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Harvest SA

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ISSN 2305-0551 ***Harvest SA*** **wins gold at the international Tabbie Awards 2013 in the Best Single Edition Category**

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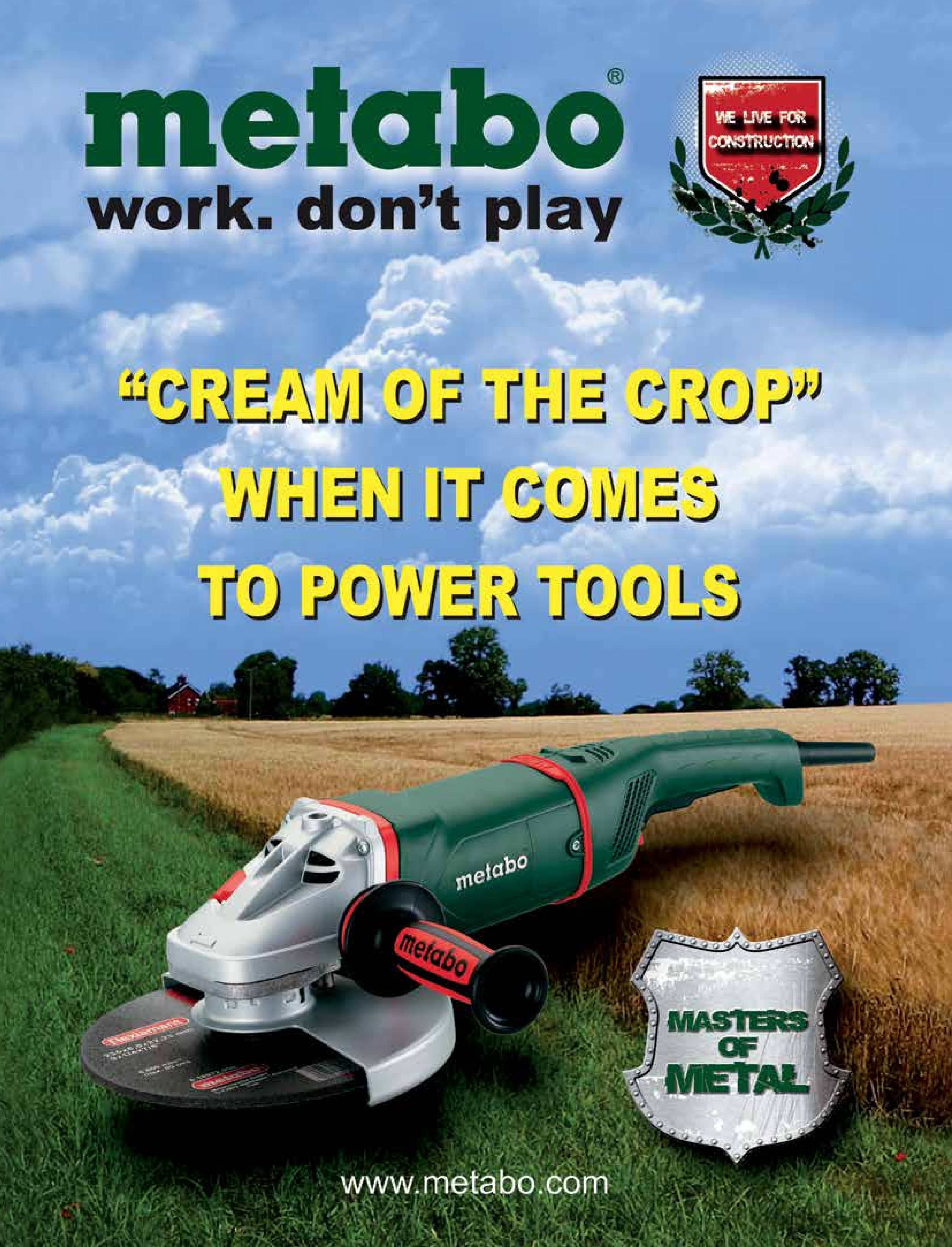
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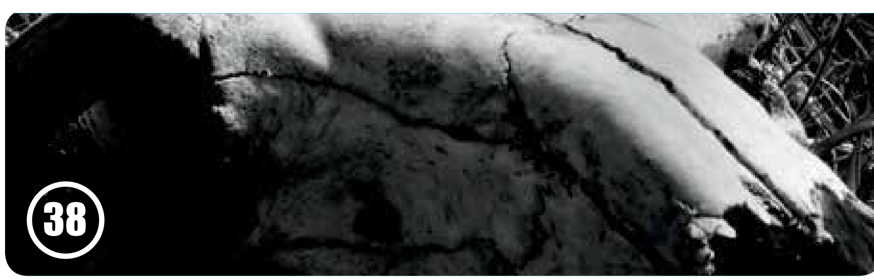
CONTENTS



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FORE WORD

JANNIE DE VILLIERS
CEO: GRAIN SA

When will the fruit start talking for itself?

Looking back at 2013 in a positive way, one can get very excited about the successes achieved, with the strategic objectives of an organisation, or as a country such as South Africa.

The season ahead of us is one month late compared to the usual weather patterns.

The harvest in the Western Cape was delayed for a month after extensive rain, and the farmers in the north had to wait patiently a month longer for their first rains to come. This is the name of the game of the grain producers in our country, waiting on God to provide so that we can plant, care for the crops and then harvest to supply our people with food.

At every meeting with government and industry role-players, we are astounded that so few people are aware of the progress made with transformation in the grain sector.

Grain SA has more black farmer members than white members.

We may not be transformed at the level of everyone's expectations, but if we look back over the past 10 years, we are definitely no longer where we were back then. I am becoming more and more frustrated when people who are exposed to the facts on the ground tell me that they did not know this or that. We continue spending money and time in an effort to inform people about the state of agriculture and its importance – not just as a producer of food but also a creator of jobs – and yet, we are not succeeding in our mission.

My question today is: When will the fruit of all our efforts start to speak for itself? When will the number of black farmers and the tonnages they produce start conveying the message to those who stand to be convinced? The grain sector is by far not where we need it to be, but sometimes in life you need to be encouraged with carrots instead of sticks.

The country is flooded with stick carriers and very few carrot farmers. May 2014 be a year when we acknowledge each other's contributions and encourage one another to achieve greater heights. Can't we implement practices such as where one can SMS or e-mail individuals who do make progress along the way of improvement and not merely complain about those things that frustrate us? Life is a movie, not just a scene.

May your 2014 inbox be full of carrots and good SMSes sent by carrot farmers and not stick carriers.

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A large-scale, high volume Limpopo fruit packaging plant, optimised its energy usage with support from Eskom.

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As a result, the plant achieved a reduction in energy usage of 619,000kWh per annum.

Eskom's on-going conversation with South Africa's agri-businesses and farmers is based on the sharing of know-how and advice on energy efficiency, a partnership fully invested in supporting the agricultural sector as the mainstay of our nation's food security.

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EDS NOTE

GREG PENFOLD
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Here's to the future

Agriculture is not only perhaps the most exciting commercial sector in South Africa, but it is also one of the most varied. Culturally, historically and philosophically, agriculture holds up a mirror to the diversity of South Africa's people and the challenges and opportunities presented them by the socio-economic climate of today.

It is the intention of *Harvest SA* to do justice to the achievements of South Africans in agriculture from across the social spectrum and contribute to the establishment of good channels of communication between all actors and stakeholders, especially between developing and established farmers and government.

It is to be hoped this issue of *Harvest SA* lives up to this ambition, showcasing as it does the winners of Grain SA's 2013 Grain Producer Awards (with special emphasis on developing farmers) and canvassing a broad palette of opinions from prominent players in wheat, dairy, maize and politics. Furthermore, our advertisers represent a veritable who's-who of South African agriculture!

Harvest SA has plenty of growth potential in its quest to become the preferred communication vehicle for the agriculture sector. Readers are welcome to contact me with queries, suggestions, opinions and tips.

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And the winner is...

In the Sept/Oct 2013 issue we reported on the chosen finalists for the Grain SA/Absa Developing Grain Producer of the Year and the Grain SA/Syngenta Grain Producer of the Year 2013 awards

At the end of last year, the finalists were announced at a gala event held at The Theatre on the Track in Midrand, Gauteng.

Anthony Evans of the Rhys Evans Group, Viljoenskroon, was announced as the winner of the Grain SA/Syngenta Grain Producer 2013 award and Maurice Boki from the farm Horncroft, situated between Cedarville and Taylorville in the Eastern Cape, was announced as the Grain SA/ Absa Developing Grain Producer of the Year 2013. Kobus van Zyl from Omnia received the award for Agriculturist of the Year 2013.

With these words Louw Steytler, chairperson of Grain SA, encouraged all the finalists: "Keep building on your success because your success as a finalist is everyone in agriculture's success".

The function was attended by 340 guests, representing role-players from across the entire agricultural spectrum. Some of them were Dr Pieter Mulder, deputy minister of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry who represented government and Annette Steyn, agricultural spokesperson of the Democratic Alliance. Guests had the opportunity to observe the role that Grain SA and South Africa's grain producers play in ensuring food security.

Grain SA hosts this annual event to celebrate and give recognition to all grain producers in the country. It is also an opportunity to build the professional image of agriculture.

Brienne van der Walt, group head, Absa Agribusiness, said that civilisation started with agriculture. "Not only did villages, towns and cities begin to flourish, but also the arts and technological sciences. Agriculture is the foundation of everything you see around you.

Anthony and David Evans on their farm

"Without the physiological foundation provided by food, one cannot add the building blocks that should follow: that of safety, love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualisation."

The challenge, opportunity and responsibility

According to Antonie Delport, managing director: Syngenta South Africa, we need to produce more food in the next 50 years than in the past 10 000 years. "Do you sense the challenge?" he asked.

"Today we are consuming at the rate of the equivalent of 1.5 planets of Earth and we obviously only have one. Can you now spot the opportunity? Clearly this is not sustainable.

"The big question is: How are we going to feed the world without damaging the planet?"

Syngenta took a leadership role in two spheres of influence. The first was addressing the critical challenges for the planet and its people with the recent worldwide launch of Syngenta's Good Growth Plan.

Secondly, Syngenta launched the first ever South African Grain Academy to build leadership capacity for shaping tomorrow's agricultural future.

In the words of Antonie Delport, "An industry that feeds you is an industry worth fighting for."

More about the winners

The Rhys Evans Group in the Viljoenskroon area has a strong family farming history and Anthony Evans joined his father after obtaining two master's degrees at Oxford and Harvard universities respectively. This geared him to operate in the competitive international arena that lay ahead.

Anthony's son, David, is the next-generation Evans to join the business, working side by side with his dad and getting into the swing of things with general manager, Arno Cronjé.

The operation functions on strict business principles, with managers assigned to the various units – from the prize Sussex cattle and huge piggery to the crop farming and peanut processing factory.

Anthony's business-minded approach has also led the group to move into the meat value chain, through investment in an abattoir.

All round, the ability to adapt to a changing production and marketing environment in a timely manner has been the key to the group's success. By introducing precision farming 10 years ago, they have seen a major turnaround in production.

Maize is their main crop and is planted in a rotation system with peanuts, sunflower and

soya, while pasture crops help to counter wind erosion after peanut harvesting.

They are widely known for their superb Sussex stud and, together with the commercial herd, the cattle are not only valuable assets but contribute to the crop farming through a well-organised compost processing system. Manure from the cattle and pigs are mixed with peanut shells and straw for fertilisation.

In general, the operation's focus on integrating its business has served it very well.

And by being on top of things always, quickly adapting where needed and moving right into the value chain, this farming operation is bound to see more generations grace its lands.

Read more about Maurice Boki, Grain SA/ Absa Developing Grain Producer of the Year 2013, on page 14.

Arno Cronjé, general manager of the Rhys Evans Group

Maurice's story

Maurice Boki, winner of the Grain SA/Absa Developing Grain Producer of the Year 2013

The mountainous area of Matatiele in the Eastern Cape is where Maurice Mthandeki Boki grew up. After he matriculated, he moved to Johannesburg and worked at Germiston Municipality for three years, after which he started working for Twins Pharmaceuticals (Adcock Ingram) for 12 years. Maurice left the pharmaceutical company in 1977 and bought a trading station in Matatiele, which still exists.

In 1995 he bought Horncroft farm through the Land Bank. The farm is situated between Cedarville and Taylorville, where he and his family still live today. And it is here where he has since been building his farming enterprise, where the shining cattle and rows of beautiful harvest-ready maize tell a story of a man whose heart truly lies in farming.

He had farmed on his own since 1995 without any assistance from any organisation.

Furthering his education, Maurice attended crop production, beef production, farm record keeping and farm business management courses at Cedara College of Agriculture.

As Maurice expanded, he leased additional land and currently farms on just under 1 000 hectares, of which well over half is arable.

Together with Grain SA's Ian Househam, Maurice carefully studies every aspect of maize production and makes plans to maximise yields while still protecting the soil.

In preparation for planting, he discs the soil and fertilises in accordance with soil sample results.

Maurice also believes in advancing his crop farming through seed technology, focusing on good performers in his area. And it pays off: even in a dry season, he harvests over five tonnes per hectare, which he markets through PSP in Kokstad.

And while Maurice is on his maize mission, Kholiswa, his wife of 36 years with whom he has four children, runs the family's trading store. Together the two of them do the overall financial planning for the business.

"Farming is tough, it's really tough; you need to be strong to remain in farming. It is not for sissies!" says Maurice.

Always looking ahead, he is currently extending the house to accommodate offices. And the more he expands, the more he is able to create much-needed job opportunities in the area.

"Maize is the staple food of most of our population, especially the lower income group. We need to be more creative and make sure that we feed the nation."

Here between the mountains, between the maize and his prize bulls, Maurice takes on each challenge as he plants, bales and feeds, fearlessly growing season after season.

Celebrating developing farmers

In October 2013, Grain SA hosted a Day of Celebration where acknowledgement was given for progress in the field of farmer development

The function, held at Amanzi Game Lodge on the outskirts of Brandfort in the Free State, was attended by more than 200 guests among whom 120 were emerging farmers.

"There is so much to celebrate in the field of farmer development and transformation within grain production, that we had to hold a celebration to recognise many different individuals and institutions involved in this field," said Landi Kruger, data administrator and economist at Grain SA.

Category winners for the Farmer of the Year competition were announced. Smallholder Farmer of the Year (from 10 hectares to producing 250 tonnes) is Victor Mahlinza. Subsistence Farmer of the Year (farmers who produce less than 10ha) is Ms TO Mdluli.

The elated Mdluli not only received a supply of fertiliser from Profert, but Husqvarna also donated a TF 536 tiller to the winner of this category. This wonderful prize will make cultivating her land much easier for this small-framed farmer from Winterton in KwaZulu-Natal.

In 2012 a new platinum category was added to the 250 Tonne Club, for farmers producing at least 1 500 tonnes of maize annually.

This is an indication of the success of the Grain SA Grain Farmer Development Programme. Gift Mafuleka joined Israel Motlhabane in this category, which now boasts two members.

Three new members were added to the gold level for farmers producing over 1 000 tonnes, namely ZP Motshwene, Tikwe Farming and Fanie Nkosi.

Solomon Masango Farming Enterprises, Keith Middleton, Maurice Boki (Grain SA's Developing Farmer of the Year for 2013) and Khaya Nkuhlu entered the silver level for farmers producing over 500 tonnes.

The 250 Tonne Club's bronze division awarded certificates and badges to nine new members: Iyay'phandela Farming and Musi Twala, Victor Mahlinza, David Mongoato, Victor Mongoato, vice-chairperson of Grain SA, Thabang Tsephe, Lebohang Khitleli, Joel Ralekhetla and Frans Mokoena.

During the event, a number of farmers were awarded membership of the 250 Tonne Club, while others graduated from the Grain SA Grain Farmer Development Programme. This programme ensures that farmers are equipped with the necessary information and skills to contribute to food security in the country.

Contributors who received a certificate for their continued support and contribution were Pannar, Profert, Sasol Nitro, the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape) and Dirk van Rensburg, a previous member of Grain SA's management committee.

Jane McPherson, programme manager: Grain Farmer Development at Grain SA, said that the 250 Tonne Club was starting to recognise the progress that emerging farmers were making.

"Our mission is to develop capacitated farmers and contribute to food security."

She urged farmers to use the natural resources available to them to make a contribution to food security, no matter the size of their land.

She also mentioned that these awards inspire other farmers to set bigger goals.

McPherson thanked all parties involved for their continued co-operation and support in keeping the Grain SA Grain Farmer Development Programme alive. "We celebrate what you have made possible for us," she said.

"We all share a collective responsibility to feed our nation," said Louw Steytler, chairperson of Grain SA.

"If we don't address food security, we won't have food to eat."

He urged farmers to join in the responsibility of this massive challenge to ensure there is transformation without the destruction of the country's food security.

Grain SA's chief executive Jannie de Villiers was delighted to address the "harvest of farmers" at the Day of Celebration.

He thanked all contributors, including farmers and sponsors, for their contribution toward food security and urged farmers to develop their knowledge.

"Thank you for persevering in a difficult time and for producing more than you consume so that we can feed the nation," De Villiers added.

He was excited about the growth of the Grain Farmer Development Programme and said, "Growth shows that this programme works."

At the onset of the function, vice-chairperson of Grain SA Victor Mongoato, who acted as the programme director, shared a Sesotho custom with guests.

According to legend, a wooden spoon is passed among inhabitants of a community during a time of drought to symbolise the fact that everyone will have food to eat.

Kruger started the 'passing of the spoon' and guests enthusiastically joined in.

Planning for the next generation

In 2013 the leadership of Grain SA identified the next generation as one of its strategic goals for the couple of years to come

Quite a few initiatives were launched since this decision was made, which created some positive results. The energy flowing from these initiatives and projects led the leadership to make the next generation the theme for the 2014 congress that will be held on 5 and 6 March 2014 at NAMPO Park near Bothaville.

Jannie de Villiers, chief executive of Grain SA, started internal mentoring sessions for the young economists and development specialists to transfer some lifeskills, leadership guidelines as well as in-depth knowledge of the grain industry. The key fundamentals contributing to food security in South Africa need to be maintained to ensure enough food for our children and unborn grand children in the future.

Together with its industry partners, Grain SA held the third successful Young Leaders Laboratory. The main aim is to build relationships between the future leaders of all role-players. The Grain Academy was launched in 2013 to invest in our young farmer leaders. They were exposed to leadership training, personal development and teamwork in resolving some difficult agricultural issues in South Africa. The alumni of the academy will most definitely be seen in the years to come.

Capacity building was identified as a key strategic objective by the role-players of the grain industry value chain. Between the Maize Trust and the Winter Cereal Trust, they have supported 74 students with bursaries for postgraduate studies. Since the project was launched, nine honours students completed their studies, 30 students

obtained their master's degrees and 11 their PhD degrees. Some of these students were sent to international conferences together with mentors to get exposure, while others were employed as interns in industry organisations such as the Southern African Grain Laboratory and other academic institutions.

For the Grain SA Congress 2014, it is planned to present a preview of the new-generation technology that is needed to produce more with less. New-generation seed, equipment and chemicals will be crucial elements of sustainable grain farming in future. The use of 'drone' tractors (without drivers) and other equipment will put pressure on job creation in the grain sector, but will reduce input costs. Seed that is more drought-tolerant is a major mitigation solution for climate change. The genetic modification of food such as maize and wheat remains a main pillar of the South African strategy to maintain food security.

The other side of the next generation revolves around people. What does the next generation consumer look like? What is it he/she wants and how does he/she want the food to be like?

The next-generation farmworker will differ from the current workforce, and Grain SA plans to revolutionise its training programmes to meet the needs and skill requirements of these farmers and farmworkers.

Last but not least, Grain SA and its partners (the Maize Trust, Winter Cereal Trust and the AgriSETA) have embarked on a very modest task to inform schoolchildren about agriculture. The programme aims to inform Grade 9 learners (the year before making final subject choices) about the role of agriculture in the economy and to inform them about career opportunities in agriculture. The programme reached 118 168 learners in 2013 and 761 schools were visited.

There is still much to be done, but by making the next generation a focus area, Grain SA wants to make caring for our future not just a culture in the organisation but part of the DNA of its staff.

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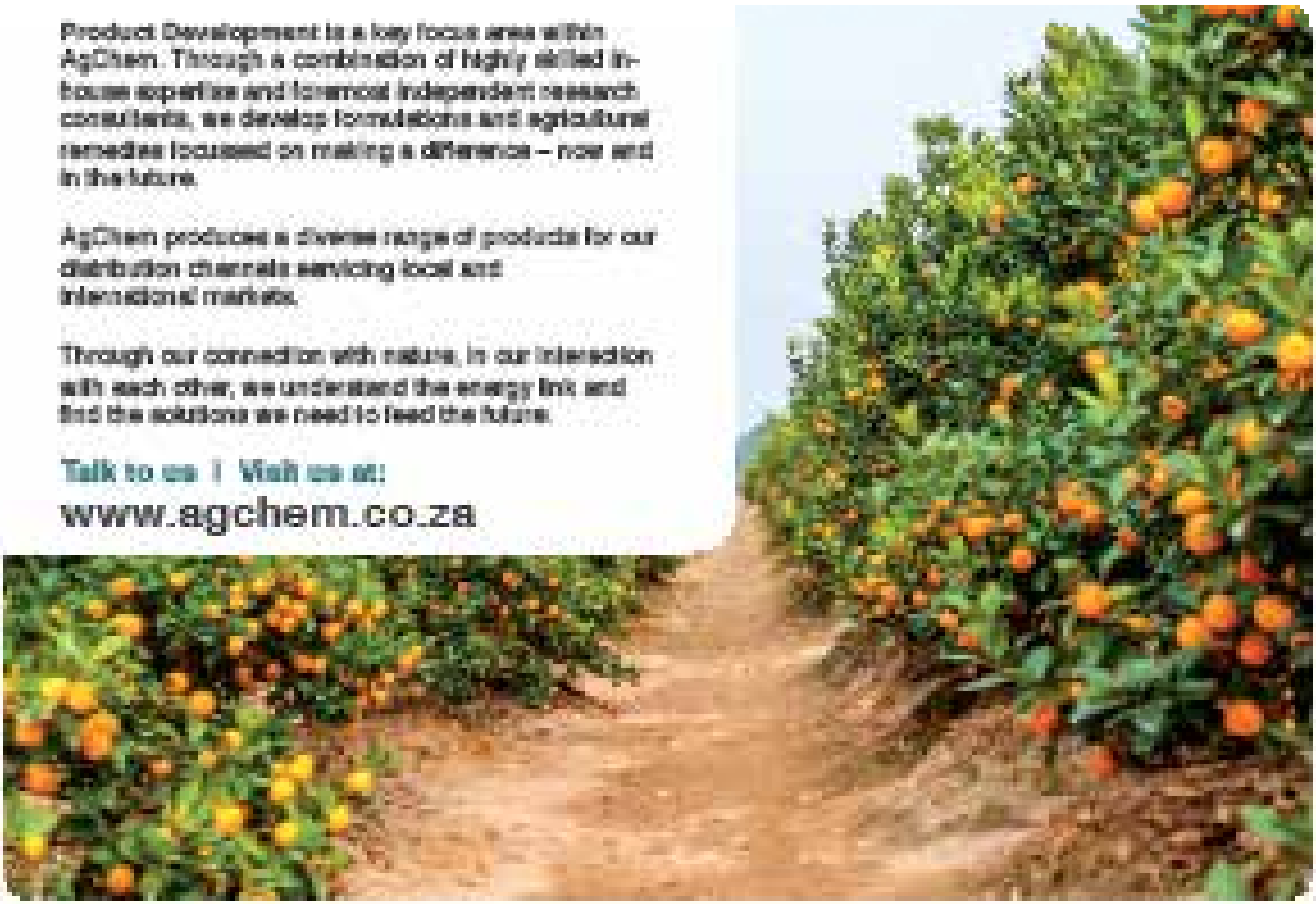







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A long road ahead

Tackling hunger in South Africa

Next year marks the deadline of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), eight targets drawn up to eradicate the world's most pressing developmental challenges.

Food insecurity was one of these. Despite the various initiatives South Africa has implemented to increase people's access to food, hunger continues to affect millions of people.

In September 2000, the world gathered at the Millennium Summit, after which the United Nations Millennium Declaration was adopted.

In that historical month, all UN member states at the time, 189 countries in total, and some two dozen international organisations joined hands to tackle some of the world's biggest developmental problems once and for all.

The pledges included the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality; reducing child mortality rates; improving maternal health; combating HIV/Aids, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; as well as developing a global partnership for development.

South Africa was one of the MDG signatories, and has since implemented various strategies to meet its obligations.

Take the issue of access to food: In 2002, the Integrated Food Security Strategy was given the go-ahead, aiming to reduce morbidity and mortality rates as a result of hunger as well as the prevention of malnutrition.

Food security, as defined by the UN, is a condition "when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."

Other initiatives followed suit, including the Zero Hunger Campaign in 2010. This strategy rests on several objectives including better access to food for all, particularly the poor; improved food production capacity for poor resource farmers; better nutrition security; and intensified government procurement from small farmers.

In addition to these and other national and regional programmes, the authorities in October last year launched the Fetsa Tlala 'End Hunger' Integrated Food Production Initiative. The aim is to improve the food production capabilities of smallholder and subsistence farmers specifically, and rural communities in general, thus increasing food security levels.

"R2 billion has been made available this financial year for farmer support programmes, and 72% of it will be used to support Fetsa Tlala," said Jacob Zuma in November 2013 during his annual address to the National Council of Provinces in Pretoria. "The programme will be administered by the departments of agriculture in the provinces. About 100 000 hectares of land will be put under production through these programmes. We trust that Fetsa Tlala will encourage the development of food gardens in all households.

"Through Fetsa Tlala, we are building on the good work that government has been doing already," the president added. "We have already spent over R3 billion since 2009 … through programmes that support smallholder farmers and vulnerable households to produce food. The support is in the form of infrastructure such as fences, boreholes, irrigation systems, poultry houses, shearing sheds and storage facilities. It is also through production inputs such as seeds, fertilisers, chemicals, day-old chickens, sheep and others."

This new campaign is no luxury as hunger, despite the various programmes that were established in the past, remains a significant problem across the country.

According to a five-year study by the African Food Security Unit Network at the University of Cape Town, launched in January 2013, 12 million South Africans are affected by hunger on a day-to-day basis. This equals just under 25% of the total population, and excludes those who are at risk of being hungry.

A recent report by the Human Sciences Research Council and the Medical Research Council reaffirmed South Africa's food insecurity challenge described in the Food Security Network statistics.

The SA National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, which was published in August 2013, states that food security has declined over the past five years. Less than half (45.4%) of the population is currently food-secure, compared to 48% in 2008. Some 26% of all South Africans are living in hunger and 28.6% are living at the risk of not having enough food for their survival.

According to Anette Steyn, shadow minister of agriculture, forestries and fisheries and member of the Democratic Alliance, this is what makes the effectiveness of Fetsa Tlala – which she calls a welcome campaign – questionable. "It is the third anti-hunger initiative launched in the last two years," she said in a statement. "The high turnover in projects raises serious questions about the minister's ability to successfully manage and deliver on food security programmes while millions of South Africans remain hungry."

South Africa's ongoing food insecurity levels are caused by the fact that past policies did not always reflect the needs of poor and rural people. Therefore they have not been very effective. That is at least the opinion of Ben Cousins, founder of and professor at the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies at the University of the Western Cape.

"The government is spending more money on rural areas than it used to, and some of the technological support has proven effective," he says. "However, policies tended to focus on the emerging business class rather than on emerging farmers."

Rural people, in addition, are not always given a proper chance to participate in policy making when it comes to legislation that affects them and food production. "They are invited to community meetings, but they are not really consulted when it comes to the drafting process of legislation," Cousins says. He adds that, as a result, policy and what is needed on the ground do not always meet halfway.

"The new policy [Fetsa Tlala] is seen as key in addressing the issue of food security. The question is whether it will be effective," he notes. "The nature around food security in rural areas is that people don't have enough money to buy food. Neither do they have access to land, seed, credit, skills and capital for equipment."

Miriam Mannak
Mannak is a senior social-development writer based in Cape Town. She focuses on a broad range of development issues including health and food security.

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Brothers in farms

Brothers Koos and Phillip Blankenberg are both farmers – one in maize and the other in dairy. We asked about their lie of the land in their respective areas of expertise

Koos and Phillip come from a very prominent farming family in the Western Cape, going back several generations in farming. They have a mutual love of the land, but their farming interests couldn't be further apart. Koos is a maize man through and through, while Phillip specialises in dairy farming.

Koos' world

We began by asking Koos for his take on the escalating maize price, which is having a severe effect on consumers.

"We are operating in a free market. In other words, we are allowed to import and export as the market determines. In South Africa we have produced a surplus of maize, and we were allowed to export the surplus to several countries such as China. A lot also went to Mexico. The thing is, we have exported more than what was available for exportation," he says.

"Now we are in a situation, down in Cape Town, where dairy and poultry farmers need to import maize from other countries because we have exported too much," he adds.

Asked if this situation is due to mismanagement, he replies: "Well, you can call it mismanagement if you want to, but I think government has a role to play in the marketplace. In other words, we have a responsibility to supply affordable food for the nation.

"Now in the international market, the price of maize actually went down by about 30%, but in the South African market, in the past three to four months, we've had a 40% increase in the maize price. And that is because we've exported too much, and there is a shortage of maize in our country".

Supply and demand

In order to understand the dynamics around the price of maize, says Koos, you must understand that once a surplus of maize becomes common knowledge, the price goes down, based on supply and demand. When prices go down, big international

Koos Blankenberg

companies come into the country and buy up the surplus to export to another country.

"It's not wrong. Indeed, it's the right thing to do, but we must have certain systems in our economy to protect us from a situation where we export more than we are allowed to export," says Koos.

"I think that in a certain sense, we are operating in a world free market, but there are things going on that you might say are interfering with that. For instance, if we export too much maize, we are in a situation that is not related to what's going on in the world market".

Asked why the price of maize differs from region to region in South Africa, Koos says: "This is because maize production takes place in one area of the country, the northern part. So if you want to consume maize down in the Western Cape, it's 1 500 kilometres away from the marketplace. Somebody needs to pay that transport. That's why you'll always have a higher price in Cape Town than in the production area".

He describes the maize price as "horrific".

"We've had about a R400 per tonne increase within the last four weeks, and this will result in a huge meat price increase. Consumers are already under tremendous strain to pay for lamb and beef, and now pork is also going up incredibly."

If the prices of the things that consumers need are too high, then demand will be lower, he says, resulting in lower production. "You will have a shrinking economy, which is something we also don't want."

Koos doesn't see South Africa heading down the path toward starvation, though. We will always have enough food, he says – but at a price.

Asked what kind of system he would put in place to make the market free and fair, Koos says: "I would be careful not to interfere with the market as it is, but I would be interfering with the management of how we manage our stock in this country. In other words, if you talk about importing and exporting, I think there is a role to be played.

"I would do some things, like rethink the tonnage that is available for export, then let the world market come in and buy it for the price that they want it. But once they have bought the available tonnage, we must remember that we have an obligation toward neighbouring countries such as Zimbabwe to supply them with maize, as they don't have enough. We need to keep that in mind when we open our gates and say, let the maize roll out our harbour".

He believes South Africa could do more to protect its economy. "We have openness, and we want to be open to the world and be part of the world and I've no problem with that. But it's not right that we give opportunities to the world outside our country which we could have had available for our own people. We are sitting in a country where we have a lot of people who are without work and I think that all the opportunities available to create work and local economy must be utilised – I don't think we are doing that."

Young boers

Is the young boer a different boer to the old boer, we asked him. "Well," he says, "the younger generation definitely is different. They think and do things differently. Some of the older farmers – and I am privileged that my father is one of them – have the ability to adapt to what the younger farmers are standing for and what they want to do. But that is not the general rule. It doesn't happen all over."

There are many people in South Africa, he says, who were born to be farmers. And they include people of all races. "Once you are born with that desire and ability, you are the right person. We need to identify the people who really want to be in farming, and put those people in partnerships with people who want to educate them."

But, he adds, "you eat an elephant piece by piece, and that is exactly how you become a commercial farmer. You don't step onto a farm and start farming. You grow into it, and it can take 10, 15, 25 years. Sometimes it takes generations to get there. And that is what people don't understand. You can't build a big commercial farm from whatever, and then take some people, put them there, and believe it will be a success. Business doesn't work that way, and the farming business doesn't work like that."

He believes there is land available in South Africa to produce more maize, "and the more we produce, the more economic activity we can create and the more jobs we can provide."

He says regulations should be put in place to force the fuel and energy sectors of the economy to make use of biofuel.

"Eskom has been a big problem lately. The increases in electricity we've had have been directly going into the cost that is being used to produce wheat and maize in this country."

On the question of recent labour disturbances in the Western Cape, around minimum wages for farmworkers, Koos says: "I strongly believe that it was an orchestrated thing. Why did it only happen in the Western Cape if the minimum wage is the same for the whole country?"

Koos believes South Africa has some of the best farmers in the world. "I have had the privilege to visit a few countries around the world. We have the best technology the world has to offer, and we are making use of that. The fact is the number of farmers in South Africa, the commercial farmers, is shrinking. The ones who are left behind are expanding; they need to make their businesses better, as profit margins are getting smaller. And that is a fact of modern farming throughout the world."

Phillip's world

Phillip is the chairperson of the Western Cape Milk Producers' Organisation, and has strong views on the price of dairy products, as well as other matters affecting the industry.

Asked why the price of dairy products has almost doubled over the past two years, he says: "I think the consumer sees that because they take milk from the shelf and they buy that milk. Yes, those prices did go up, but the producers' prices did not go up accordingly. Our prices went up by a much lower percentage than the consumer price went up. There can be many reasons for this. Maybe the supermarkets are competing against each other and want more profits. Our price didn't go up that much."

Phillip says the Milk Producers' Organisation has spoken to a few of the big supermarket groups, "and they all told us they want to see higher prices because they make a percentage of profit on that price! So the higher the milk price, the higher the profit they can make.

"They are always looking for what we call a new kid on the block – a new dairy company trying to get into the market. The supermarket will force them to give them a special price on milk just to get them into the market. And the supermarket will use that price to lower all the other guys' prices.

"The supermarket wants feet through its doors, so they are using milk dairy products and bread, which are staple foods, to get feet through their shop, and then make more profit on other products."

Phillip agrees there could be something of a cartel at play in the milk industry, fixing prices across the board. But he doesn't want to see the government clamping down.

"What's going to happen is, we are price takers of our product. If government clamps down on it, then there will be big penalties coming in. Who is going to pay for it? The farmer is going to pay for it."

But doesn't it seem an unjust and unfair system and, if so, how can we bring an end to it? "Well," says Phillip, "it's not that easy because dairy is a perishable product. It's not like maize where you can harvest it, store it, and market it when the price is right. It's a perishable product, so you have to get rid of it every day, and that is a bit of a downfall on the marketing side of your product."

The lowdown on farming

Asked if he thinks the government appreciates what is involved in dairy farming, he says: "We had some government officials on the farm before, and when they see what dairy farmers are actually doing, for the first time they realise what actually goes into dairy farming – all the knowledge, technology and the time. It's a 365-day-a-year operation. I don't think they are always aware of what the dairy industry is really doing, and it's our job to make them aware of what we are doing. I think government can do more to help dairy farming in South Africa."

He doesn't believe there is trust between dairy farmers and the government, and that's something that both need to work on. "And obviously, it has to start from our side. We already have a new national chairperson who, I think, is very pro-government and very good at building relationships. So we are starting to move in that direction."

On the question of what he would say to government, if given the opportunity, Phillip says: "The first thing I would try and do is bring them out to the farm, and show them what we are doing. Then I would tell them all the challenges we have. Some of these involve government. For instance, our maize prices went up by R500 a tonne just in the last month, but we are exporting maize. That is making maize expensive.

"The other thing I would talk to them about is the illegal importation of dairy products, something we as an organisation have to clamp down on."

As for aspirant farmers hoping to enter the market, he says that if you want to start a new dairy farm, you need between R70 000 and R100 000 per cow. That includes the cow, the capital investment, the feed and all the other things needed to start up a new dairy. It means that, for a 500-cow operation, you will need to outlay at least R35 million.

Apart from the money, though, it's a very long and arduous process to become a dairy farmer, says Phillip. "You need skill and knowledge. The only way we can teach people that skill is by having them work next to you for a couple of years, then start doing things by themselves. Then only in 15 to 20 years can you say now you can go on your own ... you can run a dairy farm now."

He says many farmers are reluctant to form partnerships because profitability in dairy farming is under severe pressure.

"Besides, you have to spend at lot of time making a success of your own business. You normally don't have the time to bring in a partner and train him/her because you are so concentrating on making profit just to survive. So that is also a problem: I can't invite you to farm with me if I am not making a profit."

Phillip Blankenberg

In a maize

Asked why South Africa is exporting 150 000 tonnes of maize to Zimbabwe when we need it ourselves, Phillip says he doesn't have an answer. "We are exporting that maize from Durban harbour and importing maize into Cape Town harbour. That doesn't make sense."

Government, he says, needs to realise what is going on in the dairy industry. "We need to go to government and talk about an import tariff, some help in some form, or even giving us a few cents a litre for taking on partners (aspirate farmers). Those are the things we need to start talking about.

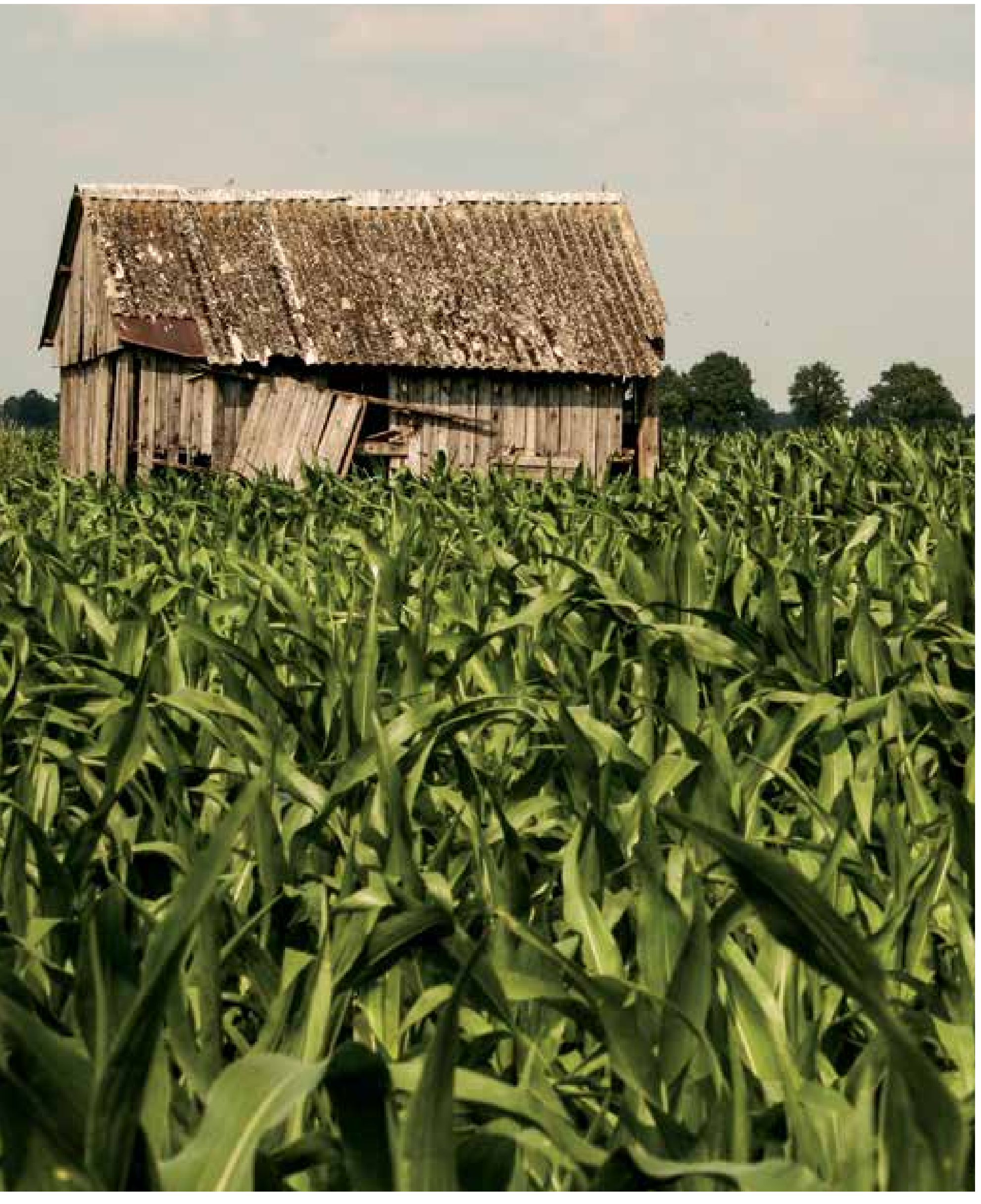
"We lost more than 1 000 dairy farmers in the last three years. That is all capacity we could have used. And it's gone now, it's all gone.

"So if we can change things around and make it a profitable industry for the farmer and consumer, we can grow a lot more milk," Phillip concludes.

Interview: Tony Sanderson
Text: John Gumede

Why the 37% increase in white maize price?

The current short market and high prices are short-lived, but the question remains: what caused the white maize price to increase by 37%?



The South African white maize price increased by R900 per tonne from the last week of November 2013 until mid-January, moving from R2 400/tonne to R3 300/tonne – an increase of 37%.

Since the end of November 2013, the international maize price traded sideways, so it had little impact on the increase in the domestic maize prices, but there are two factors that have had a major impact:

1. The weak exchange rate and the underlying economic fundamentals of the South African economy

The South African rand is following a group of emerging economies, including Turkey. These countries have similar underlying fundamentals in their economy, which include significant trade deficits. Consequently, these countries are highly vulnerable to risk-aversion strategies from the global investment fraternity. For example, the current decline in the value of the rand at the end of January 2014 was due to the fact that the rand followed the weakening Turkish lira.

Our upcoming election may have an unknown future impact on the rand, and some believe it will stay weak until after the election period. This will support higher import prices of both grains and inputs.

2. The unexpected exports of maize to Zimbabwe

The Food and Agriculture Organisation communicated during the second semester of 2013 to Grain SA that Zimbabwe suffered poor growing conditions and that the country may suffer a shortage of 460 000 tonnes, which need to be imported to meet the demand of 1.43 million tonnes.

> *"Based on our per caput consumption figure of 115kg per annum for maize, we have estimated Zimbabwe's food consumption at about 1.43 million tonnes (MY 2013/14 April/March). Given their 2013 production level (in the absence of official figures we have projected it to be close to the 2012 output, which was slightly below 1 million tonnes), the country will need to import approximately 460 000 tonnes to satisfy national requirements. The government has already negotiated to import 150 000 tonnes from Zambia and has issued import permits for 25 000 tonnes of grain from South Africa. I am waiting to receive updated figures of commercial import from Zambia."*
>
> ***FAO email to Grain SA (25 July 2013)***

Consequently, Zimbabwe failed to secure maize from Zambia, as the latter didn't have maize available for export to Zimbabwe, who then turned to South Africa to meet its demand.

Zimbabwe imported about 154 000 tonnes of maize this season, the equivalent of the amount that will be imported by South Africa from the Ukraine. Zimbabwe traditionally does not import maize from South Africa, but this unexpected event resulted in South Africa needing to import maize during the first quarter of 2014, just before the elections.

The unexpected imports of South African maize by Zimbabwe led to the increase in domestic maize prices, while the strategic imports of maize by Zimbabwe left South Africa with a tight carry-out. As a result, the imports of 150 000 tonnes of maize from the Ukraine is timely to relieve pressure and, therefore, the underlying support of maize prices for old-season stock.

It's very important to note that the current high maize price is of a short-term nature and will soon ease once imports land and as soon as the early delivery of maize starts in March **(see Table 1).**

The current high levels will subdue in a matter of weeks and it can already be seen when the future Safex price levels for maize delivery are compared. The maize price for March trades 6% lower than February due to earlier deliveries and expected imported volumes that will increase the supply of available maize. As harvest progresses, the prices for April are 13% lower than for February, 20% lower in May and 30% lower in July **(see Table 2).**

The prices for maize delivery in July are between 9% and 12% higher compared to July 2014 prices. Due to South Africa's economic situation, the exchange rate is currently about 22% weaker than a year ago and the impact of the latter on fuel, fertiliser and other imported inputs increases the cost of production compared to the foregoing season. The current forecasts promise sufficient widespread rainfall over the production area, and the impact on new season prices can already be witnessed as new season prices start to decline.

Table 2: Future expected prices for maize as on 29 January

	February	March	April*	May	July
Price level (Rand)	3 294	3 113	2 872	2 632	2 312
Difference between Feb 14 and future month price		**(-181) -6%**	**(-422) -13%**	**(-662) -20%**	**(-982) -30%**

***Estimate**

Table 1: Monthly total maize exports compared to the increase in imports (October – April 2014) until the end of the current marketing year.

	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Apr
Exports	94 054	114 757	68 505	83 651	Na	na	na
Imports	0	0	0	0	150 000 tons		
Early deliveries *	0	0	0	0	602 000 ton		

na: not available *Estimate

Other factors to take into consideration

- The domestic wheat price didn't follow the old season trend in maize prices and, as a result, the price of bread shouldn't increase. Current wheat prices are only 3% to 5% higher than last year and the wheat price only constitutes ±20% of the total cost of a loaf of bread.
- It's expected that South Africa will import 975 000 tonnes of rice in 2013/14. S increasingly imports more and more rice. The exchange rate and world price increases will have an impact on local rice prices.

Summary

The current maize price spike is going to be short-lived, with early deliveries and imports on the way. Maize prices for the new season compare moderately (single-digit changes) with last year's prices. A continuation of the current dry conditions in the western production areas could add to more pressure on prices. Weather prospects for the coming weeks look promising.

South Africa went through similar situations in 2007/08, and back then no interventions were made and the market corrected itself. We do not believe that any intervention is currently needed.

Grain SA, 29 January 2014
pretoria@grainsa.co.za

Fishing for change

The Department of Agriculture, Forestries and Fisheries is helping to cast the nets wider to include the previously disadvantaged so that they may put food on their tables

On January 8, 1912 in Bloemfontein, a group of visionary leaders formed a party that would fight to liberate the people of the land from oppression, freeing them from strife and enforced poverty.

Part of the vision that informed the formation of the Freedom Charter has always been that the land, the sea and its resources should belong to all those who live in the land, and that the resources should be shared evenly among all South African citizens. Thousands of our people who live in the country's coastal towns depend on the sea for their survival. Statistics have shown us, however, that a fifth of South Africans still go to bed hungry.

For generations, the harvest of the sea has served to line the pockets of the already privileged white minority, something the department is fighting to change.

Industry research has shown communities in the coastal regions of the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Northern Cape make up the bulk of the country's rural subsistence fishers.

On April 27, 1994, what had only been a dream to the founding fathers of the ANC became a reality. We, the black majority of this country, were able to legitimately walk into Parliament and change things around.

For the ANC government, which has vowed to eradicate poverty completely by 2030, the vision has always been to put the economic resources in the hands of the majority, who had previously been denied access through cruel policies devised by the oppressor.

In a country plagued by the three demons of poverty, unemployment and inequality, we as government are faced with the mammoth task of redressing these issues. Since its launch in 2009, the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) has been pegged by government as one of the key departments to correct the situation.

The current policy, Fishing Rights Allocation Process 2013 (FRAP 2013), which is under heavy scrutiny today, is another example of legislation put in place to see to it that it is not individuals or a minority who benefit from the fishing rights allocations, but subsistent communities that fish to put food on their tables and sell the surplus stock to their local communities.

On December 30, 2013 – a day before the fishing rights to the KZN prawn trawl, demersal shark, squid, tuna pole-line, hake handline, white mussels, oysters and traditional linefish species expired – the outcome of the current allocations was announced, setting the cat among the pigeons.

The ANC government has always spoken out about its vision to right the wrongs of the past, and in this instance – contrary to the accusations that have been levelled against the department in regard to the FRAP – this has meant giving people who have previously been denied access to harvest the sea by apartheid policies, a chance to put food on the table for their families.

What we need to see is a community of fishermen being able to go out to sea, fish for their families and sell the surplus fish to their own community to put clothes on their children's backs. This policy was crafted to be a pro-poor piece of legislation that favours the subsistence fisherman above the well-established commercial operator, and it is legislation that has always been aimed at restoring the dignity of the poor traditional fishermen and women in our coastal towns.

Who stands to benefit from the misinformation and the rumour-mongering, and what does the poor fisherman gain at the end of it all?

In the case of the Traditional Linefish sector, this has meant that while 455 allocations had been previously made, only 225 allocations were awarded in January – paving the way for more subsistence fishers to participate in the sector.

As a department we took the implementation of this policy seriously and preparatory measures to safeguard against possible bungling of the process, including the setting up of a Fishing Rights Verification Team, were therefore put in place.

Another important precautionary measure has been the appointment of an independent auditing firm to provide technical support for the FRAP 2013 process and conduct the requisite consultative meetings – actions that have ensured this has not only been a legal and fair but also a democratic process. Unsuccessful applicants who feel the DAFF has made a mistake by not awarding them fishing rights have been invited to appeal the rights denial.

The fishing industry, which contributes billions to the country's GDP, is a lucrative industry, but while fish stocks are a renewable resource, they are dwindling because they were harvested at rates that were not sustainable. The allocators of these rights have also looked into this – a challenge that all affected governments across the world are battling with.

While this is nature's gift to our people, we need to preserve it for the coming generations of fishermen. In this regard, DAFF's policies, including FRAP, are tackling this challenge head-on and seeing to it that we do not run out of fish stocks.

A healthy debate about government's policies is a natural occurrence in any democratic state, and our department welcomes an investigation into FRAP 2013, but while it is the constitutionally protected right and duty of the media to shine the light into injustices that may be occurring in our communities, it is also its collective job and responsibility to supply their readership with factual and balanced information.

The questions we should be asking ourselves are: who stands to benefit from the misinformation and the rumour-mongering, and what does the poor fisherman gain at the end of it all?

Playing political football with the lives of the downtrodden is a disgrace to and dishonours the memories of people such as the late Nelson Mandela, who have laid down their lives and sacrificed precious time with their families so we can call our land our own.

Tina Joemat-Pettersson
Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

World Cup-quality turf seed

Agricol is a seed company that has, over more than 50 years, made deep inroads into the South African and international markets.

Agricol focuses closely on the demands of customers as well as on the latest trends in the seed markets. Activities include plant breeding, seed production, international trade, processing, marketing and the distribution of seed.

Agricol's vision is to become a leader in the South African seed industry and receive international recognition by building the Agricol brand. To ensure their products meet the needs of the marketplace, they are tested in a worldwide trialling network in order to assess their adaptation to different environmental conditions and uses. Agricol strives to be a reliable supplier of proven products through a commitment to continuous product innovation.

Agricol has been involved with the marketing of turf grass/lawn seed for over 25 years and is also the leading supplier to golf courses, sports stadia and the South African lawn industry. Agricol is currently the exclusive African distributor of turf seed products for the following companies:

- Seed Research of Oregon
- Pickseed
- DLF

Through these alliances Agricol was the proud supplier of turf grass seed to the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, and the South African stadiums received a glowing review from Jerôme Valcke, the General Secretary of FIFA. He commented that Cape Town's ryegrass pitch should be seen as the benchmark for all World Cup stadiums. The 2010 FIFA World Cup turfgrass seed project is just one success story from their productive, 25-year relationship with DLF Trifolium, Seed Research of Oregon and Pickseed.

The plant breeders of DLF-Trifolium, working in close co-operation with external partners and scientists, strive to improve and integrate their research achievements into a practical form for groundsmen and greenkeepers to utilise. Through this breeding and testing collaboration they can ensure that new varieties adapt to local growing challenges and market requirements. Improved wear-tolerance, extended winter growth, salt-, heat- and drought-tolerance, as well as improved disease-tolerance, are just some of the traits contributing to increased sustainability and reduced costs.

The Agricol product range was created specifically to cater for a range of applications and uses, including sports stadiums (perennial rye), parks and recreational areas, school sport fields (kikuyu, annual rye, perennial rye, cynodon), golf courses (kikuyu, dwarf fescue, perennial rye, bent), airports and landing strips, as well as agriculture (dwarf fescue, creeping red fescue and perennial rye).

Agricol offer the South African market the best-quality products available in the world through their alliance with DLF Trifolium, and it should come as no surprise that only seed from the DLF trifolium range has been used in the pitch preparations for the 2014 Soccer World Cup in Brazil. The grass seed chosen for the World Cup has been tested thoroughly in Brazil by external international advisors as well as local sports grass specialists. The football pitches are generally Bermuda grass-based but, due to the winter dormancy of Bermuda, the pitches have been over-seeded with top-performing perennial ryegrasses, including the new 4 turf™ (turf tetraploid perennial ryegrass).

The new 4 turf™ type of tetraploid perennial ryegrass is bred especially for rapid establishment and unique stress-tolerance. Traditional turf-type perennial ryegrasses have two sets of chromosomes, whereas tetraploids have four sets. Forage tetraploid grasses have long been known for showing better stress-tolerance and disease-resistance compared to diploids, an advantage now available in turf grasses.

This special edition 2014 FIFA World Cup turf seed mixture is now available to the South African market in small 500g packaging for use on private and home lawns.

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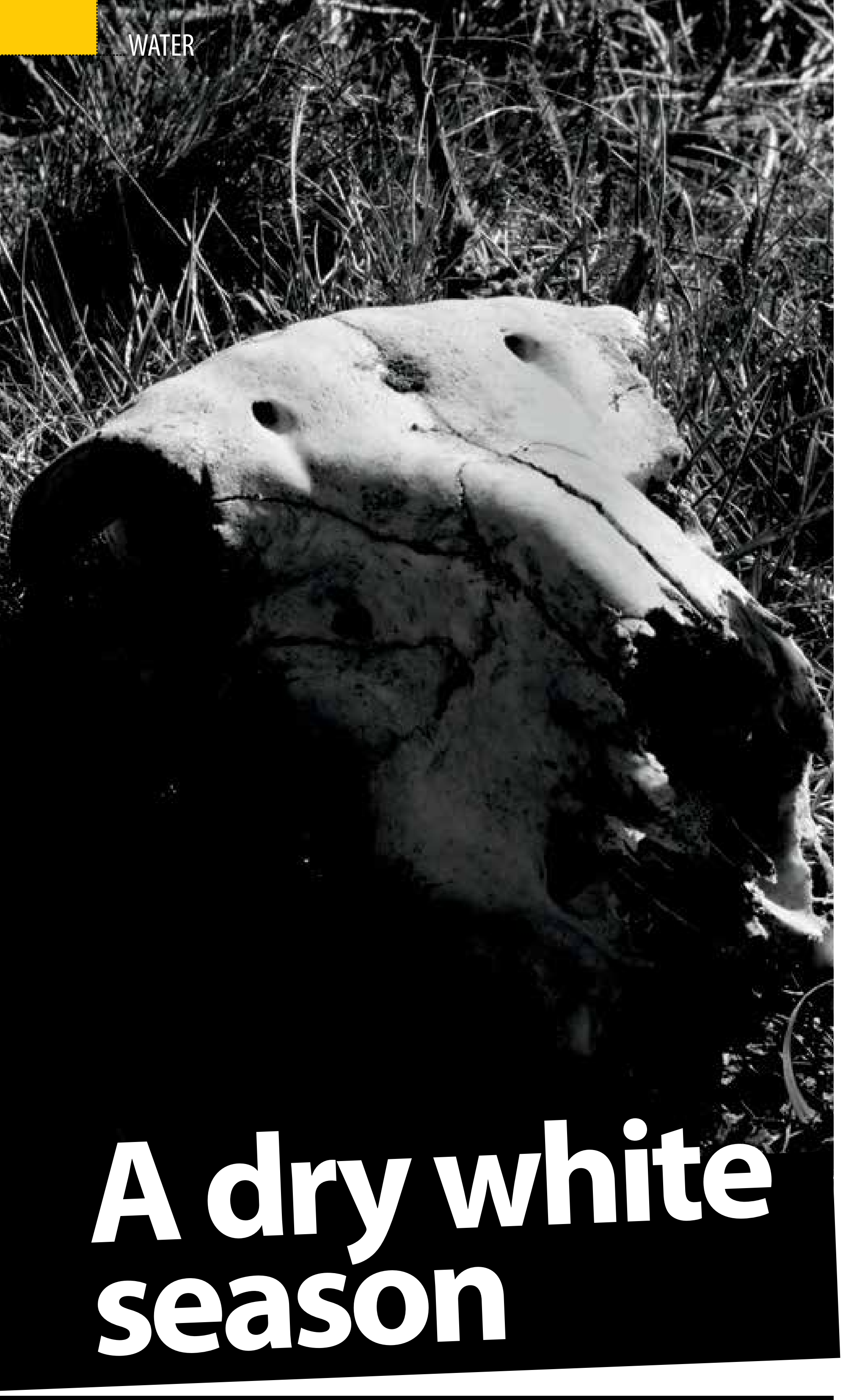

A dry white season

Drought continues to be the biggest threat facing South African farmers, many of whom are going through difficult times

Following a year in which South Africa's white harvest was severely hit by drought conditions, the need for farmers to heed early-warning systems has become increasingly apparent.

So serious is the situation that late last year Agriculture Minister Tina Joemat-Pettersson stepped into the fray, saying the country needed farmers to respect early-warning systems for drought.

There were also signs that the government intends to make its emergency weather warning systems more credible among farmers, after drought played havoc with the country's white harvest.

"Our first priority is to have early-warning systems for farmers and to get them to respect them," Joemat-Pettersson was quoted in *Mail & Guardian Online*. "We warned farmers the drought was imminent, but if they doubt the credibility of the information then they're not going to do anything," she said.

Harvests down by 20 percent

Quoting figures supplied by the Crop Estimates Committee, reports said white corn harvests – used to make one of South Africa's staple foods – dropped 20% in the year ended April (2013) to the smallest since the 2007 season after a drought in the main growing provinces.

The minister, meanwhile, announced that government would provide R43 million in drought aid to the North West, after the province was declared drought-stricken under the Disaster Management Act.

North West Premier Thandi Modise's spokesperson Lesiba Kgwele was quoted as saying a drought response task team had been established, consisting of government departments, organised agriculture and all municipalities in the province.

He said the Department of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries had conducted drought verification between July 9 and August 12, and as part of a drought emergency relief assessment it processed more than 19 000 applications for financial assistance from commercial and subsistence farmers.

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SA's rainfall patterns

According to the SA Weather Service, the country's climate is one of great variability. Seasonal rainfall percentage deviations since 1960 demonstrate wide fluctuations about the long-term average and it is in this context that large rainfall deficits must be assessed, the Service says.

Between July of 1960 and June of 2004, there have been 8 summer-rainfall seasons where rainfall for the entire summer-rainfall area has been less than 80% of normal. A deficit of 25% is normally regarded as a severe meteorological drought but it can be safely assumed that a shortfall of 20% from normal rainfall will cause crop and water shortfalls in many regions accompanied by social and economic hardship.

Heaviest in the east

According to the SA Weather Service, all but the south-western and southern regions of South Africa rely on summer rainfall, which normally falls between October and March, the summer season. Rainfall is heaviest in the east and decreases westward. For convenience the rainfall season is taken to run from July until June of the following year, but rainfall outside of the summer season is usually insignificant.

The consequence of rainfall being confined to six months of the year is that most crops can only be grown during this period. Similarly, the recharging of water resources is also confined to these crucial six months.

"When the seasonal rainfall is seriously below normal, crop yields are poor and ground and dam water levels fall dangerously low. Should these conditions occur in swift succession, as in the periods from 1964 to 1970, 1991 to 1995 and again from 2002 to 2005, there is insufficient time for natural resources and the economy to recover from each rainfall-deficit period," says a report on the SA Weather Service website.

Simultaneous to low rainfall are cloud-free skies and high temperatures. The effect of abnormally high temperatures is an increase in evapotranspiration as well as stress on plants whilst further depleting surface-water reserves through evaporation.

City Press quoted Kgwele as saying: "Urgent interventions are also being considered to alleviate water shortages in Mamusa and Greater Taung local municipalities, which have resorted to tankering drinking water to communities, as the Mamusa Dam has virtually run dry."

According to the newspaper, Kgwele said Modise shared the concern of provincial disaster management authorities that fish killed by lack of water in the dam would create a health hazard during the rainy season.

"The Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati District Municipality is reportedly tankering water to 50 000 households across villages within its jurisdiction," said Kgwele.

Impacts

The most serious impact, other than dwindling water supplies, is the effect on staple crops and, ultimately, commercial crops. In 1992/1993, undoubtedly one of the most widespread droughts of the last 45 years, maize had to be imported to South Africa (as well as the rest of southern Africa).

The knock-on effect of crop failure could be seen in the population drift from rural areas into the cities, farm labour lay-offs and farm closures as well as an increasing indebtedness in the agricultural sector.

Other serious impacts brought about by drought are the devastating veld fires that destroy large areas of grazing at a time when grass is in short supply. Commercial timber and orchards are also prone to damage at such times.

In 1992 there were several huge fires that destroyed thousands of hectares of grassland. In one of the worst events, during August, at least nine people perished.

In 1994 a combination of unusually strong winds and very dry conditions saw large areas of grazing and timber destroyed. Six people died in one such fire in July of that year.

Again, in July of 2002, Mpumalanga was devastated by fires that destroyed 24 000 hectares of pasture, left four people dead and caused damages amounting to more than R32 million.

Canned fruit farmers in crisis

Canned fruit farmers in the Western Cape have suffered major losses due to unusual weather. It is estimated that 18% of crops have been lost, SABC News reported.

Normally Cape orchards bear top quality cling peaches primarily for canning, but unseasonal rain has caused the fruit to drop. The resulting rot leads to dangerous fungi and the dreaded fruit fly that can destroy an entire orchard.

A smaller harvest will have a knock-on effect on the entire value chain, and seasonal workers are already feeling the pinch.

"Many of the peaches lie under the ground and there is very little time to work ... [A]fter a week, the work is finished and then we must stay at home with no money, no work no pay," says seasonal worker, Isak Adams.

The weak rand combined with a high quality crop would have been a golden opportunity for farmers, but that is now lost.

"An opportunity like this only comes around every 20 years. After the 2008 crisis, farmers were looking to recover well, as up to 85% of our produce is exported; this would have been a golden season, but now that won't happen," says Canning Fruit Producers' Association chief executive officer, Wiehahn Victor.

John Gumede

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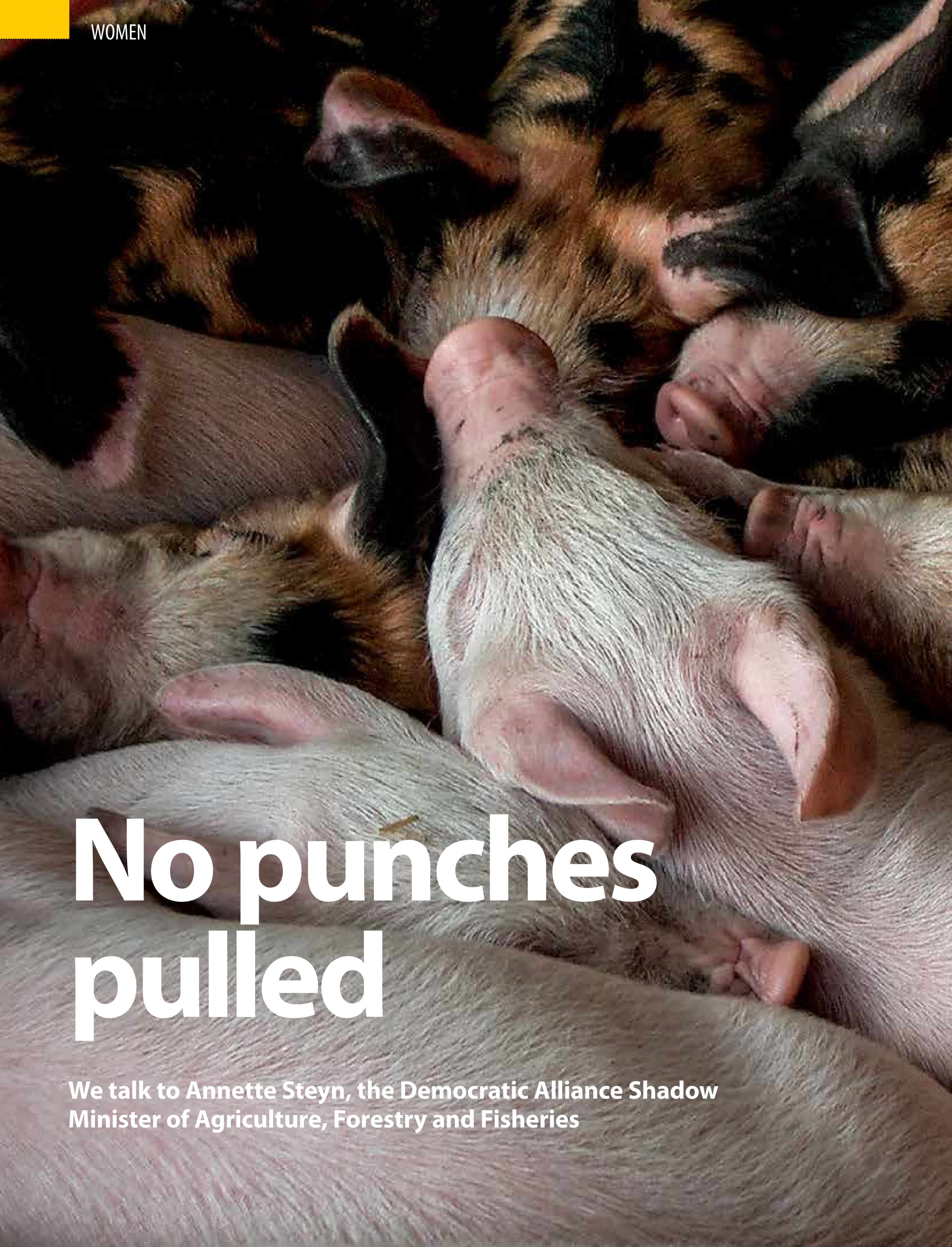

No punches pulled

We talk to Annette Steyn, the Democratic Alliance Shadow Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

South African farmers feel the government doesn't listen to – or care about – their problems. In a wide-ranging interview, Shadow Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Annette Steyn called for more research to be undertaken in South Africa's vital agricultural sector, saying the country's agricultural laws were "outdated".

"I sometimes get phone calls from people in the farming community, to say they need to go and do this or that, and asking for my opinion. I see this as a role that I play, to give them advice on how to understand politics, and what politics is all about," she says.

She says farmers are frustrated in government, and one of the reasons things take so long to get done in agriculture is the fact that all departments play a role in agriculture, including Treasury and the departments of Water Affairs and Transport.

"So there's no one-stop shop where farmers can go into someone's office and fix everything at once."

Feeding the nation

She says if you need to feed the nation, and people are starving because you are not doing a good job, "you can't come in with politics, but unfortunately that's what is happening".

On a lighter note, she recalls a recent visit to the Eastern Cape where a number of tribal chiefs told her they would vote for the DA if she brought them a bull. "I said I can't do it, I'm not in government in the first place and I don't own any bulls."

Steyn says one of the most important challenges facing farming in South Africa is ensuring farmers can farm properly and that, where necessary, the government brings in the right people to train them and to help them set up proper systems.

"I still believe that South Africa has some of the best farmers in the world. I still believe that we are a unique country, we are people who can survive in the most difficult situations. We will make it," says the shadow minister.

Groot Trek

She adds: "I always laugh when Dr Theo De Jager from AgriSA (vice president) says we went through the Groot Trek, and so many other things, and we will survive. I'm not worried about that. My real concern is making sure we stay on track with what is happening in the world. We need research; if we don't do that, our farmers are going to struggle, but I think also they will get through it. They will do it themselves. But I really think we can do it – we must just stay positive."

Concerning the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Steyn says: "I must say this department is a mystery to me. I've been trying to find out now for the last two or three years why we've had so many directors-general (DGs), why we have such a high rollover of deputy DGs and top-level officials. There's a problem somewhere, and I have my own opinion as to where the problem lies. I think it is the minister. And I've told her. I think she's not handling people well, she doesn't have very good communication skills, and people just can't cope with it."

Asked what qualifies her to be Shadow Minister of Agriculture, Steyn says: "Well, I think in the first place, I was born on a farm. I understand farmers, which is a very important part of working in this environment.

A farm girl at heart

"The second thing is I constantly meet with the top structures of all organised agriculture to speak to them, find out the issues and learn about what is going on. I visit farms and farming communities. To just sit and get information over a desk is not good enough – you must physically go and see."

She sees herself as playing a mediating role, "between at least certain sections of government that are prepared to listen, to help and advise, and to make sure people better understand farming and farming communities."

Steyn says she visits farmers across the country on a regular basis, including farmers who are not organised or aligned with recognised agricultural bodies. "I meet with everyone in the farming communities to make sure everyone understands and that voices are being heard."

Interview: Tony Sanderson
Text: David Capel

Fields of dreams

Mphilo Dlamini was drawn to Syngenta SA's philosophy of bringing plant potential to life in order to help feed an exploding world population, but for him it's even more personal.

Leading global agribusiness Syngenta was formed in 2000 following the merger between Novartis Agribusiness and Zeneca Agrochemicals. Its name means "bringing people together" and its mission is what inspires their Corporate Affairs Manager for Africa Middle East, Mphilo Dlamini.

"I love what Syngenta does and I was drawn to the company by their philosophy - without food the world is dead, so a company that seeks to provide such sustainable solutions is attractive to me. Everything hinges on food: no engineer can develop a software on an empty stomach and no miner can go underground on an empty stomach."

Syngenta's mandate extends further than simply helping to produce food – it's critical that they unlock (and share) the secrets of producing more food with less resources. "I think that's a fantastic mission and, for me, it's an amazing story to tell."

Mphilo is the perfect ambassador for spreading the words and deeds of this visionary company that is pushing the envelope in terms of technology and innovation. As a boy he used to plough the field with oxen, before planting and then weeding with hoes. His grandparents were uneducated rural farmers who would sell any surplus crop and use the money to feed Mphilo's siblings and their parents, and somehow they also managed to eke out enough to pay for the childrens' schooling, all through subsistence farming.

"Today I am what I am because of that background. I know what agriculture can do in transforming rural economies. I owe it all to my agricultural roots."

His subsequent experience working in government relations has proven invaluable considering that government policies drive the business environment, and his wide-ranging skillsets have also been of great benefit in fulfilling his personal mission with Syngenta.

"As a corporate affairs executive you need to be informed so that you can advise the company leadership and introduce strategies to mitigate any adverse effects of negative policies. It's also important that you drive the agenda for the company's freedom to trade or license to operate."

Mphilo is also a firm believer that companies who embrace corporate affairs principles have a better competitive edge. "Not everything can be achieved by financial muscle. Relationships, networks and partnerships can deliver more for a

Mphilo (right) in conversation with Kofi Annan.

company's bottom line if they are brought into the epicenter of the business."

Part of his team's agenda is to ensure that Syngenta has a license to operate as well as the freedom to trade anywhere in their region. This calls for high-level stakeholder relations engagement with government, regulatory bodies, policy makers and opinion leaders.

"It's challenging because agricultural products are highly regulated, while agricultural technology has the lowest adoption rate. People still think that agriculture should be a primitive industry, when all other industries are technologically advancing."

Navigating through product registration processes in his region can prove to be a minefield because of bureaucratic

bottlenecks, lack of legislations and so on, while there is also a huge need for the protection of intellectual properties and the harmonisation of registration processes. Mphilo relies heavily on his 3 Ds when it comes to working closely with heads of state, senior government ministers, government officials and regulatory authorities.

"Diplomacy. Diplomacy. Diplomacy! I cannot over-emphasise the importance of that, because it teaches you how to handle people from all levels socially and politically. Knowing what you need to say and how to say it are skills that have to be developed over time and these are critical when representing a company amongst sensitive stakeholder groups."

Mphilo wears his parental hat first thing in the morning, dropping his two kids at school and fetching them during his lunch break. After work he'll either go for a workout at the gym or can be found fulfilling his church commitments, either in church meetings or attending services.

The issue of regulating agricultural commodity prices remains a tricky one for him. "We live in a free market economy, but no matter how many regulations you introduce to a commercial process, the market will always be the final judge. However, it's critical that agricultural productivity is high so that commodity scarcity is not the primary influencer of price hikes and so on."

The task facing Syntenga and the agricultural sector at large is daunting to the extent of seeming impossible. More than half of the world's population now lives in cities where no food production is happening and, at the same time, we're using its resources 50% faster than it can handle.

"What we're asking our planet to provide is simply not sustainable, but Syngenta's Good Growth Plan (see panel) resonates with me because it seeks to achieve what seems impossible. My personal philosophy is that nothing is impossible."

The fact remains, though, that every day the world wakes to face the burden of feeding an additional 200,000 mouths. Agriculture is unquestionably the future of the world, and Mphilo believes that a lot of effort, prioritisation and investment needs to happen in this sector, in addition to the youth being positively encouraged to make a career in agriculture.

"Syngenta is partnering with governments and all stakeholders to ensure that agricultural productivity is enhanced… and the good news is that we have the products and the technology that can help the world to grow more with less."

Syngenta's Good Growth Plan

1. Make crops efficient
2. Rescue more farmlands
3. Help biodiversity flourish
4. Empower smallholders
5. Help people stay safe
6. Look after every worker

The faint of heart need not apply

Carl Opperman, CEO of Agri Wes-Cape, says farming in the province is in good shape, but it takes guts

The Western Cape's farming sector is thriving, despite a number of challenges, according to Carl Opperman, chief executive of Agri Wes-Cape.

In a recent interview, he expressed his delight at the good wheat crops produced in the province and said that even though the weather had played up at times, good yields were being achieved.

"We had very interesting weather conditions last year, from hail to snow, and from floods to droughts. We had hail in some of our fruit areas at a time of year when it wasn't normal. But on the whole, we are doing okay," says Opperman.

As he points out, farming is not for sissies. "At the moment in the Western Cape, we have certain areas where there is a bit of a drought, we've had some severe floods with infrastructural damage, we have crops on our lands and we've had a very good wheat crop.

"So if we look at things overall, we are not in a bad state. If I compare our province to Northern Cape and North West, and the grain areas which have been late in producing, I would say that this time we got the longest stick, not the shortest stick. But, as you know, the wheel will turn again," he adds.

No train, no grain

He says Agri Wes-Cape collected around 2 500 tonnes of feed to take up to the North West and Northern Cape.

"The sad part, though, is that Transnet, on 2 January, said 'we have the trains, and we've put everything in place to get the fodder'. More than a month later, there are still no trains available. So all my fodder is standing rotting at the silos. I have seven or eight pickup points, delivering at three points, and we're all standing and waiting for the trains to come so we can load them.

"We are in daily contact with Transnet, asking them what is happening. They are waiting for the CEO to sign off the document, and I don't know how many more months we are going to have to wait."

He says helping farmers in the north includes not only commercial farmers but small-scale farmers as well. "We have a massive number of small farmers, and the

agreement I have with my colleagues in the North West and the Northern Cape is that whenever they come to pick up the feed and distribute it, they will also distribute it to the small-scale farmers. A farmer is a farmer, and it doesn't matter what size you are. When you are in trouble, you assist one another.

"On top of this, we've also had a lot of cash donations. We used those donations to get interlinks for the high-value fodder, which was loaded and is still waiting for the train to take it up to help the people out," says Opperman.

Knowing the right steps

In order to succeed in farming, he says, you need a number of things including labour, natural resources, land and entrepreneurial skills. "To be an entrepreneur, you have to be somebody who knows what steps to take. There are a lot of black farmers who are very successful, and these are the people we have to push further."

He says the fact that farmers have to pay transport differentiations out of their own pockets, even if the grain is only being taken 45 kilometres away, is "sickening".

Opperman says it's important for farmers and government to figure out what they have in common and in which areas they can work together.

But, he adds, there are people in government who don't understand agriculture production. "The moment we can get them to understand agriculture production and the way to produce and the way to do things, I believe we will make progress."

Interview: Tony Sanderson
Text: Salvador Adams

Bühler launches new milling plant

Food processing plant and equipment supplier Bühler South Africa launched its two-ton per hour mobile Isigayo compact mill on 12 April 2013, in conjunction with the Department of Trade and Industry (Dti).

The mill was launched in a bid to address the government's mandate of developing the small-scale milling sector and improving food security in the Southern African region.

Bühler South Africa's solution came in reaction to the country's need to move the processing of raw maize products into the country.

"This is a game-changer," said Garth Strachan of the DTI at the launch of the mill in Honeydew, Johannesburg. "It will introduce new technology to bring new players into the sector."

Some 30% of high-yield, under-utilised land is located in sub-Saharan Africa. "Various challenges – such as infrastructure – prevent role-players from utilising this land. Africa imports about 28% of its maize," added Strachan.

Easy to use

Designed by the Bühler Group, the two-ton per hour Isigayo Compact Mill comes pre-assembled in two containers. It can be installed quickly and easily, requires minimal training to operate, and has a low start-up cost. It is targeted at small and medium millers as well as commercial maize farmers, small farming communities, entrepreneurs, governments and non-government organisations.

The chief executive officer of the Bühler Group, Calvin Grieder, believes that the compact mill will revolutionise the country's milling sector. He described the Isigayo mill as affordable and easy to transport, adding that it would create employment and improve nutrition.

The idea of a compact maize mill started with the "Innovation for a Better World" award that Bühler received in 2010. Their "container mill concept" innovation was initiated for the agricultural sector, providing affordable and improved nutrition to the people. With the Isigayo project, Bühler decided to enter the small-scale milling segment. The unique and cost-effective processing is ideal for villages in rural and subsistence farming areas.

A clear focus

Having a standard plant pre-assembled in a container posed a technical as well as a marketing challenge when it came to addressing the needs of new target groups. For this reason an external market study was conducted through interviews with farmers, small millers and entrepreneurs, and the feedback revealed that a low start-up cost and quick return on investment were critical success factors for new millers. Target costing therefore became a clear focus during the further development of the project.

With the launch of the Isigayo mill, Bühler have found a local growth opportunity leading to an extension of core competences. Further developments are being considered to multiply the Isigayo approach to other raw materials such as wheat.

The Isigayo mill can lead to a 30% saving in costs as harvesting, production and consumption can all be concentrated in one place, thereby cutting out the middleman. This gives rural milling a competitive edge over industrial mills located in bigger centres.

For more information
visit www.buhlergroup.com
or email grain-logistics@buhlergroup.com

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For more information, visit us at www.buhlergroup.com/isigayo

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