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PULA IMVULA

GROWING FOOD • PEOPLE • PROSPERITY

PGP MAGAZINE FOR DEVELOPING FARMERS

PGP
PHAHAMA GRAIN PHAKAMA

PANNAR®
Together we farm for your future™

PULA IMVULA

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Cover photo: Ertjies Jacobs

Top tips FOR FARMERS

The Phahama Grain Phakama (PGP) Farmer Development team shares some valuable information for the month of April. April is an important month in the seasonal cycle of summer crops in South Africa, as it is harvesting time. Unlike during the planting season, farmers hope for cooler temperatures and drier conditions.

Bringing in the harvest

Remember to confirm the availability of your contractor if you use one for harvesting. This important tip comes from Du Toit van der Westhuizen, regional development manager in North West. He reminds farmers about the importance of maintaining harvesters. 'It is also important to transport and store equipment and machinery properly.'

Du Toit and Jerry Mthombothi, regional manager at PGP's Mbombela office, urge farmers to ensure that they still have a market for their crops as this is usually organised before planting. 'Farmers will not get good prices if they don't organise a market for their produce in time or before they planted their crop,' says Jerry.

Keep your eyes open

Even if you are ready to harvest, keeping your eyes open for pests and diseases is still important. Scouting for diseases and pests should be done continually, even during the month of April. 'If the lands are wet, it allows pests and diseases to infest the crops,' advises Jerry.

He also advises farmers in the Highveld regions who did not plant Bt maize to spray with insecticides to prevent or control fall armyworm. 'If the time allows it, farmers can continue spraying both weed and pest control because of the high rainfall that has been received during the past few weeks.'

Don't forget about your livestock

'April is the time to plan the winter feed,' says Eric Wiggill, regional development manager at PGP's Eastern Cape office. 'Buy bales as soon as possible if needed, as prices will spike in the winter. As grass starts to lose its nutritional value, you should also buy animal licks.'

Also prepare for ewes lambing in the autumn. 'Remember to inject ewes 30 days before lambing with Multivax-P Plus, as this will give the lambs immunity when they are born.' This product may also be used in pregnant ewes as an aid in the control of lamb dysentery, pulpy kidney, tetanus and pasteurellosis in the lambs – provided that the lambs receive sufficient immune colostrum during the first one to two days of their lives. ■

COMPILED BY LOUISE KUNZ, ASSISTANT EDITOR: PULA

From the PGP desk

PHAHAMA GRAIN PHAKAMA

THROUGH THE FARMER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME, THE PHAHAMA GRAIN PHAKAMA (PGP) TEAM TRIES TO SERVICE FARMERS AT ALL DIFFERENT LEVELS – FROM THE SMALL 1 HA FARMERS UP TO THE LARGE COMMERCIAL FARMERS. THE STARTING PLACE FOR CONTACT WITH FARMERS IS THROUGH STUDY GROUPS.

Unfortunately, the study group service stopped during the Covid-19 pandemic, when group meetings were not permitted, which was a great pity. The PGP team is making a serious effort to revive the study groups again.

COMBINED STUDY GROUPS

As a result of the reduced service, many farmers became inactive and the team lost contact with them. There was also a very large number of study groups, and the team was unable to reach them all. In order to re-establish contact, the decision has been made to combine many of the study groups. The following tables will indicate which study group you can join.

PGP regional office: Dundee

Serviced by: Graeme Engelbrecht and Phumzile Ngcobo

Number of groups	Province	District municipality	Local municipality
1	KwaZulu-Natal	Amajuba	Dannhauser
1	KwaZulu-Natal	Amajuba	Newcastle
2	Mpumalanga	Gert Sibande	Dr Pixley Ka Isaka Seme
5	Mpumalanga	Gert Sibande	Mkhondo
1	KwaZulu-Natal	uMzinyathi	Nquthu
2	KwaZulu-Natal	uThukela	Inkosi Langalibalele
4	KwaZulu-Natal	uThukela	Okhahlamba
2	KwaZulu-Natal	Zululand	AbaQulusi
1	KwaZulu-Natal	Zululand	eDumbe

Area: Maclear

Serviced by: Johan Nel

Number of groups	Province	District municipality	Local municipality
8	Eastern Cape	Joe Gqabi DM	Elundini LM

PGP regional office: Free State

Serviced by: Johan Kriel

District municipality	Local municipality
Fezile Dabi	Ngwathe
Lejweleputswa	Matjhabeng
Thabo Mofutsanyane	Dihlabeng
Thabo Mofutsanyane	Maluti-a-Phofung
Thabo Mofutsanyane	Mantsopa
Thabo Mofutsanyane	Setsoto

PGP regional office: Lichtenburg

Province: North West

Serviced by: Du Toit van der Westhuizen

District municipality	Local municipality
Bojanala Platinum	Madibeng
Dr Kenneth Kaunda	JB Marks
Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati	Kagisano-Molopo
Ngaka Modiri Molema	Ditsobotla
Ngaka Modiri Molema	Mahikeng
Ngaka Modiri Molema	Tswaing

Area: Mthatha

Province: Eastern Cape

New mentors will be servicing these groups

1	Amathole DM	Mbhashe LM
12	OR Tambo DM	KSD LM
9	OR Tambo DM	Mhlontlo LM
4	OR Tambo DM	Nyandeni LM

PGP regional office: Kokstad			
Serviced by: Eric Wiggill and Lunga Mahlonyane			
Number of groups	**Province**	**District municipality**	**Local municipality**
1	Eastern Cape	Alfred Nzo	Matatiele
1	Eastern Cape	Alfred Nzo	Mbizana
1	Eastern Cape	Alfred Nzo	Ntabankulu
6	Eastern Cape	Alfred Nzo	Umzimvubu
5	Eastern Cape	Alfred Nzo	Winnie Madikizela-Mandela
1	KwaZulu-Natal	Harry Gwala	Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma
2	KwaZulu-Natal	Harry Gwala	Ubuhlebezwe
1	Eastern Cape	OR Tambo	Ingquza Hill
1	Eastern Cape	OR Tambo	Mhlontlo

At a meeting of the Emahlatini Study Group, a very secluded area, deep within the Mondi Forests of Piet Retief. Phumzile Ngcobo, assistant regional manager at PGP's Dundee office, visited the farmers' homesteads to check on their crops.

Area: Piet Retief			
Province: Mpumalanga			
Serviced by: Timon Filter			
Number of groups	**Province**	**District municipality**	**Local municipality**
1	Mpumalanga	Gert Sibande	Chief Albert Luthuli LM
1	Mpumalanga	Gert Sibande DM	Mkhondo LM
2	Mpumalanga	Gert Sibande DM	Msukaligwa LM
1	Mpumalanga	Nkangala DM	Steve Tshwete LM

Mentor Phumza Mtukushe delivered chemicals to the Khanyayo Study Group and discussed the importance of weed control with the farmers. She also visited a few of the fields to see how the farmers' crops were doing.

Provinces: Mpumalanga/Limpopo			
Serviced by: Jerry Mthombothi and Agnes Mndawe			
Number of groups	**Province**	**District municipality**	**Local municipality**
7	Mpumalanga	Gert Sibande	Chief Albert Luthuli
1	Mpumalanga	Nkangala	Emakhazeni
1	Mpumalanga	Ehlanzeni	City of Mbombela
1	Mpumalanga	Ehlanzeni	Nkomazi
1	Mpumalanga	Ehlanzeni	Thaba Chweu
8	Limpopo	Sekhukhune	Elias Motsoaledi

Contact the coordinators if you would like to participate in study group meetings. Contact details are on page 2. The PGP team is looking forward to more face-to-face contact with you.

Please remember to pay your annual R50 for study group membership.

A group of farmers from the Tlaakgameng Study Group in North West during the meeting in September 2024.

COMPILED BY JANE MCPHERSON, PGP ADVISOR

Mitigate the impact of Goss's wilt

GOSS'S WILT IS AN EMERGING CHALLENGE FOR SOUTH AFRICAN MAIZE FARMERS, CAUSED BY THE BACTERIUM *CLAVIBACTER MICHIGANENSIS* SUBSP. *NEBRASKENSIS*. IT PRIMARILY AFFECTS MAIZE AND CERTAIN GRASSES, INCLUDING SORGHUM, FOXTAIL SPECIES AND RELATED CROPS. IT IS NOT KNOWN TO INFECT VEGETABLES, AS ITS HOST RANGE IS SPECIFIC TO CEREAL AND GRASS SPECIES.

This plant pathogen leads to severe leaf blighting, systemic infection and stunting, ultimately reducing crop yields. The disease spreads through infected crop residue, wind-driven rain, irrigation and contaminated equipment, entering plants through wounds from hail, pests or mechanical damage.

The 2023/2024 growing season showed an increase in reports of unusual symptoms in maize fields, prompting scientific investigations. Given its potential impact on the yield and trade, the Department of Agriculture (DoA) convened a Disease Steering Committee (SteerCo) to assess and develop strategies for containment and management.

THE ROLE OF THE STEERCO

The Disease Steering Committee (SteerCo), led by experts from the DoA, Grain SA, SANSOR, seed companies and the research community, was established to assess and manage Goss's wilt in South Africa. Key outcomes include:

- Confirming the presence of Goss's wilt through official sampling.
- Conducting a pest risk analysis (PRA) to limit the importation of infected seed and plant material.
- Reporting the outbreak to the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) for compliance with fair trade regulations.
- Planning a delimiting survey in the 2024/2025 season to determine the disease's prevalence and distribution.

A non-infected stalk.

> Crops infected with Goss's wilt used for grain or feed do not directly threaten human or animal health, as the pathogen only affects plants.

MORE ABOUT THE DISEASE

This article explores the key outcomes of the SteerCo discussions, the risks associated with Goss's wilt and management practices that farmers can implement to mitigate its effects.

Symptoms

Symptoms include irregular, water-soaked lesions on leaves that turn yellow, tan, or brown with dark borders. It can also cause malformed ears and tassels. Cutting the stalk reveals internal brown or reddish streaks in the vascular tissue, and bacterial slimy and smelly exudate may ooze from the cut, especially under pressure.

The disease thrives in hot, humid conditions and spreads through plant stress or physical damage. A stem that is not infected appears healthy, firm, and free of discoloration, lesions, or abnormal growths. Wilting symptoms may result from drought or other causes. Therefore, producers are encouraged to submit suspected samples for testing to Grain SA.

How it spreads

The pathogen spreads through planting infected seeds (although at a minuscule level of 0,05%), crop residues, soil and secondary host plants. Wind-driven rain, irrigation and contaminated equipment further facilitate transmission. It enters plants through wounds caused by hail, pests or mechanical damage. Although seeds have a low probability of transmission, they can still introduce the disease into new areas.

The 2023/2024 summer crop season was exceptionally hot and dry, leading farmers to report unknown symptoms in their maize fields. Samples submitted to the ARC-Grain Crops, FABI (UP) and Stellenbosch University confirmed that Goss's wilt was present in South Africa, with official samples testing positive.

- About 14 samples were submitted, of which only four tested positive using symptom observation, PCR molecular analyses and whole genome sequencing of the disease.
- Negative tested samples were affected by severe heat and drought, causing sunscald.

The disease has been isolated in four provinces: The Free State, North-West, Mpumalanga and Limpopo.

Examples showing the presence of Goss's wilt.
Photos: Grain SA

Infected crops

Crops infected with Goss's wilt used for grain or feed do not directly threaten human or animal health, as the pathogen only affects plants. It is important to note that grain is not a pathway for transmission. While seeds play a role in disease transmission because they propagate plants, grain is harvested for consumption and cannot function as seed, making it irrelevant as a transmission pathway.

Concerns

The presence of Goss's wilt has raised concerns among farming communities and trading partners. Botswana and Namibia have imposed trade restrictions on South African maize. This prompted the DoA to draft an official response, which, by using the scientific understanding of the disease in its defence, could get Botswana and Namibia to lift the ban within a week. Additionally, a scientific paper is being prepared to enhance awareness and management strategies locally.

MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Since prevention is crucial, ARC-Grain Crops is developing a Goss's wilt management strategy. Recommended practices include:

- **Prevention or avoidance**: Clean equipment thoroughly and harvest infected fields last to minimise spread.
- **Residue and host reduction**: Practise crop rotation with non-hosts such as soybeans and use deep tillage to reduce infected residue.
- **Resistant hybrids**: Opt for maize hybrids that are resistant to Goss's wilt (possible resistance index developed in South Africa).
- **Chemical control**: No effective chemical treatments are currently available.
- **Manage hosts**: Manage grass weeds, as they may be alternative hosts.

Farmers noticing unfamiliar symptoms should contact Grain SA to connect with diagnostic clinics. These clinics can provide accurate disease identification and further guidance on management practices.

CONCLUSION

By following these strategies and staying informed through SteerCo initiatives, South African maize farmers can mitigate the impact of Goss's wilt and ensure sustainable farming practices for the future.

Contact Dr Godfrey Kgatle (Grain SA research coordinator) on 079 489 5966 or *godfrey@grainsa.co.za* for more information.

DR GODFREY KGATLE, GRAIN SA RESEARCH COORDINATOR

On-farm biosecurity:

Key guidelines every farmer should know

ON-FARM BIOSECURITY IS THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENCE AGAINST PESTS, DISEASES AND WEEDS THAT CAN HARM YOUR CROPS AND LIVELIHOOD. BY TAKING PROACTIVE STEPS, YOU CAN PREVENT COSTLY OUTBREAKS, PROTECT YOUR FARM'S PRODUCTIVITY AND SAFEGUARD THE WIDER AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY.

The recent detection of Goss's wilt in South Africa (see article on page 6) emphasises the need to ensure proper biosecurity protocols are in place to prevent the spreading of diseases, pests and weeds. Implementing measures such as cleaning equipment, using certified disease-free seeds and monitoring crops for early symptoms can help contain potential threats.

UNDERSTAND HOW DISEASES SPREAD

Diseases can spread through contaminated equipment, vehicles, people or infected plants. Use **Figure 1** to understand and mitigate these risks.

6 KEY PRACTICES TO PROTECT YOUR FARM

1. Monitor your crops

- Regularly inspect your crops for pests and record your observations.
- Familiarise yourself with serious exotic diseases and pests, as well as their symptoms.
- Keep detailed written and photographic records of any unusual findings.

2. Ensure an accurate diagnosis – test your crops

If you suspect a new or a resurgence of an existing disease, pest or weed, report it immediately to the Grain SA Research Team and/or the Diagnostic Clinic at FABI (see contact details at the end of the article). The clinic is available to assist with disease identification. (See article on pages 4 and 5 in the February issue.)

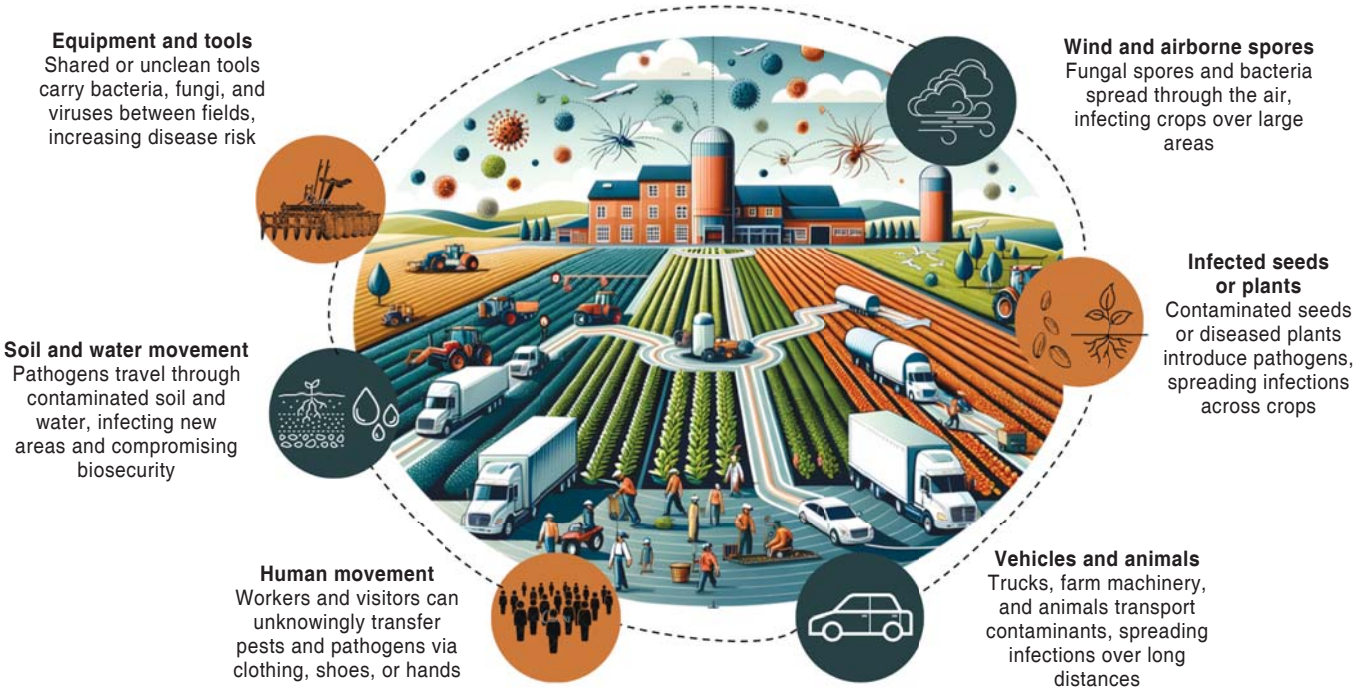
The following steps can be taken to contain the infection whilst waiting for identification:

- Mark the affected area and limit access.
- Avoid touching, moving or transporting infected plant material, except for sample testing.
- Wash your hands, clothing and footwear after contact.
- Restrict the movement of people, livestock and equipment nearby.
- Restrict operations in the area while waiting for identification. If operations cannot be restricted, then ensure that all machinery and personal items are cleaned/decontaminated appropriately after entering the affected area.

3. Manage people's movement

- Visitors and workers can unintentionally spread pests. Use biosecurity signs to direct visitors to check in, record their visits and ensure that they have clean footwear and clothing.
- Pay special attention to contractors, utility providers and international visitors. Train your workers on biosecurity protocols.

1 ***How diseases spread on the farm.***



MADE POSSIBLE BY THE MAIZE TRUST

A wash station for vehicles and machinery can reduce the spread of diseases.

4. Reduce risks from vehicles and equipment

Direct visitors should park in a designated area that can be monitored for diseases, pests and weeds. Ensure all machinery and vehicles entering production areas are clean.

Here are some more helpful tips:

- **Designate a parking area**: Direct all visitors to park in a monitored area away from production zones. Input suppliers and technicians visiting the farm should preferably utilise on-farm vehicles rather than their own to prevent contamination across other farms.
- **Clean before entry**: Ensure all vehicles and equipment are free of soil, plant material and debris before entering your farm.
- **Set up a wash-down facility**: Install a wash station to clean vehicles and machinery. Use high-pressure water to remove debris and organic matter.
- **Disinfect effectively**: After cleaning, apply disinfectants like bleach solutions (1:10 dilution) or commercial farm disinfectants to kill pathogens. Focus on tyres, undercarriages and tools.
- **Regular maintenance**: Clean and disinfect equipment after each use, especially when moving between fields or farms.

5. Manage grain carefully

- Source seeds from reputable suppliers and document their origin.
- Regularly monitor stored grain, clean up spills and aerate storage areas to maintain cool conditions that deter diseases and pests.

6. Manage risks posed by livestock and feed

Ensure that purchased fodder or grain is free of diseases and weed seeds.

By following these guidelines, you can take proactive steps to protect your farm from pests and diseases, ensuring a healthy and productive operation.

Contact the **Grain SA Research Team** to get in touch with the research community for advice or diagnostic services:

- Mike Ellis (072 287 7496/*mike@grainsa.co.za*)
- Dr Godfrey Kgatle (079 489 5966/*godfrey@grainsa.co.za*)
- Dr Lavinia Kisten (083 273 0709/*lavinia@grainsa.co.za*)
- Pfano Musetsho (065 887 7946/*pfano@grainsa.co.za*)

Alternatively, you can contact the **Diagnostic Clinic** at FABI on (012) 420 3939 or *diagnostic.clinic@fabi.up.ac.za*.

DR LAVINIA KISTEN, RESEARCH COORDINATOR AT GRAIN SA

3 reasons to visit NAMPO

Every year during May, Grain SA hosts NAMPO, the biggest agricultural trade exhibition in Africa. Although there are huge tractors and very expensive equipment on display, the suppliers also cater for smaller farmers, so don't miss this annual event.

Here are three good reasons to visit NAMPO Park near Bothaville in the Free State from 13 to 16 May:

1. **Great networking opportunities**: Connect with other farmers, input suppliers, industry experts and agricultural businesses from across South Africa. The PGP Farmer Development team will also be at the event, which means you can come and meet the team and discuss your farming challenges and joys.
2. **Cutting-edge agricultural technology on display**: It's a one-stop shop for farmers to view the latest farm machinery, agricultural equipment and input products from various suppliers – with live demonstrations of planting, harvesting, and tilling techniques.
3. **See a wide-ranging livestock exhibition**: Explore a wide range of cattle, sheep, goat, pigs and horse breeds, including daily livestock parades and pedigree displays.

Wear comfortable shoes and a hat and enjoy the NAMPO experience!

All farmers must pay the minimum wage

THE NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE WAS IMPLEMENTED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 2019. DURING THIS PERIOD, A MASSIVE INCREASE WAS IMPLEMENTED ON TOP OF THE SECTORAL DETERMINATION FOR THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR.

The question is often raised whether South African farms can effectively accommodate a minimum wage within the current production and economic climate. The answer to this question is always that the minimum wage is a way to manage a complex employee/employer relationship in such a way that it benefits both parties. It is up to the employer to ensure that the performance received in exchange for the salary imposed is up to the standards of efficiency that he requires.

ANNUAL INCREASE

When the first sectoral determination was implemented in 2012, an hourly salary of R7,71 was promulgated. Since then, there has been a significant increase every year.

This year is no different, and from **1 March 2025**, all employers in South Africa (including agricultural business units) had to increase their salaries to at least **R28,79** per hour worked. Even though the 2025 increase is a modest **4,38%** on the previous wage of **R27,58**, labour specialists are already receiving questions on how to keep agricultural businesses sustainable within the sphere of rising staff costs.

It is very important to note that the *National Minimum Wage Act* applies to all employees in all sectors, with no distinction between small, medium and/or large enterprises.

- Therefore the practical application of this clause means that, irrespective of whether you have one or 50 staff members, you must comply with the minimum requirements stipulated.
- This *National Minimum Wage Act* covers all employees on your farm – farm workers and domestic workers.

TAKE NOTE

The purpose of this article is to communicate the change to the wage, but it would be irresponsible not to focus on the numerous other acts that are influenced by the *National Minimum Wage Act*.

In terms of enforcing non-compliance with the Act, the CCMA is now empowered to hear cases and make determinations on the underpayment and/or any non-compliance to any section of the Act. The CCMA can order payment and impose fines.

- The new Employment Equity Regulations also state that in order to receive a compliance certificate, employers must comply with the *National Minimum Wage Act*. Therefore it is clear that employers must ensure that they are in compliance with the hourly wage set by the Act.

Please remember that a national minimum wage assists in addressing numerous socio-economic pressures that workers face. However, it should be part of a system that is specifically developed for a farm to ensure that all workers are effective contributors to a sustainable business.

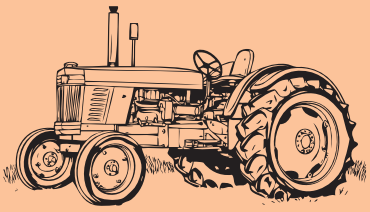
CONTACT US

The Excelsis Group, who are labour specialists, recognises the importance of sustainability and the role that farmers and their workers play in ensuring food security. They are therefore willing to assist anyone with questions on the above-mentioned systems of efficiency. Contact the author on 082 443 0296 or send an e-mail to *dirk@nvbd.co.za*. ■

DIRK COETZEE,
LABOUR RELATIONS SPECIALIST

MAINTENANCE

EQUIPMENT: When to let it go



With good maintenance, a farmer can increase the lifespan of his/her tractors and other farming equipment. However, if you have not done regular maintenance and you have some broken and worn equipment lying around, it may be time to let it go. Here are some key considerations for when it is time to relinquish it.

1 **Age and condition:** If the repair expenses exceed the machine's value or parts become increasingly difficult to locate, it may be time to consider replacing it.

2 **A decrease in performance:** If a machine's performance has significantly decreased, affecting its output and efficiency, it may hamper your overall farming operations. It may be time to upgrade to a newer model which could enhance productivity.

3 **Safety concerns:** If a machine presents safety risks due to outdated safety features or frequent breakdowns, it's essential to prioritise the safety of your employees and yourself. ■

Source: *https://www.nwkarena.co.za/2023/11/16/its-crucial-to-maintain-farm-equipment/*

COMPILED BY LOUISE KUNZ, ASSISTANT EDITOR, PULA

Keep PAPERWORK up to date

MOST FARMERS ENJOY THE PRACTICAL SIDE OF FARMING – TO BE IN THE FIELDS, TO WORK WITH THEIR HANDS, TO HERD CATTLE AND TO SEE HOW NATURAL PROCESSES ARE TURNED INTO MARKETABLE PRODUCTS. THIS IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT IS THE HEART OF A FARMING BUSINESS, BUT ANOTHER CRITICAL PART OF A FARMER'S RESPONSIBILITY IS TO ENSURE ENDURING SUCCESS – PROPER KEEPING OF THE RIGHT RECORDS.

'I do not like paperwork.' 'I'll leave it to my accountant.' 'I cannot work with a computer.' 'Paperwork is for people who like working in an office.' These are some of the excuses farmers tend to use when asked why their records are not up to date and organised.

WHY RECORD-KEEPING IS IMPORTANT

Running a farming operation takes planning and keeping good records is the golden thread that links the history of the farm (the realities) with the planned future. If you do not know exactly what the current reality of the farm is, how can you plan for the future and how will you know if you reach your goals?

As a farmer, you are also a manager who must make decisions on a daily basis. Good records serve as a basis for making good scientific decisions based on actual facts. Good records force a farmer to think about numbers and measurable quantities. This usually improves his/her judgement concerning physical and financial concepts. It helps one to approach a matter more objectively.

Most importantly, keeping good records ensures that the farming business adheres to the rule of law regarding annual submissions – for example, tax returns and required document submissions when applying for credit. Many farmers are not eligible for loans because of a lack of records.

TYPES OF RECORDS

So, if record-keeping is the golden thread, what type of records must farmers keep? The nature and scope of a comprehensive farm record-keeping system will depend on the nature and size of the farm business. However, the following types of records should be kept:

Financial records

These include:

- A complete list of assets and liabilities (inventory).
- Recording the income and expenses (remember to keep the source documents as well).
- Preparation of financial statements and management statements.
- Analysis and interpretation of the farm's results.
- The planning or replanning of the farm for the next one to three years.

Mechanisation records

Machinery statements contain all the information about machinery. Information on individual items, stating the model, age, book value, repairs, service records, hours worked and insurance, should be recorded.

Field records

These records are needed for market planning and largely involve market information in the form of historical product prices, quantities, dates, agents, etc.

Labour records

Labour statements are used to record all matters about labourers. These include details such as service contracts, wages received, rations, medical costs and workers' compensation. The number of labourers, loans, debts, leave and absences should also be recorded.

General records

Rainfall, map of the farm and other records regarding the farm, such as tax returns, permit applications, vehicle licences, membership fees, field maps, etc.

Livestock records

These contain information about the various stock-farming enterprises in the farm business. Feed, remedies, dosing and marketing costs for a specific herd or flock are recorded. For example, individual records of milk production, calving records, wool production, weaning mass and weight gains should be kept.

Livestock tables indicate the opening and closing numbers of livestock, as well as their value, by classifying livestock according to age and gender – for example, bulls, cows, heifers over two years and heifers one to two years.

USE THESE TOOLS

- Using a computer along with the right software can make it very easy to keep farm records and compile financial statements.
- You can even use your cellphone with appropriate applications (apps), notes and photos that can capture data.

However, if you do not have a computer or are not comfortable using technology, handwritten records are just as good and can serve the same purposes.

To plan for success, use good records as a foundation for the plan. This will help you make better-informed decisions without guessing. Nobody knows your farm and business better than you. Keeping the right records can be very beneficial. It can help you to get access to funding, ensure your business is adhering to law and improve your management skills, as you will be making better decisions that lead to higher chances of success. ■

YOLANDI MARAIS, AGRICULTURAL ADVISOR AT DUNAMUS

Maximise your sunflower yield

ONE OF THE WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR YIELD AND INCOME IS TO HARVEST YOUR SUNFLOWERS AT THE RIGHT TIME AND HANDLE THEM AS BEST AS POSSIBLE. ALSO PREVENT ANY MOISTURE DAMAGE AND SEED DEGRADING TAKING PLACE BEFORE AND AFTER COMBINING.

The 2024 sunflower production season produced 635 750 tons of delivered seed from 529 000 hectares, which gives farmers a national average of 1,2 t/ha. In the month of February (3/02/25 to 26/02/25), the sunflower contracts trading on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) had an average of R9 273,29 for March 2025, R9 129,41 for May 2025 and R9 311,82 for July 2025.

The current futures prices vary from a low of R8 800 to a high of R11 030 from March to July 2025. Look at your sales strategy to fix prices to your best advantage. This implies a gross per hectare value of R11 898 at the national production level. Then you must hope that your yields this season outperform the national average, so that you will realise a higher net margin or profit on your crop.

HARVESTING AT THE OPTIMUM TIME

In a normal year, short season hybrids will have heads that become yellow at about 105 days after planting and brown at about 120 days after planting. During this two-week period, you can assess your possible final yield per hectare. It is also a good time to arrange with the contractor for harvesting, or be sure to have your own equipment fully prepared to take off the crop at the optimum moisture content.

On-farm storage and drying facilities (if you have this available on the farm) can also be prepared. The best option for smaller farmers is to harvest and deliver the crop immediately to the co-op or private silos. This will reduce or eliminate the risks associated with drying your own crop or temporary storage on a shed floor.

Harvesting sunflowers with a high moisture content normally results in higher yields, less bird damage and less head-dropping or seed-shattering.

Farmers should invest in a moisture meter to make accurate readings in the field. Sunflowers can be combined at 20% and dried to 10%, but this is a very high starting point. Some silos will only accept them at between 12,5% to 13,5% moisture from the lands. Seed moisture levels of 12,5% or lower are more optimum to start harvesting. The losses resulting from the combining process can be very high if you wait for the seed moister to be at 10%.

Harvesting sunflowers with a high moisture content normally results in higher yields, less bird damage and less head-dropping or seed-shattering.

Make sure that you are aware of the highest acceptable moisture content percentage for deliveries directly from the land to the co-op silos, so that a very valuable load will not be turned away. Remember that sunflowers need to be at about 9,5% for storage up to six months, and must be continuously aerated or moved from silo to silo to prevent any fungus build-up. Sunflowers over 12,5% can have a fungus build-up within 48 hours of being dumped into a pile and can start a fire spontaneously.

COMBINE SETTINGS

- Make sure that your combine operator and machine can lower the drum speed to between 300 and 500 revs per minute (rpm) to avoid seed shattering.
- The blower must also be set to blow out the maximum stalk, leaf pieces, florets, empty seed kernels and fine hairs from the combine sample, without removing the smaller seeds.
- It is this combination of foreign material in the harvested seed sample that leads to moisture retention and spontaneous combustion, even within the short period of 'just over a weekend' storage on a shed floor.
- It is advisable for the farmer to constantly monitor seed losses during combining.

SAMPLE CLEANING

Seed sample cleaning is the secret to any temporary storage if your local silo is not able to take a load immediately.

- If you have your own handling facilities, including driers and aerated storage silos, it is crucial to be able to totally clean the seed sample before drying or storage.
- There are very effective, reasonably priced seed cleaners on the market that can be purchased and used by smaller sunflower farmers.
- They must be used immediately after the seed from the land is poured into an intake pit, prior to being dried or stored.
- Movable cleaning machines attached to a floor auger can also process and clean a batch of seed temporarily dumped on a level concrete floor.

DRYING CLEANED SEED

High-oil sunflower seed is made up of about 35% to 42% oil and 18% to 20% protein. The oils contain 55% to 75% linoleic and 15% to 25% oleic acids, which can be highly volatile. For farmers who have drying machines, it is essential to monitor the flow rate and temperature settings more carefully than when drying maize or wheat seed.

At even 2°C higher than the optimum, you will start to smell the oil in the air around the drier. This is the first warning that your temperature is too high or that the flow rate is too low in a continuous flow system.

Batch driers must be closely monitored for the temperature and moisture content to avoid spoiling a whole batch, which can be a very expensive mistake.

The watchword must be constant supervision of the drying process and monitoring the seed condition at short periods. One does not want to remove any valuable oil or moisture beyond 9,5%, as this will lower the final mass and value of the delivered seed when assessed at the silos.

IN SUMMARY

After growing a good crop of sunflowers, plan carefully for harvesting at the optimum seed head stage and know what important steps to take for handling or storing your crop. Always inspect your lands to ensure that you maximise the yield of your crop of sunflowers. ■

RICHARD MCPHERSON, PULA CONTRIBUTOR

WORDS OF WISDOM

We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.

~ SOURCE UNKNOWN

The importance of maize for poultry

BROILER FARMING IS A PROFITABLE VENTURE FOR MANY UPCOMING FARMERS, BUT UNDERSTANDING FEED CONSUMPTION IS CRUCIAL FOR COST MANAGEMENT AND PRODUCTIVITY. MAIZE (CORN) IS A PRIMARY INGREDIENT IN BROILER FEED, PROVIDING ESSENTIAL ENERGY FOR GROWTH.

In South Africa, an estimated 43% of all maize allocated to animal feed is consumed by broilers. According to a graph released by Grain SA, broilers have consumed 1 790 650 tons of maize in the 2024/2025 year to date.

According to Waldo Macdonald, key accounts manager at Nutri Feeds, maize usually makes up 50% to 70% of a typical poultry diet.

The exact amount of maize consumed depends on the feed formulation, but on average, a broiler eats 3,6 kg to 4,5 kg of its total feed in six weeks (before being slaughtered). If maize accounts for 60% of the diet, each broiler consumes about 2,7 kg of maize during its lifetime.

The food conversion ratio (FCR) is used to determine how well feed is performing. It is calculated using the following formula: FCR = feed intake per weight. It shows how much feed (kg) a chick needs to eat to gain 1 kg of its body mass. The lower the FCR, the less feed the chick consumes to gain 1 kg of weight, meaning the feed is more efficient.

According to Waldo, a broiler can consume anything from 1,3 kg (in controlled circumstances) to 1,8 kg of feed to gain 1 kg in weight. 'In the informal market, where conditions are less controlled and lower-density (cheaper) feeds are used, the figure will typically be significantly higher. Therefore I would not necessarily attach a fixed number to it, as it depends on the management of the chicks and the type of feed used,' he explains.

FACTORS AFFECTING MAIZE CONSUMPTION

Various factors influence how much maize broilers consume:

- **Feed formulation:** The percentage of maize in the diet varies based on the protein and energy needs.
- **Growth rate and breed:** Fast-growing breeds consume more feed.
- **Environmental conditions:** Temperature and housing conditions impact feed efficiency.
- **Feed quality and availability:** Poor-quality maize or feed shortages can reduce the intake and cause slow growth.

A technical advisor at one of the country's largest chick farmers told *Pula Imvula* that, when he joined the operations 25 years ago, broilers were slaughtered at 46 days. Today, thanks to advancements in feeding, the average slaughter age has been reduced to 33 days.

Typical diet

The typical diet for a broiler will look like this:

- **Hatching up to day 9:** Pre-starter – contains more soy (protein) and is in the form of crumbs to help build the carcass.
- **Day 10 to 17:** Starter – supports early growth and development.
- **Day 18 to 27:** Grower – comes in pellet form and contains more maize to promote weight gain.
- **Day 28 to 35:** Finisher – contains, on average, 60% maize and helps to maximise growth before slaughter.
- **Last phase (optional, day 36 onwards):** Post-finisher – some farmers provide this just before slaughter. It does not contain any growth stimulants and helps to ensure meat quality.

Photo: Christo van Deventer

What not to feed broilers

Broilers should never be fed:

- Mouldy or spoiled feed, as it contains mycotoxins leading to poisoning, poor growth or even death.
- Raw beans or unprocessed legumes, as they contain anti-nutritional elements that interfere with digestion.
- Excessive salt, which leads to dehydration and kidney damage.
- Avocado pit and skin, as it contains persin, which is toxic to poultry.
- Caffeine, as it contains theobromine, which can be fatal to chickens.
- Onions and garlic in large quantities, as this can cause anaemia and affect the taste of the meat.
- Green potatoes or tomato leaves, as they contain solanine, which is toxic to broilers.

DID YOU KNOW?

According to those involved in this sector, one of the most popular broiler chicken breeds in the world is Ross (developed in the United Kingdom). It is known for its fast growth, high feed efficiency and excellent meat yield, making it a preferred choice for commercial poultry farming.

How much meat do we eat?

According to the South African Poultry Association (SAPA), this country's chicken meat consumption in 2022 was approximately 2,26 million tons, equating to a per capita consumption of 37,3 kg.

The average broiler yields about 1,5 kg of consumable meat, which means that South Africans consume approximately 4,13 million broilers daily, totalling about 1,51 billion broilers annually.

In a media statement on 20 January this year, this organisation reported that the domestic poultry industry is a R65-billion strategic national asset – the second-largest agricultural sector, while being the largest employer, employing almost 58 000 South Africans across the value chain. The industry has made significant investments to increase its slaughter capacity from 19,5 million to 22,5 million birds per week, although it's currently only slaughtering 21,5 million every week.

KARINA MULLER, PULA CONTRIBUTOR

Following in his father's footsteps

IMAGINE winning a great cash prize just because you want to pay tribute to your farming hero. This is what happened to Musa Sibiya. Musa read about the Grain SA and John Deere competition, 'My Hero', and decided to enter his hardworking son, Mzwakhe Sibiya (23), who is following in his father's footsteps and working passionately with soil near Amersfoort, Mpumalanga.

Musa explains that time has changed young people's behaviour and the respect they show. 'One thing I can say about my son, is that he respects me in a way a father expects from his son. Unlike his peers, he did not seek a job but decided to follow my example and accept me as his teacher to show him how to run an agricultural business.'

During the past five years, Musa taught Mzwakhe that hard labour, long hours and sometimes disappointment would form part of this journey. 'Instead of demanding an education, he embraced these challenges and never complained about the hard work. Last season, he produced 10 tons without my assistance, from preparing the soil to harvesting. To me, that was proof that when I am no longer part of this world, my legacy will continue. I know that Mzwakhe will also pass the baton to my grandchildren.'

This proud dad shared that he has always been his own mechanic. 'I did not realise that Mzwakhe watched me closely while I was repairing my equipment. Because he learned from me, the Department of Agriculture recently appointed him as a tractor mechanic to assist small farmers in rural areas. He has also mastered sheep herd management, which is his great passion. He has learnt that farming is a business, and that is exactly what he is doing! Thank you, Mzwakhe, for your respect and hard work. You make me proud!'

A father and his hero – Musa and Mzwakhe Sibiya.

By nominating the hero who fuels your passion for farming, you can win a cash prize of R2 500. Your story is a tribute to their lasting legacy, and your hero will also win an exciting gift from John Deere. Scan the QR code to fill in the form or visit the website *sagrainmag.co.za*.

SA GRAAN/GRAIN EDITORIAL TEAM

Symptoms of Septoria brown spot are clearly visible on these leaves.

Severely damaged fields showing patches caused by Septoria brown spot disease on the edges of the field.

Septoria brown spot can be devastating

SEPTORIA BROWN SPOT (ALSO KNOWN AS SEPTORIA LEAF SPOT) OCCURS IN ALMOST ALL SOYBEAN PRODUCING AREAS AND IS CURRENTLY A POTENTIAL DISEASE THREAT TO SOYBEAN PRODUCTION IN SOUTH AFRICA. THE DISEASE CAN CAUSE SYMPTOMS ON LEAVES THAT MAY DECREASE THE SOYBEAN YIELD IN SEASONS CONDUCIVE TO THE DISEASE'S DEVELOPMENT.

This common fungal disease in soybeans can can cause yield losses of up to 80%. The disease is caused by a fungus known as *Septoria glycines*, which survives on infected leaves and stem residues that are left in the field after harvesting. The fungus can also survive in or on the seeds. Correct identification of the disease is critical in developing appropriate disease management strategy.

EPIDEMIOLOGY

- Septoria brown spot disease occurs when spores land on wet leaves under persistent humid wet conditions and by favourable temperatures between 15°C and 29°C.
- The spores are disseminated to other plants by either wind or rain or during irrigation.
- The disease will then develop when the conditions are favourable.
- Disease cycle continues from infected plant residues to healthy plants.

SYMPTOMS

It appears as small, irregular, red-brown spots on both sides of the leaves. Individual spots merge to form large blackish-brown irregular blotches. As time progresses, leaves will turn yellow, die eventually and fall prematurely.

Symptoms first appear at the lower leaves and progress to the upper canopy. They first appear as small brown dark spots which eventually grow and merge to form big irregular brown areas on the leaves. These brown areas appear as yellow patches on the sides of the leaves.

DISEASE MANAGEMENT

An infection of Septoria brown spot during pod formation can result in severe yield losses. Therefore, disease management should occur as soon as the disease symptoms are detected to avoid severe damage to the soybean plants.

The disease affects most plants in the legume family – therefore, rotation with non-legumes and deep tillage could minimise infection. In severe incidences, the application of foliar fungicides can reduce the impact of the disease. Although damaged plants may recover after the application of fungicides, severely damaged plants die.

Farmers are encouraged to frequently monitor and scout their fields for diseases. While all soybean cultivars are susceptible to Septoria brown spot, some are more susceptible than others. Therefore, farmers need to choose soybean cultivars that are or show some level of resistance against the disease.

For more information on this topic, contact Moses Ramusi at *moses.ramusi@gauteng.gov.za*. ■

MOSES RAMUSI AND ZUZUMUZI BUTHELEZI, BOTH FROM THE GAUTENG DARD AND DR GODFREY KGATLE, RESEARCH COORDINATOR, GRAIN SA

Corner Post

BY LOUISE KUNZ, ASSISTANT EDITOR

'FOR BUYISIWE, EVERYTHING STARTS WITH A VISION.' THESE WORDS CONCLUDED THE VIDEO ABOUT BUYISIWE STEVEN DHLAMINI (56) AT THE 2024 DAY OF CELEBRATION. HE WAS ONE OF THE FINALISTS FOR THE GRAIN SA SMALLHOLDER FARMER OF THE YEAR CATEGORY.

Although Buyisiwe did not walk away as the winner, he seized this opportunity to increase his agricultural knowledge. He paid careful attention to the videos showing the farming operations of all the other finalists in the various categories. He also chatted with farmers to hear what they do that would help him improve his farming enterprise. This passionate farmer dreams of excellence and always strives to improve from one season to the next.

Buyisiwe's father farmed on a farm near Volksrust. He and his siblings all had to help on the farm from an early age. After leaving school, he stayed on the farm and worked there for five years. He then exchanged the farm life for the bustling city, Johannesburg, where he built and installed petrol tanks at petrol stations for four years.

Then he changed his career and worked as a driver delivering frozen goods. He soon saw a business opportunity and bought his own truck. This delivery operation is still operating in Daggakraal, where he now lives. In this period, he also worked at a scrapyard, where he saw another business opportunity and soon started his own scrapyard, a business he has since given to his son.

At this stage, Buyisiwe's brother started pulling him into his farming enterprise, and soon, Buyisiwe dreamed of farming on his own. He started buying farming equipment and when he returned to farming, he already had his own tractor, disc and planter.

His brother has played a huge part in his growth as a farmer, but it is the assistance and advice from the Farmer Development team that have helped him become a successful farmer. He joined the Job Fund Maize Project of Grain SA in 2018 and made sure he seized the opportunities the programme offered to increase his agricultural knowledge.

Once he started applying the correct agricultural practices, he realised that farming is profitable – and profit meant he could grow his farming operation and plant more hectares. And more hectares mean more work opportunities for the community who are employed by him in season.

BUYISIWE'S STORY

WHAT KEEPS YOU GOING IN TOUGH TIMES?

If there is a bad year and I don't make money, I must keep going because it's my business. I have built this business up from scratch and I own implements, so I must continue. It is also my passion, so I have to keep going.

WHAT IS THE BEST ADVICE YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN?

To rip my fields! You need to have space in your soil for the roots to go wide and deep. The other advice that has improved my yield was about plant population – to not plant too close to each other. If the plants have enough space for nutrients and water, then you have a good chance of realising a good yield.

HOW CAN WE MOTIVATE THE YOUTH TO FARM?

Mentor them, be an example to them and show them that there is joy in farming. Tell them about the challenges and fulfilment of seeing crops grow from a seed.

NAME THREE TOP TIPS FOR FELLOW FARMERS:

- Soil cultivation is extremely important. Learn and apply good agricultural practices.
- When it comes to inputs, buy high-quality seed and follow a fertiliser programme.
- Farming is a lifestyle and not just a job. You have to live farming, not just do it.

FARM FACTS

Farm: Vuka community property
Nearest town: Volksrust
Region: Mpumalanga
Size: Planted 30 ha soybeans (22 ha on communal land, 2 ha on leased land) and 2 ha drybeans
Type of farming operation: Mixed – crops (soybeans and drybeans) and some cattle and chickens.

PGP'S CONTRIBUTION

- Joined Grain SA in 2018
- Pixley ka Seme Study Group

Training courses completed:

- Workshop skills development: Workshop tools
- Nutrition: Different food groups
- Introduction to drybean production

A mentor's view:

Timon Filter, mentor at the Louwsburg regional office, says Buyisiwe is a farmer who is striving for excellence. 'He truly has a mind and a heart for agriculture. His is a success story of profitability in farming.' Timon is very proud of this passionate farmer, who always listens to advice. 'He improves every year and becomes more confident in growing soybeans. He wants his fields to reach their potential and isn't happy when it doesn't happen. He also doesn't let a bad year affect his passion for farming.'

Timon Filter

A programme that is changing lives

BA Project: Farm from your own pocket

OVER MANY YEARS, THE BEYOND ABUNDANCE (BA) PROJECT HAS PROVED TO BE A SUCCESSFUL WAY TO ASSIST FARMERS. IN THIS PROGRAMME, THE FARMER CONTRIBUTES 80% OF THE INPUT COSTS AND DONORS PROVIDE THE BALANCE.

Due to the support of partners of the BA programme – Bayer, Kynoch, Villa and PSP in Kokstad – the PGP team can get very good discounts on the input costs.

'On top of these discounts, we also manage to get some donations from companies from their CSI budgets,' says Jane McPherson, PGP advisor. 'In the past year, the faithful Sasol Agricultural Trust contributed again and the South African Cultivar and Technology Agency (SACTA) contributed for the first time. We hope this will continue. We have also requested assistance from Land Bank to support this project.'

In the past, the number of hectares per farmer has been limited. 'However, we have decided that spending your own money, as the farmer, is essential in the growth towards independence,' says Jane. This is the reason why the programme is going to be opened up to larger farmers. 'The same criteria will remain – the farmer has to pay 80% of the costs into a special account, from which we manage the purchases.'

During a recent board meeting of Grain SA, one of the very successful farmers from Schweizer-Reneke said that borrowing money for production has caused the failure of many farmers in this area. It is relatively easy to get into debt, but recovering from a few bad years is difficult if you have interest-bearing debt.

This farmer mentioned the figure that the 10% of farmers who are still farming grain in that area are all farmers who have managed to use their own money to plant the crop. Using your own money has the added value of risk management, as it is easier to risk someone else's money than to use your own!

After inputs are delivered to the farmers (or to a location as close as possible), the PGP team offers on-farm support to ensure that the farmers use it correctly.

If you want to be a farmer who farms from 'your own pocket', please contact your nearest development coordinator and discuss your plans with him. The contact details are on page 2 of this issue.

The PGP team really hopes that a number of farmers will be interested in expanding their farming operations by using mostly their own money.

AT GRASS ROOTS

During the soybean course in the Dundee service area attendees were shown how to check for compaction by using a steel probe.

The group who attended the introduction to groundnut production were very interested in learning more. They asked questions and even asked the trainer to repeat sections that they did not grasp properly.

The nixtimilisation courses are an eye opener to many who do not realise that maize is not only for animal and human consumption. They were shown how to make baked goods using masa. These two excited ladies proudly show of a pizza they made.

Opportunities to learn more about farming

A total of 63 study group visits took place at the beginning of this year (13 January to 12 February), during which advice was given about weed and pest control. The mentors also checked on the overall crop development of the subsistence farmers.

The area where the Donkerhoek Study Group farms, is booming with agricultural activity. Farmers are planting both soybeans and maize.

Mentor Phumza Mtukushe met with the Ndunge farmers, during which the spraying programme was revised. The farmers had sprayed the weeds properly, but unfortunately, it rained soon afterwards and they will have to respray.

Johan Nel, a mentor in the Maclear region, visited the Katkop Ntaboduli Study Group. It was evident that good weed control had been done in most of the gardens. Johan advised the farmers to spray again where weeds emerge again. The crops were looking good in most of the gardens.

Eastern Cape mentor, Lunga Mhlonyane, visited the Bambanani Study Group, where he did training on pests and diseases. He urged farmers to do spot checks and report unusual spots or patterns on their maize.

For the members of the Emangweni Study Group, these visits are a great motivation to improve as farmers. One of the farmers has replanted her fields at least three times, showing her persistence to get it right.

MENTORS SHOW FARMERS THE RIGHT WAY

REGULAR farm visits by the regional development managers and/or mentors are a valuable part of the PGP Farmer Development Programme. These visits allow mentors to evaluate a farmer's practices and progress directly, identify specific issues on their land and deliver tailored advice where needed.

During January and February, 68 farmers received individualised support from PGP team members. A total of 141 farm visits were done to check post-emergence spraying and crop emergence.

On the farm of the 2024 New Era Commercial Farmer of the Year, Ranko Tsotetsi, maintenance was being done on the equipment, as Ranko was awaiting rain for his crops.

The maize fields on Mooiplaas where Senzeko Mabuza farms looked good when mentor Timon Filter paid the farmer a visit. The soybeans showed good nodulation, but the plants needed some sunshine.

Munyai Mpho received a visit from Du Toit van der Westhuizen, regional development manager in North West. This farmer planted 230 ha. He also prepared 70 ha of land to expand for the next season.

When Free State farmer, Sello Isaac Malakoane, was visited by his mentor, Johan Roux, the maize had been top-dressed and sprayed for insects and weeds. The farmer still had to spray some of his soybean crop.

PROUD TO BE A PART OF YOUR STORY

I wasn't always a farmer. My journey began in finance, but everything changed after a visit to a commercial farm. It ignited my passion for agriculture and in 2017, I started my own farming venture with just two cows. I now manage over 800 hectares dedicated to crops and raising livestock. Our grain production has soared from 250 to over 1,500 tonnes annually by 2023 – a milestone I am incredibly proud of. For those new to farming, my advice is simple: start small and grow gradually. Understanding your soil through careful analysis is crucial and perhaps, most importantly, invest in high-quality seeds. That's why I choose Pannar. Their seeds deliver exceptional yields, even when conditions are less than ideal. With Pannar, I know I'm planting the best foundation for a bountiful harvest.

FARMER: Happy Letsitsa

FARMING ENTITY: Noitgedacht Farm, No 74

AREA: Hennenman District, Free State

CROP:	**PANNAR HYBRID USED:**
Sunflower	PAN 7160CLP *(Sunflower)*

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