).
- **Alfred Gondo**: Grain SA Potential Commercial Farmer of the Year (100 ha, but producing less than 250 tons).
- **Jim Besabakhe Masemola**: Grain SA/Land Bank Smallholder Farmer of the Year (10 ha, but producing less than 250 tons).
- **Mhlangenqaba Mkizwana**: Grain SA/Absa/John Deere Financial Subsistence Farmer of the Year (less than 10 ha).

## Awards celebrate our...



**Luc Henry, managing director of Syngenta, delivering the keynote address.**



**Dr Langelihle Simela  
(Absa Agri Business)**



**Antois van der Westhuizen  
(John Deere Financial)**

**PGP Farmer of the Year  
sponsor representatives.**



**Sakhumzi May  
(Land Bank)**



**Anlie Hattingh, Brand  
Republic, was the  
master of ceremonies.**



**Here are some more photographs of the winners taken on the evening.**

In announcing the winners, Jeremia Mathebula, chairperson of PGP and vice-chairperson of Grain SA, said that the recipients of these awards are beacons of hope and an inspiration to the communities they farm in. 'Achieving great yields takes passion, faith and hard work. It is these values that allow farmers to grow from obtaining 2 t/ha to becoming 8 t/ha growers,' he added.

Sponsor representatives, Dr Langelihle Simela (business development manager: Absa Agri Business), Antois van der Westhuizen (managing director: John Deere Financial Africa and Middle East) and Sakhumzi May (chief agricultural economist at Land Bank) congratulated the winners and thanked Grain SA/PGP for driving the programme with continued success.

- Dr Simela thanked all who contributed to the nominees' success stories. 'This sector keeps on growing despite South Africa being a rain-scarce country. Through collaboration and partnerships, we are able to foster inclusive growth as each role player brings a piece of the puzzle to the table,' she added.
- Van der Westhuizen thanked the nominees and grain farmers who attended the evening for their contribution to keeping South Africa food secure. He also thanked Grain SA for hosting such an important event.
- 'Your hard work, resilience and vision as grain farmers inspire us and fuel our commitment towards your growth,' said May. ■



**VALERIE CILLIERS,  
EDITOR, SA GRAAN/GRAIN**



# Manage a loan wisely

**B**Y LOANING A FARMER MONEY, THE FINANCIAL INSTITUTION ESSENTIALLY BECOMES AN 'INVESTOR' IN THE FARMER'S BUSINESS. IT IS THEIR JOB TO ENSURE THAT THE MONEY IS PLACED IN THE HANDS OF A POTENTIALLY SUCCESSFUL ENTERPRISE OPERATED BY GOOD FARM MANAGEMENT.

When farmers are planting only a few hectares (1 ha to 5 ha), they usually do it from their own pockets and without an outside loan. It is the farmer's money and what he does with the crop and the income, is entirely his/her choice.

However, when a farmer starts to grow and plant more hectares, it is often necessary to apply for a production loan from a bank, agricultural business or other funders. These businesses are known as financial institutions. This is often when the farmer's attitude changes. He then seems to regard the crops as someone else's crops and he expects them to carry the loss.

## AN EXAMPLE

A farmer is able to plant:

- 25 ha of maize from his own pocket at a cost of R250 000 (for the sake of the example).
- 50 ha of maize with a loan from South African Cultivar and Technology Agency (SACTA) at a cost of R500 000.
- 50 ha of maize with a loan from Bank A at a cost of R500 000.

This farmer now owes R1 000 000 and has planted 125 ha of maize:

- 25 ha of maize yielded 50 tons with a total income R200 000.
- 50 ha of maize yielded 100 tons with a total income R400 000.
- 50 ha of maize yielded 100 tons with a total income R400 000.

So the farmer actually invested R1 250 000 in the crop and only realised an income of R1 000 000. In other words, the farm has made a loss of R250 000.

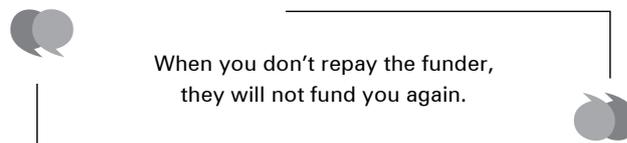
## What to do

This puts the farmer in a dilemma: He needs money for himself to live on, but he owes the funders R1 000 000, which is all the income he generated.

- ☒ The **wrong thing** to do, is to only pay the funders R800 000.

☑ The **correct thing** to do, is to repay the funders in full with the total income of R1 000 000.

- Why? Farming is a long-term business and a way of life. Some years you make good profits and other years you make a loss.
- To be a grain farmer, you will probably need to take out production loans every year. When you don't repay the funder, they will not fund you again – and in essence, that will be the end of your farming career.



Remember, you are not farming in a partnership with the bank. You are only borrowing from the bank, and you need to repay your loans before you use the money for anything else. ■

## TAKE NOTE

There are some risks to consider when applying for a loan:

- The interest rate may increase annually.
- You may lose your collateral (this is an asset or property that you offer as security for when you are unable to pay back the loan).
- You may have to pay late fees or penalties for late payment.

Source: <https://www.farmersweekly.co.za/farming-basics/how-to-business/a-guide-to-the-loan-application-process/>



JANE MCPHERSON,  
PGP ADVISOR



# An introduction to basic groundnut production

**G**ROUNDNUTS ARE PRIMARILY USED FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION IN TERMS OF THE RAW SEED, PEANUT BUTTER, OIL AND OTHER BY-PRODUCTS. THE CORRECT CULTIVATION OF GROUNDNUTS CAN PRESENT FARMERS WITH A VERY HIGH NUTRITIONAL CROP AND A HIGH-INCOME VALUE.

Locally, groundnuts are grown in the summer rainfall regions under irrigation and dryland conditions. Initially, smallholder farmers from mainly the northern and eastern parts of South Africa produced groundnuts for their own consumption – and it is still an important source of nutrition in the northern parts of KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Mpumalanga.

Recently more farmers from the developing farmer sector have entered the commercial market through incentives given by processors to boost South Africa's production numbers and to keep the groundnut industry viable. This has opened many new business opportunities for the emerging farmer and the commercial farmer, where both parties are enabled to form strong working relationships to ensure a sustainable groundnut industry.

A groundnut breeding programme was started at Potchefstroom (ARC-GC) in the 1960s, where Spanish-bunch type groundnut cultivars are currently still being produced (Figure 1).

## BACKGROUND

Groundnuts (*Arachis hypogaea L.*) are divided into two groups, namely the Virginia and Spanish-Valencia groups. The origin of groundnuts is from South America. It is safe to say that the groundnut legacy in South Africa was introduced by the Portuguese seafarers and slave traders in the form of the cultivar Natal-Common.

The importance of groundnuts for the South African market is emphasising its value nationally and as an export product, especially in terms of its potential to generate international revenue since 1967. Van der Merwe (1981) explained that the early Natal settlers conducted the first groundnut trials in 1853, when the locally available cultivar and the Virginia type favoured by the settlers were tested in South Africa.

This Spanish type is highly suitable for South African conditions because it is adapted to adverse environmental conditions, proved to be more disease-resistant, supports a shorter growing cycle and shows an apparent lack of fresh seed dormancy, as suggested by Hammans in 1994.

## STARTING YOUR OWN GROUNDNUT FARMING OPERATION

### Soil

Soils normally selected for groundnut production should preferably be sandy. Groundnuts have a well-developed taproot system which, depending on the soil type, can reach a depth of 1,8 m. Soils with a high potential to produce groundnuts are therefore typically deep (1 500 mm to 2 000 mm), well drained, red and/or yellow soils with a high fine sand fraction such as sandy loam to sandy texture in the topsoil. The pH (KCl) should range between 5,5 to 7.

The preparation of the seedbed is very important. The seedbed must be moist, even and firm to allow good contact between the soil particles and

the seed for good germination and root development. The most important soils for groundnut cultivation are Avalon, Bainsvlei, Clovelly, Hutton and Glencoe. Physical limitations including shallow soil, hardpans or compaction layers must be avoided because it restricts taproot development.

Seed germination is rapid if the soil moisture and temperature are optimal (above 18°C). Shallow planted seeds (less than 50 mm deep) will be planted in relatively warmer soil. Seeds planted in too shallow soils will dry out quickly and germination will be low, which will result in poor stands and yields.

### Water

Areas under rainfed conditions in which groundnuts can be grown successfully, are limited because moisture is a critical factor for groundnut production. The Spanish type is recommended in rainfed areas where irrigation is not possible, as it is more water-use efficient (WUE) because of its upright growth habit and short growing season. Rainfall in the region of 500 mm to 700 mm per annum is optimum conditions for groundnut production.

Planting should not be done before at least 50 mm of rainfall in a short period of time was measured. The germination process of the seed can be speed up by planting them in moist, warm soils.

### Temperature

Groundnuts originate from the tropical areas in South America and therefore require a growth period of at least 150 frost-free days and high temperatures. Avoid planting in dry soil and irrigate during cold spells or planting in cold, wet soil. Planting in soils of 15°C at a 5 cm soil depth ensures fast germination and produces healthy seedlings.

A germination rate of 95% can be achieved between 18°C to 30°C. Suitable vegetative growth occurs best between 20°C to 35°C, while a day temperature of 27°C is most suitable for flower development. A warm day of 29°C and a cool night of 23°C are optimum temperatures for pod formation.

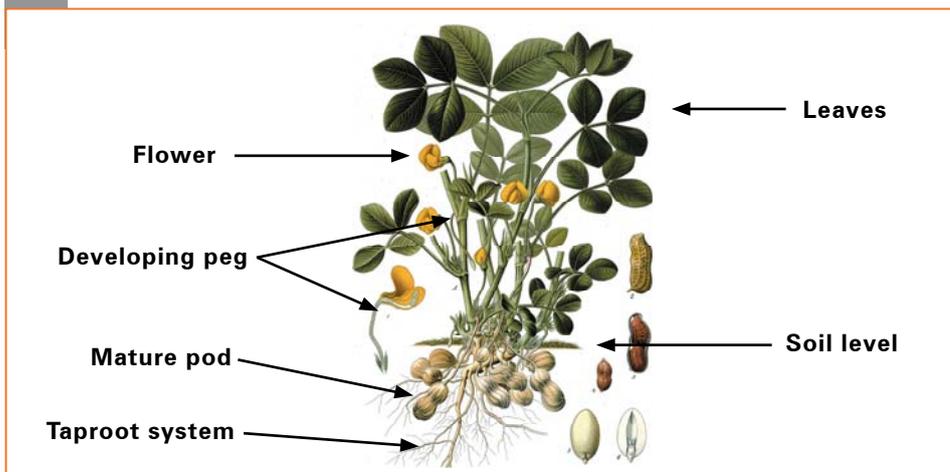
### Fertiliser

Groundnuts are not highly dependent on nitrogen fertilisation because, as a legume, it can fix atmospheric nitrogen with the aid of root bacteria that converts atmospheric N<sub>2</sub> into NO<sup>-3</sup> through the nitrification process. Active nitrogen nodules have a pinkish appearance, and those not active are green or black when dissected. In rural fields, however, the level of phosphorous is usually low and it should be applied additionally.

Like other crops, groundnuts require adequate levels of potassium for normal growth and development. In the unlikely event where the potassium levels are low, it can be supplemented up to 10 kg ha<sup>-1</sup>. Calcium, on the other hand, is an essential element in groundnut production and crucial for seed development.

An over-supply of potassium in the soil can induce a calcium deficiency. On calcium-deficient soils, groundnuts will produce a lower yield with a low kernel quality. Soil tests, analyses and correct fertilisation are important.

**1** An illustration of the groundnut plant.



**1** A groundnut stack.



The groundnut plant.



**2** Plants can be placed in windrows to dry.

**Production practices**

- Planting starts when the soil moisture is adequate and after the seedbed has been properly prepared. To establish a good planting density, an amount of 50 kg seed is planted on a hectare.
- On smaller pieces of land, the spacing of the seed in the row can be 8 cm apart and the spacing between the rows must be 90 cm. In high rainfall areas the spacing between the rows can be 75 cm.
- The seed must be placed at a depth of 5 cm and a little pressure must be exerted on the planting row to maximise the contact between the soil and the seed. When implements are used for planting, the seed and fertiliser are deposited simultaneously. If hand planting is used, the fertiliser can be broadly and evenly spread by hand after planting.
- It is important to apply a pre-emergence herbicide, of which a mixture of Strongarm plus Alachlor can be recommended. Pest and insect control are usually not a major concern. However, when there is an infestation of higher than 10%, action should be taken. Usually aphids, rust and leaf spot are occurring more often than other problematic organisms.
- To combat aphids, an insecticide with mercaptothion, pirimicarb or thiomefon as active ingredient can be applied. To control rust and leaf spot, the fungicides with active ingredients such as carbendazim or tebuconazole can be used. Maintenance of the groundnuts fields throughout the season is very important.
- Harvesting takes place 150 days after planting. The whole plant gets lifted out of the ground and can be packed in a heap/stack (Photo 1) or placed in windrows (Photo 2) to dry. After two weeks, the leaves and stems can be removed, and the shelling can start. Care must be taken during the shelling process to prevent damage to the kernels. Split and damaged kernels will result in a lower income compared to whole (choice grade) kernels. The yield of groundnuts varies between 1,5 t ha<sup>-1</sup> to 4 t ha<sup>-1</sup>. ■



DR WIKUS SNIJMAN, PROJECT MANAGER: GROUNDNUT BREEDER SEED, ARC-GRAIN CROPS

# Eastern Cape farmers learn about crop rotation

**T**HE ZANYOKWE IRRIGATION SCHEME (ZIS) FALLS UNDER KEISKAMMAHOEK IN THE EASTERN CAPE. DESPITE HEAVY RAINFALL, MORE THAN 100 PARTICIPANTS GATHERED HERE FOR A FARMERS' DAY IN SEPTEMBER 2024. THE PURPOSE OF THE EVENT WAS TO PROMOTE THE GROWING OF CERTAIN WINTER AND SUMMER CROPS IN THE EASTERN CAPE.

This farmers' day is the result of a project led by the Department of Agronomy at Stellenbosch University in collaboration with the Department of Agronomy at the University of Fort Hare. The project focusses on exploring the yield potential and adaptation of grain and oilseed crops in the Eastern Cape, and aims to enhance the agricultural productivity and climate resilience of crops produced in the province.

Preliminary studies by Stellenbosch University (SU) and the University of Fort Hare (UFH) have shown that winter crops such as wheat and canola and summer crops such as soybeans, sorghum and sunflower can be produced successfully in the Eastern Cape.

## INTERCROPPING

Currently, most of the local farmers grow only maize and do not practise crop rotation. In the winter, most of their fields lie fallow and those with irrigation normally grow vegetables. Thus, farmers were encouraged to practise crop rotation by introducing winter crops such as wheat and canola, as most of them have access to irrigation water in ZIS.

The speakers also motivated the farmers to intercrop maize with leguminous crops such as soybeans, as these can improve soil fertility, increase diversity and reduce the occurrence of crop diseases.

Furthermore, sorghum and sunflowers were highlighted to be climate-resilient crops that can greatly benefit farmers in areas with a low rainfall. The nutritional and health benefits of sorghum were also emphasised, as this crop has the potential to be used as a substitute for maize in human diets.



*A group who attended the farmers' day. The participants gathered in a hall belonging to the Department of Rural Development in the Eastern Cape and Agrarian Reform in Burnshill.*

The farmers showed interest in producing the suggested crops but raised a critical question about market availability for the crops. It was highlighted to the farmers that interventions from several government departments at national level would be required to avail marketing infrastructure, provided that the production levels are high.

## WORKING TOGETHER

In the meantime, farmers who are willing to start growing the crops can work together or form co-operatives so that their produce and resources can be pooled together to get a marketable quantity of crops. Currently one local small-scale farmer, Sinelizwi Fakade, is already producing canola under irrigation. If more farmers can join him, their produce can be combined and transported to the buyers.

The extension officer, Xolani Mpengesi, promised to follow up with the farmers to see who is willing to try the new crops. The information will be communicated to the relevant people to get the project started.

## Partners

The success of the farmers' day can be attributed to the collaboration of various institutions highlighting a broad and multidisciplinary approach. These are:

- Grain SA.
- University of Fort Hare.
- Department of Science and Innovation.
- Technology Innovation Agency.
- Agricultural Research Council.
- Department of Rural Development and Agrarian Reform.

The project has a dedicated team of researchers, students and technicians from SU and UFH. Key team members include Prof Pieter Swanepoel (SU), Prof Charles Mutengwa (UFH), Willem Botes (US), Dr Flackson Tshuma (SU), Dr Nyasha Chiuta (UFH) and UFH students Simthandile Bobotyana (PhD), Luyolo S Mzileni (PhD), Vicks S Mbhele (MSc), Sixolile Mkoliswa (MSc) and Sihle Sitshaka (MSc).



*Collaborators and stakeholders visited the wheat and canola fields under the shade netting at Lenye in the Zanyokwe Irrigation Scheme.*



*Students in the sunflower field during a practical demonstration.*

## BACKGROUND ABOUT COLLABORATIVE STUDIES

Currently, there is limited data on grain and oilseed crop cultivar performance and agronomic practices in the Eastern Cape. Reliable guidance is critical for local grain farmers, and a collaborative study by SU and UFH seeks to provide information on the yield performance, disease resistance and grain quality of different cultivars, as well as insights into the effects of agronomic practices.

Field trials are being conducted in multi-locations (Ugie, Elliot, Zanyokwe and Alice) in the Eastern Cape to allow for the assessment of the grain yield and associated yield components, as well as grain quality in response to different environmental conditions.

The study is also essential for predicting yield differences among cultivars, assessing the cultivar stability across sites/environments and selecting superior cultivars for future planting. By understanding how different cultivars interact with the environment, researchers can recommend the best-performing genotypes for each agroecological zone.

## Project highlights

The project presents an outstanding opportunity for student training and capacity building within the agricultural sector, particularly in agronomy. Various undergraduate students from UFH and Lovedale College have conducted their practical research work at the trial site. The involvement of students has been a crucial aspect of the project, providing them with hands-on experience and enhancing their understanding of the challenges and opportunities in crop production.

## Future events

The collaboration between SU, UFH and other stakeholders has great potential to motivate and influence farmers to adopt sustainable farming practices, including crop rotations. The next farmers' day promises to be bigger and better. ■

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research team acknowledges the financial support from the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) and the Technology Innovation Agency (TIA), as well as the Maize Trust. Additionally, the facilitation and coordination by Grain SA, the insights from the Western Cape Department of Agriculture, specifically Piet Lombard, and the involvement of Fort Hare University, specifically Prof Charles Mutengwa, and the Agricultural Research Council, specifically Annelie de Beer, have been invaluable to the project's progress and success.

**FLACKSON TSHUMA AND PIETER SWANEPOEL, BOTH FROM STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY, AND CHARLES MUTENGWA AND NYASHA CHIUTA, BOTH FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE**



# Top tips FOR FARMERS

**F**arm management forms an integral part of a successful farming operation. January is a good time to plan for the upcoming production year. Farmers should then make decisions such as what to plant and what to buy for the new season. Here is advice from team members of the Farmer Development Programme.

## ✓ Marketing options need attention

'Unless pressured by creditors, consider very carefully fixing your maize price with a contract – unless you are sure it is an exceptional deal, which it usually is not,' is the advice of Graeme Engelbrecht, regional development manager in KwaZulu-Natal. He shares this rule of thumb for contract price setting:

- 30% prior/at planting.
- 30% at mid-season (February/March).
- 40% at harvest.

Besides getting a contract or price setting, Graeme suggests that farmers begin with their marketing options at the planning stage before planting. 'Make sure you clearly understand who is responsible for which costs when selling – this includes storage, handling, in-out cost, transport to/from the silo and even the costs allocated to grading and moisture loss.'

## ✓ Don't forget about your crops

Jacques Roux, regional development manager in the Free State, reminds farmers to apply topdressing in January. Topdressing is a way to ensure that the fertiliser the farmer applies is used optimally towards the benefit of the maize plant and ultimately the yield.

January is also the ideal time to spray your crops. Pesticides and fungicides are hazardous chemicals, so the application method is a critical factor in chemical control. Chemicals must be applied at the right place and the right time – and in the right way.

## ✓ Some more good advice

Timon Filter, a trainer and mentor from Piet Retief, shares some good general advice with farmers. 'Continue to work hard but remember to trust God. You can do everything according to plan, but when it is hot and dry in January, it is important to remember that the Maker of heaven and earth will send the rain.'

He also reminds the small-scale farmers not to despise small beginnings. 'Rather do everything well on 1 ha and achieve 8 tons on your single hectare, than plant 3 ha and get only a total of 8 tons on it.' ■

COMPILED BY LOUISE KUNZ, ASSISTANT EDITOR: PULA

# Genetic and mechanised innovations in SA maize production

**M**AIZE IS CRITICAL TO FOOD SECURITY IN SOUTH AFRICA, CONTRIBUTING ABOUT 50% TO 60% OF THE POPULATION'S CARBOHYDRATE INTAKE. IT IS PRIMARILY CONSUMED IN THE FORM OF MAIZE MEAL (MIELIE MEAL), WHICH IS USED TO PREPARE POPULAR DISHES LIKE PAP, ENJOYED BY PEOPLE FROM VARIOUS SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS.

South Africa produces 15 million to 17 million tons of maize annually, covering 2,5 million to 3 million ha. This article discusses how South Africa has met growing population demands over the past century. This has been done through innovations such as (i) improved agronomic practices through mechanisation, fertilisers, and pesticides; (ii) genetic gain through development of hybrids and GMOs; (iii) economics and commodity prices; and (iv) precision agriculture.

These innovations have significantly increased maize yields from 0,6 t/ha to 6 t/ha. However, with ongoing population growth and rising production costs, ensuring food security remains a challenge. Future yield improvements may depend on advancements in new breeding techniques (NBTs) and further precision agriculture innovations.

## THE EVOLUTION OF MAIZE BREEDING AND ITS INTRODUCTION TO SOUTH AFRICA

Maize originated from the wild grass *teosinte* in Mexico around 7 000 years ago. It was selectively bred for larger kernels and reached Africa through trade routes in the 16th century, eventually becoming a South African staple (Figure 1).

In the early 1900s, the South African population was 5 million to 6 million, and maize production was primarily subsistence based, covering about 1 million to 1,5 million ha with low yields of 0,6 t/ha and a total harvest of around 900 000 tons. By the 1960s, with mechanisation, fertilisers, pesticides, seed treatments, and hybrid seeds, the cultivated area expanded to 2 million to 3 million ha, producing about 4,5 million tons with improved yields of 1 t/ha to 1,5 t/ha, as the population reached 17 million to 20 million.

In the 1980s, South Africa's population of approximately 35 million relied on a stabilised maize production of 3 million ha, yielding around 2 t/ha. However, economic constraints and policies led to yellow maize becoming a cost-effective staple, widely used as animal feed and promoted as an affordable option for human consumption during white maize shortages or droughts to support food security.

The introduction of genetically modified maize in the 2000s further boosted yields to 3 t/ha to 4 t/ha (with a total harvest of 13 million tons), meeting the needs of 44 million to 47 million people. Today, because of improved seed genetics, sustainable practices, and precision agriculture, maize yields average 5 t/ha to 6 t/ha (with a total harvest of 17 million tons), sustaining South Africa's population of 60 million and supporting food security.

## REGULATORY FRAMEWORK OF NBTs TO BOOST PRODUCTIVITY

Breeding in South Africa is managed under various stringent regulatory acts such as the Plant Breeders' Rights Act (Act No. 15 of 1976), the Plant

Improvement Act (Act No. 53 of 1976) and the Genetically Modified Organisms Act (GMO Act No. 15 of 1997). The Plant Breeders' Rights Act offers intellectual property protection to encourage innovation, while the GMO Act ensures the safety of GMOs for human health, animal health, and the environment.

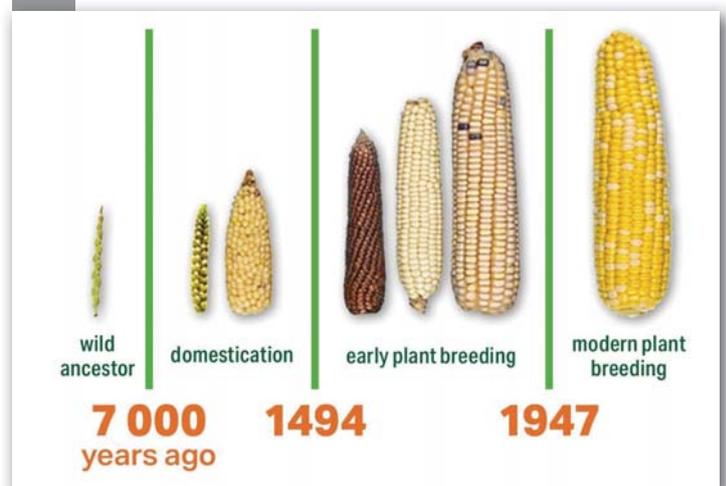
Every maize cultivar that is released for public production is thoroughly tested for compliance, therefore discrediting the perception that these are cancerous or disease causing. These laws align with international standards, enhancing South Africa's agricultural competitiveness, promoting sustainable farming, and ensuring food safety for consumers.

Maize breeding has evolved through three main stages, including traditional breeding, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and new breeding techniques (NBTs). Traditional breeding, which has been practiced for thousands of years, involves selecting plants with desirable traits and crossbreeding them to pass these traits to the next generation. While this method has successfully improved maize over time, it is an unpredictable and time-consuming process that can take up to 15 years to achieve stable results for specific traits.

In the 1990s, GMOs transformed maize breeding by incorporating specific genes from other organisms. GMOs do not necessarily increase maize yield, but make for more effective agronomic practices, pest control (*Bt* gene) and weed control (Roundup). Both traditional breeding and GMOs have limitations in speed and complexity. Due to our improved understanding of plant genetics and physiology, NBTs offer a promising solution considering the South African production challenges ahead.

These challenges include (i) the need to produce crops with higher yields to meet the projected demand of 25 million tons of maize by 2040; (ii) the increasing frequency of extreme environmental conditions, like nationwide delayed rains, and temperature fluctuations such as -5 °C in September and up to 40 °C by October 2024; (iii) summer rains delayed for up to six weeks; and (iv) severe droughts in North West.

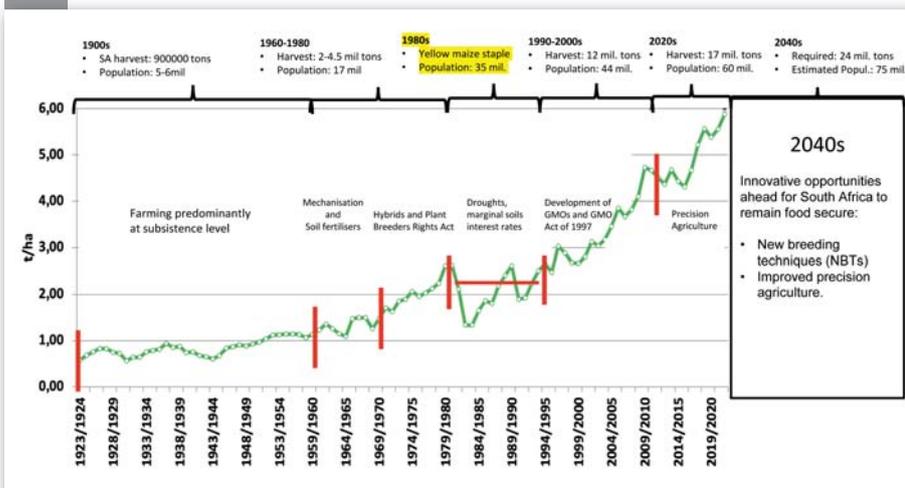
### 1 The evolution of maize.



Source: Dr Mamata Khandappagol



## 2 The development of maize production in South Africa.



Source: Grain SA Applied Economics, adapted by Dr MG Kgatle

NBTs allow for swift, targeted improvements in traits like drought tolerance and nutritional content, and could reduce some of the regulatory barriers faced by GMOs. This will also make new technologies more accessible and cheaper. While NBT (gene editing) creates new traits faster without introducing foreign genes, these still must be tested for their interactions and crop fit. NBTs are presently not used nor regulated in South Africa, highlighting a potential need for regulatory reform to support agricultural innovation.

### South Africa's food production challenge

While maize and soy production meet domestic needs, South Africa relies on wheat imports, making local food security vulnerable to global trade disruptions. Grain prices are tied to Safex, making local production viable only if it competes with international prices; otherwise, millers can import at lower prices than in the local market.

However, importing would have huge consequences on the economy, labour (job security) and gross domestic product (GDP), not mentioning the impact on food security and the sustainability of being a grain import-dependent country. Relying on imports increases vulnerability, especially as international events like trade imbalances, pandemics (such as Covid-19),

droughts, and conflicts create obstacles to reliable trade. These events can quickly shift an importing country from food security to food insecurity. GMOs have enhanced South African grain production's competitiveness by reducing production costs and protecting genetic potential.

### CONCLUSION

South Africa's maize production has undergone significant advancements, from traditional breeding to the incorporation of GMOs and now the promising potential of NBTs. While traditional breeding and GMOs have played key roles in improving maize yields and resilience, NBTs offer a more precise, more affordable and rapid approach to enhancing traits like drought tolerance and nutritional content.

Through advances in mechanisation, genetic modifications, and precision agriculture, South Africa's maize sector has become more resilient in the face of population growth, increasingly extreme environmental conditions, and rising production costs.

The country's reliance on imports for certain commodities, such as wheat, underscores the vulnerability of South Africa's food security to global disruptions. Ensuring sustainable, local food production through technological advancements and regulatory frameworks is essential to safeguarding food security and maintaining job stability, given agriculture's central role in the economy. ■



DR GODFREY KGATLE, RESEARCH COORDINATOR. FIRST PUBLISHED IN SA GRAAN/GRAIN, NOVEMBER 2024.



# A GOOD NAME

**T**HE PLANTING HAS BEEN DONE AND THE CROPS ARE GROWING. NOW THE MARKETING OF YOUR PRODUCTS NEEDS YOUR ATTENTION. YOU NEED TO MAKE A DECISION CONCERNING THE MARKETING OF YOUR GRAIN AND OILSEEDS.

This means that you can do nothing and accept the price at harvest time, you can go to the agribusinesses and sign a contract to sell your products at a certain fixed price, or you can negotiate the right to sell your grains at a specific price.

Each strategy will have an effect on your income. If you don't do anything, the price at harvesting time will normally be the lowest.

If you negotiate a fixed price contract, for example R100 for maize, it will mean that you must deliver 100 ton maize at a price of R100/t. If the price increases to R200, you will have to sell your product at a price of R100/t. But if the price decreases to R50/t, you will still receive R100/t.

A maize contract is a legally binding agreement between a buyer and seller of maize that outlines the key terms and conditions of the transaction. These terms and conditions typically include the following:

- Expected price.
- Quality of the maize.
- Variety of the maize.
- Quantity of the maize.
- Delivery period.
- Payment terms.
- Any special conditions.

Normally the fixed price contracts will create a big opportunity to harm your reputation. If the price increases from R100 to R200, many farmers will do everything to sell their produce at R200. Some farmers will not honour the contract and this will usually have a negative effect on their good name. Not honouring the contract will lead to financial institutions refusing to lend you money or increasing the interest rate. This is something you really do not want.

## GET HELP FROM A SPECIALIST

The marketing of your products is a difficult task, so it's wise to make use of specialists at agribusinesses. Tap into their knowledge and decide on the agreement that will be the best for the future.

In the evaluation of your business, financial institutions will mainly consider three aspects. If they are satisfied with these aspects, they will approve the loan. The three aspects are:

1. The repayment ability of the client.
2. The security or collateral that the client can provide to repay the debt if something goes wrong.
3. The jockey that is managing the project. It is normally this aspect that clients forget, which will largely influence the loan and the interest rate that needs to be paid.



When a person does not live with integrity, he starts to compromise, and compromise will destroy a good name.



A good name will have a positive impact, but a bad name will have a negative result.

A good name means you are a person of integrity, but it also represents you, your life and who you are. It testifies about the work you do and how you do it. Your name embodies your reputation. Having a good name requires honourable motives and priorities. It also involves living with a clear conscience by taking responsibility for your actions and correcting your behaviour when you have offended someone or done something wrong.

If your secret desires are motivated by greed or pride, your actions will be influenced by these motives and you will forfeit your good name. To have a clear conscience means taking responsibility for your actions and making things right when you have done something wrong to others.



# is important

Priorities reveal your values. They demonstrate what is most important to you: Position, prestige and possessions, or your relationships.

## PRACTICAL WAYS TO MAINTAIN A GOOD NAME

A good name is more valuable than riches because it can't be bought with money. It has to be earned moment by moment, day by day, decision by decision. Having a good name means living in a way that earns the trust of others. It means demonstrating integrity that people can depend on. Maintaining a good name doesn't mean that you are perfect, but when you make mistakes, you learn from them and do what you can to make things right.

- Be true to your word and do all you can to fulfil your promises and honour your commitments, whatever the cost.
- Return borrowed items. As time passes, the risk of damage, both to the borrowed items and to the friendship, continues to increase.

- Maintain righteous business practices. All business practices must be honest and fair. There is severe and lasting damage to the name of any person who profits from another person's loss.
- Be punctual in paying bills. Business people depend on the money that is owed to them, so that they can in turn fulfil their financial responsibilities. When a payment is late, the confidence and respect towards the one owing the money are damaged.
- Honour those on whose businesses you depend and establish the practice of making the full payment for services. Consider keeping a special account to keep funds in trust so that the money will not be spent on other items.
- Associate with wise people. Companionship is an important part of life, and your associates influence your judgement on many issues.

## How a good name is destroyed

Difficult circumstances alone cannot destroy someone's good name. When a person does not live with integrity, he starts to compromise, and compromise will destroy a good name. Compromise may begin with 'small' or 'soft' choices. It may appear to someone that if he compromises, he will relieve the pressure, but he actually multiplies his future problems.

Beware of compromising in these and other areas:

- Dishonest billing.
- Immorality.
- Cheating on taxes.
- Cooperation with evil.
- Misusing funds.

At the end, your good name will help to obtain your goals and will play a role in a good life.

## REFERENCES

<https://iblp.org/how-can-maintain-good-name/> ■



**PIETMAN BOTHA, INDEPENDENT AGRICULTURAL CONSULTANT**



*Farming isn't something that can be taught. Each plant tells its own story that has to be read repeatedly.*

~ KELSEY TIMMERMAN  
New York Times bestselling author



# Manage your chickens' breeding cycle

**G**ROWING A FLOCK OF CHICKENS IN A SHORT TIME MAY REQUIRE MORE OF AN INVESTMENT THAN JUST BUYING A COUPLE OF HENS AND A ROOSTER TO DO THE WORK. TO GET YOUR FLOCK TO GROW QUICKLY, NEEDS MUCH MORE TIME AND MANAGEMENT THAN JUST A FEW HENS LAYING EGGS TO BROODING AND RAISING THE CHICKS TO THE NEXT CYCLE.

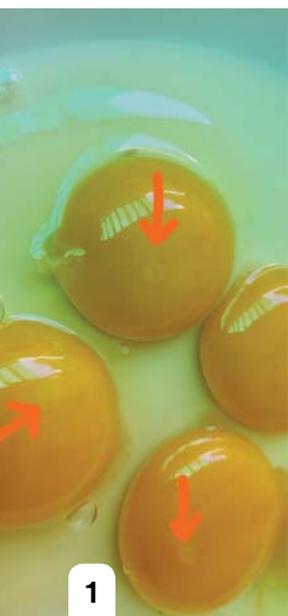
## UNDERSTANDING THE CHICKEN BREEDING CYCLE

Growing from a day-old chick, it takes about 18 weeks to 19 weeks before a hen can lay eggs. Chickens can lay more than 15 eggs before becoming broody and each egg is laid at an interval of approximately 24 hours to 26 hours.

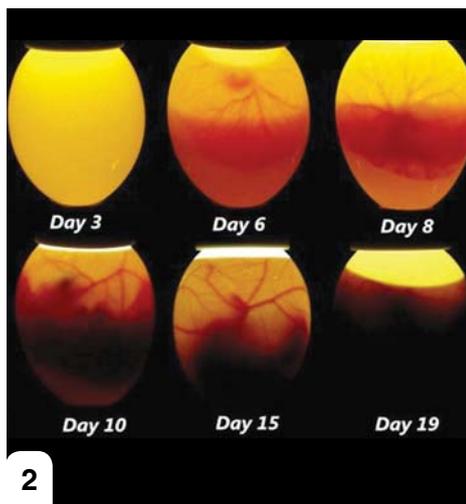
It takes 21 or more days of incubation before all the eggs hatch. After sitting on her eggs for about 21 days until they hatch, a hen will typically stay with her chicks for six to eight weeks. When her chicks are old enough to fend for themselves, the mother hen will go back to her flock and return to 'normal' life. The exact timespan will vary from hen to hen. Don't be surprised if it takes a few weeks longer than eight weeks.

**Egg fertility:** If you are collecting eggs from your chickens to have them incubated by a hen later when they become broody, the best is to choose eggs from a hen that is favoured by a rooster. Alternatively, you can check for fertility by cracking the egg and checking for a small, white spot or dot on the yolk (**Photo 1**). There is no need to worry about what to do with eggs that you have cracked – fertile eggs are just as good for breakfast and any other use in the kitchen.

**Egg viability:** Fertile eggs selected for hatching need to be stored carefully for a maximum of 18 days, preferably between 10°C and 12°C. The cooler end of the spectrum is better, especially if you intend to keep them for a longer time while you wait for a hen to become broody.



**1**  
A small, white spot on the yolk shows fertility.



**2**  
Egg candling makes it possible to monitor embryo development.

**Storing fertile chicken eggs:** Store fertile eggs with the round end up. Turn them at least twice each day. Keep them cool and dry and away from direct sunlight and drafts.

## REDUCE THE GUESSWORK

There is a way that can help reduce the guesswork on the probability of chicks before they hatch. Egg candling is a method used to observe the growth and development of an embryo inside an egg by using a bright light source behind the egg to show details through the shell.

Here is the method:

- Eggs may be candled after five days of incubation and every few days thereafter. For the best results, you should candle eggs in a dark room or in dark conditions.
- Hold a flashlight (your smartphone's light will work best) right against the shell at the larger end of the egg, where the air sac is located.
- Rotate the egg to observe blood vessel growth and embryo development.

Candling allows you to monitor many things, including the egg fertility and embryo development (**Photo 2**). By identifying and removing non-viable eggs, you avoid the risk of rotten eggs exploding and contaminating your batch with dangerous germs.

## THE ROLE OF THE BROODING HEN

Clean water and good quality feed are a means of survival for your chickens. Although hens that are incubating eggs do not come out regularly to feed or drink, it is a good idea to keep food and water available for when she does come out.

A well-fed brooding hen tends to sit for extended periods on her eggs, without going out regularly to look for food. This ensures that the eggs remain under a favourable temperature that will facilitate their development. Clean chicken housing reduces the chances of high pest infestations.

From the day when the chicks start hatching, you must begin to collect them daily, preferably at night, and put them in a brooder box until the hatching is complete. The main reason for separating the chicks from their mother is to ensure that the hen goes back to the flock in a short time and starts the process all over. ■

Scan the QR code to read the complete article which was published in the *NWK Arena* in 2022:



**LEONARD THAPHATHI,**  
AGRICULTURAL MANAGER,  
TIGER BRANDS



# Protect your **WORKERS** against injuries

**T**HE TERM 'WORKMAN'S COMPENSATION' IS THE COMMON NAME USED FOR A COMPLICATED ACT. IT REFERS TO THE *COMPENSATION FOR OCCUPATIONAL INJURIES AND DISEASES ACT (NO. 130 OF 1993, OR COIDA)* AND THE *COMPENSATION FOR OCCUPATIONAL INJURIES AND DISEASES AMENDMENT ACT (NO. 61 OF 1997)*.

The Compensation Fund provides compensation for workers who get hurt at work, who get sick from diseases contracted at work, or for death because of injuries or diseases at work. The worker gets compensated from the Compensation Fund for medical costs incurred.

This means that the employer does not have to worry about expensive medical claims. Before complaining about another law to be managed, please note – when you register and adhere to the requirements of this law, it is to your benefit in terms of rands and cents.

Imagine this: One of your employees is using a large angle grinder to cut steel rods and accidentally cuts his leg badly. As the injury occurred whilst he/she was on duty, you will be responsible for the medical costs to attend to the injury, which could be quite a significant amount.

The medical costs will certainly affect your profits negatively, especially if your business is small, and you could be in a difficult position to pay the medical costs of the employee, which is exactly why the Department of Labour created the Workman's Compensation Fund.

## When can a worker/employee claim compensation?

- When injured in an accident that happened while doing their work. The law refers to these injuries 'in the course and scope of duty'.
- If they get a disease caused by their work (an occupational disease).

A worker's dependents can claim in case of death caused by an accident or disease.

Any worker who is employed, whether permanently, casually or seasonally, can claim. The act classifies any person, irrespective of their age, who is employed by an employer for the purpose of his farming activities as a worker. Compensation can also be claimed by the widow/er or dependents if a worker dies because of a work-related accident or disease.

Injuries covered by the *Compensation Act* are only these that occur because of or at work.

Occupational diseases are illnesses caused by chemical products or conditions that the worker was exposed to at the workplace. Workers can claim compensation, even if they are no longer at the specific workplace.

## CONTRIBUTION TO THE FUND

All employers who have one or more employees, must register as an employer and contribute to the Compensation Fund on an annual basis. Depending on the type of farming business, the contribution is plus or minus 0,5% of the yearly total of all salaries. Workers do not pay anything to the fund, so employers cannot deduct any money from workers' wages for this.

In a previous paragraph, it is described which workers may claim under this act for compensation – thus the farmer should contribute for all those workers, but if he does not, they are not excluded from claiming. The farmer, however, commits an offence by not registering them and can be held liable for a claim.

This act defines a financial year as the period from 1 March until the end of February the following year. Employers must then submit their annual return of earnings, on which they reflect the actual salaries/wages paid to all employees during the preceding year, before 31 March of each year. In terms of this act, employers are compelled to keep record of their employees' salaries for a period of at least four years. These records must always be available for inspection by an authorised person.

A worker/employee has the responsibility to adhere, to the best of his/her ability, to all the requirements of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to minimise the occurrence of illnesses and injuries.

## An employer is responsible to:

- Register with the Compensation Commissioner as an employer.
- Report all incidents that will require medical assistance by completing an 'Employer's report of an accident' form and if the employee returns to work, a 'Resumption report' from.
- Ensure the annual compensation form is completed and returned in time as requested and the required amount is paid over in time.
- Keep copies of all documents for reference purposes.

Seek advice from a lawyer when needed, as this act is too complicated for everyone to be an expert. ■



**MARIUS GREYLING,**  
INDEPENDENT AGRICULTURAL  
MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT

# A programme that is changing lives



## Farmers get training on best practices

**GRAIN SA** PRESENTED AN IMBIZO IN LICHTENBURG ON 23 OCTOBER 2024, THEMED *END-TO-END FARMING PRODUCTION*. STAKEHOLDERS FROM GRAIN SA, PANNAR, BAYER AND THE FORESTRY AND AGRICULTURAL BIOTECHNOLOGY INSTITUTE (FABI) COLLABORATED ON THIS INITIATIVE.

The Imbizo's main focus was on providing comprehensive support to farmers, especially emerging farmers, to enhance their productivity, profitability and sustainability across the entire farming cycle. The aim is to empower farmers by improving their access to resources, technology, markets and financial support, enabling them to manage the farming process efficiently from start to finish.

Key elements of the Imbizo paid attention to, amongst others, planning and preparation. Farm planning and education provided guidance on creating farm business plans, understanding the market demand, and selecting appropriate crops based on the local environment and available resources. Farmers were offered training on the best agricultural practices, sustainable farming, soil health, pest management and climate adaptation.

Access to resources and inputs dealt with seed and input support to ensure farmers have access to high-quality seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and equipment to start their farming season. Technology adoption introducing affordable technology such as mobile apps, farm management software and precision farming tools to optimise farm operations were also discussed.

The topic of crop management educated farmers on soil health and irrigation, and to why maintaining soil fertility and efficient irrigation systems (e.g., drip irrigation) to improve crop yields and water management are crucial. Pest and disease control practices provided knowledge on integrated pest management (IPM) strategies to reduce pesticide dependency and increase crop resilience.

Harvesting and post-harvest handling explained the importance of timely harvesting, ensuring farmers know the optimal time for harvesting to maximise their yield and quality. Post-harvest practices educated farmers on proper storage, sorting and grading techniques to reduce losses and increase the quality of products for the market. Marketing gave farmers a perspective on branding and packaging, in order to add value to their produce through branding, certification (e.g., organic) and packaging to attract higher-paying markets.



*Attendees at the Lichtenburg Imbizo, which was hosted on Mapidi Manoto's farm, Lusthof.*

Furthermore, financial management and sustainability educated farmers on accessing capital and managing farm finances, budgeting, and accessing credit or insurance. The facilitation of connections with financial institutions and micro-lenders for loan access was also addressed, as well as sustainability practices to encourage climate-smart agriculture, resource conservation and sustainable land management practices to ensure long-term farm viability.

Finally, support structures gave farmers insight into cooperative development in promoting farmer cooperatives enabling collective bargaining, shared resources, and better access to markets and finance.

The benefits to farmers cumulate into increased productivity, access to improved farming techniques, resources and technology, which in turn would lead to higher crop yields and more efficient farming practices. Raising awareness about market opportunities gives farmers better access to profitable markets locally, allowing them to sell their products at competitive prices. The financial literacy training empowered farmers to make informed decisions, manage cashflow and invest in farm expansion.

A focus on sustainability educated farmers on sustainable farming practices to ensure that they can adapt to climate change and preserve resources for future generations. And the empowerment training and support help farmers to become self-sufficient, reducing their dependency on external support and enabling long-term economic independence.

The Grain SA Imbizo platform aims to empower developing farmers with the tools, knowledge and support necessary to manage their farms efficiently. By offering training, access to resources, financial support and market opportunities, farmers can improve their productivity, sustainability and profitability, which is leading to enhanced food security and rural development.



*Du Toit van der Westhuizen, regional development manager in North West, was one of the speakers at the Imbizo.*



**PATRICIA ZIMU,  
LEVY OFFICER AND  
MARKETER, GRAIN SA**



## Learning to farm better

**THE** eight training courses that were presented during October and November were attended by 135 farmers wanting to learn more about maize production. Feedback from the attendees was very positive and they look forward to attending more courses.



*According to trainer Chris de Jager, the attendees at Dundee appreciated the opportunity to learn more about growing maize for a profit. They also learned how to calibrate a knapsack sprayer.*



*This group from Legolaneng near Groblersdal attended a training session in Mbombela, which was presented by trainer Agnes Mndawe. It was the first training session they attended. They were very eager to learn and requested more training.*



*Trainer Chris de Jager also presented an on-farm maintenance and support course at Driefontein in the Louwsburg district. Apart from basic safety, the trainees learned how to start an arc weld.*



*They also learned how to paint something (like a gate) with many holes.*

## NOW WE CAN PLANT

**AT** most of the farm visits that happened between 14 October and 13 November 2024, the inputs that the farmers procured through the Beyond Abundance project were distributed. A total of 168 study group visits took place in this period. Here are some of the happy farmers who are looking forward to the new season.



*The Ntabamhlophe Study Group in the Dundee region was thrilled to receive fertiliser and topdressing.*



*Delivery of 56 bags of 4-3-4 and 42 bags of 1-0-0 was done at the Katkop1 Study Group in the Maclear area.*



*At the Ikamvalethu Study Group in the Kokstad region, even the dogs were pleased when fertiliser, seed, Roundup and Bullet were delivered. ■*

# Corner Post

BY LOUISE KUNZ, ASSISTANT EDITOR

**A**LTHOUGH MARTIN BOTHA WAS NEVER A CROP FARMER, HE GAINED GOOD KNOWLEDGE ABOUT WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR SUCCESSFUL CROP FARMING THROUGH HIS POSITIONS AT SEED AND AGRICULTURAL CHEMICAL COMPANIES. AFTER RETIRING TWELVE YEARS AGO, MARTIN BECAME ONE OF THE MENTORS OF THE FARMER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (FDP) OF PHAHAMA GRAIN PHAKAMA (PGP).

Martin finds great joy in training developing farmers and watching their progress, especially when they achieve good results. One of those farmers who has been particularly exciting to guide, is Alfred Gondo, the Grain SA Potential New Era Farmer of the Year for 2024.

He met Alfred six years ago, when the young farmer had limited knowledge about good agricultural practices. He had planted for the first time in the 2015/2016 season, motivated by his late father's passion for farming. Through dedication and hard work, he grew his farming operation from initially planting 20 ha to planting 100 ha last season.

Even though the climatic conditions were problematic, Alfred still managed to realise a yield of 7,7 t/ha on the 42 ha of maize he planted and 1,1 t/ha on the 62 ha of soybeans he planted.

This dedication led to Martin nominating Alfred for the Farmer of the Year competition. It was only when Martin looked at the 'video evidence' of Alfred's farming operation that he realised that his mentee stood a good chance to be chosen as the winner. Martin could not attend the Day of Celebration, where Alfred was

announced as the winning farmer. However, as soon as Alfred had the opportunity, he phoned his mentor to tell him the good news.

Martin believes Alfred's success comes from his hunger to improve and gain more knowledge about agricultural practices. Alfred is full of praise for his mentor and says that Martin has a wealth of knowledge – not just about crop production, but also because he is a chemical specialist. 'He is always ready to give guidance when I need it, and he has taught me a lot.'

On the flip side, being a mentor has helped Martin to develop patience and to respect people, even if their opinions, mindset and culture are different to his.

## THE MENTOR AND MENTEE

### WHAT HAS IMPRESSED YOU MOST ABOUT YOUR WINNING FARMER?

Alfred is a hard worker who gets up early in the mornings to make sure everything gets done. He is an enthusiastic and passionate farmer who listens to advice. He is also keen to learn. If I spot something that needs attention during a farm visit, he will react immediately and get it done.

### WHY DID YOU NOMINATE HIM?

He is a conscientious young man with wide general knowledge of agricultural practices.

### WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM ALFRED?

To listen carefully, think about what is being said and not to react to what I think I heard – basically to remain calm, no matter what happens.



MARTIN BOTHA

## FAST FACTS

**Name:** Martin Botha  
**Region:** Mpumalanga  
**Position:** Joined Grain SA as mentor in 2012.  
**Mentors:** His father, Hertzog Botha.



Martin with his mentee, Alfred Gondo, on his farm.

### WHAT IS YOUR DREAM FOR THIS WINNER?

That he will achieve his dream of getting more land so that he can plant 500 ha. ■

### THREE CHARACTERISTICS A MENTOR NEEDS:

- Patience.
- Wide general knowledge about all aspects of farming.
- Good communication skills.



Partners of the Farmer Development Programme who have supported farmer Alfred Gondo over the years, are SACTA, Kgodiso Development, Standard Bank, OPDT and the Maize Trust, in overlap with PGP.