

NOVEMBER 2024

PULA IMVULA

GROWING FOOD • PEOPLE • PROSPERITY

PGP MAGAZINE FOR DEVELOPING FARMERS



Editorial team

PHAHAMA GRAIN PHAKAMA: PRETORIA

PO Box 74087
Lynnwood Ridge
0040

086 004 7246
www.grainsa.co.za

Jane McPherson

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

EDITOR AND DISTRIBUTION

Liana StroebeL

084 264 1422 Office: 012 943 8285
liana@grainsa.co.za

PUBLISHING PARTNER

INFOWORKS MEDIA PUBLISHING

Assistant editor – Louise Kunz

louise@infoworks.biz

Team leader – Johan Smit

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

Publishing – Elizma Myburgh,
Joritha Hechter



PGP Farmer Development Programme

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT MANAGERS

Free State

JACQUES ROUX

082 377 9529 jacques.rouxjr11@gmail.com

Mpumalanga

JERRY MTHOMBOTHI (MBOMBELA)

084 604 0549 jerry@grainsa.co.za

PHUMZILE NGCOBO (ERMELO)

060 477 7940 phumzile@grainsa.co.za

Office: 012 943 8289 Lianie Swanepoel (Office assistant)

KwaZulu-Natal

GRAEME ENGELBRECHT

082 650 9315 graeme@grainsa.co.za

Office: 012 943 8287 Nkosinathi Mazibuko

North West

DU TOIT VAN DER WESTHUIZEN

082 877 6749 dutoit@grainsa.co.za

Office: 012 943 8290 Lebo Mogatlanyane

Eastern Cape

ERIC WIGGILL

082 620 0058 eric@grainsa.co.za

Office: 012 943 8277

Luthando Diko (Office assistant: Kokstad)

Cwayita Mpotyi (Office assistant: Mthatha)

Lindie Pretorius (Office assistant: Maclear)

Western Cape

MJ SWART

072 090 7997 mj@grainsa.co.za

Office: 012 943 8285 Hailey Ehrenreich (Office assistant)

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

CONTENTS



04

The four category winners at the Day of Celebration. Read more about the event and the winners on page 4.

GUIDELINES FOR OUTSTANDING SOYBEAN YIELDS

08

UNDERSTAND MARKET TRENDS BEFORE YOU PLANT

12

EFFECTIVE CUTWORM CONTROL BEGINS WITH TIMELY WEED MANAGEMENT

14

KNOW THE DETAIL ON MINIMUM WAGES; REST PERIODS

07

CATTLE EAT LESS WHEN IT IS HOT

16



RAPID RESPONSE TEAM READY FOR ACTION

16

10

17

16

A PROGRAMME THAT IS CHANGING LIVES

18



Top tips FOR FARMERS

A key factor influencing agricultural productivity is the understanding of seasonal patterns and how they affect crop growth. In this editorial piece the team members of the Farmer Development Programme share some tips to keep farmers on track during November.

In the October issue the regional development managers shared the optimal planting dates for various crops. They all agree that adhering to the correct planting date is crucial, but waiting until the first rain of the season falls is just as important in order to have enough moisture for seed germination.

✓ Be prepared for planting season

'Plan before you plant,' says **Jerry Mthombothi**, regional development manager in Mpumalanga.

When it comes to the planting season, farmers must remember that certain things must be ready before the seed goes into the ground. 'One is ripping your arable lands to increase the soil depth by breaking the plough pan. Then you must prepare a fine seed bed by discing the soil thoroughly,' explains Jerry. 'It is also important to plant the correct plant population to avoid competition for water and nutrients among the plants.'

✓ Keeping stray livestock out

Stray livestock is one of the leading threats to smallholder and subsistence crop production. **Phumzile Ngcobo**, assistant regional manager, encourages farmers to do maintenance of fencing infrastructure at this time of the year to protect their crops.

✓ The value of knowledge

Broadening your knowledge is important when it comes to farming because there is always something new to learn. 'Knowledge will help you make the right decision for your farm,' says **Jacques Roux**, regional development manager in the Free State. He also warns farmers to leave "guess work" out of the business. 'Constantly observe. To measure and weigh is to know!'

✓ A last word...

Relationships are important in successful farming. 'Build a healthy relationship with your service suppliers and farm workers. They help build your business,' says Jacques. Phumzile also encourages farmers to attend all study group meetings. 'It is here where you can be kept up to date and refreshed about important management practices.' ■

COMPILED BY LOUISE KUNZ, ASSISTANT EDITOR: PULA

A DAY TO CELEBRATE

and honour agricultural excellence

ONE OF THE MOST VIBRANT EVENTS ON THE GRAIN SA CALENDAR IS THE ANNUAL DAY OF CELEBRATION. THIS YEAR THERE WAS EVEN MORE TO CELEBRATE, AS THE EVENT WAS PRECEDED BY THE FIRST RAIN FOR THE SEASON.

The Day of Celebration aims to honour emerging and new era farmers who are part of the Phahama Grain Phakama (PGP) Farmer Development Programme (FDP) and have excelled in their respective categories. And so, on 18 September, the agricultural community gathered at NAMPO Park near Bothaville to recognise and celebrate the hard work and achievements of those farmers.

SHARING MESSAGES

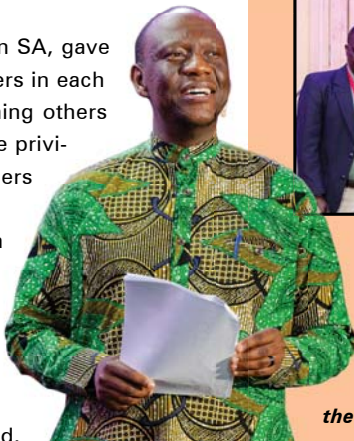
The keynote address was delivered by Annette Steyn, advisor to the Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen, who himself could not be at the event, but congratulated the finalists in a video message. The minister thanked Grain SA for their investment in equipping farmers in South Africa to be sustainable and competitive in the grain value chain. He added that he is excited to work with Grain SA and all the farmers who are part of the organisation to build a sector that is resilient – one that will grow South Africa’s economy and contribute to job creation.

Sponsor representatives spoke about the importance of farmer development and the role each of these organisations play in partnership with Grain SA. A big thank you to all these organisations that contribute to the success of the programme:

- Absa AgriBusiness Centre of Excellence (Dr Langelihle Simela, business development manager)
- Bayer Crop Science Division South Africa (Sandile Khumalo, squad coordinator: Seeds)
- Hollard Insure (Andries Wiese, national business development manager)
- John Deere Financial (Pieter Pienaar, credit sales and marketing manager)
- Kgodiso Development Fund (Diale Tilo, executive director)
- Landbank (Themba Rikhotso, chief executive officer)
- Pannar Seed (Phillip Hollenbach, agricultural development manager)
- Standard Bank – South Africa (Calvin Motsipiri, manager agri-business SE)

Dr Tobias Doyer, chief executive officer of Grain SA, gave the concluding remarks and reminded the winners in each category to take up a mentorship role by teaching others what they have learnt. He added that it is a huge privilege for Grain SA to be involved in seeing farmers grow and produce more year on year.

‘A farmer who grows from a 3 ha to a 6 ha operation, contributes to the local economy. Jobs are created and communities are sustained when farmers do well. We are all in this together and we want to see more people in rural areas included in the grain value chain so that we can build a better South Africa,’ he added.



To celebrate South Africa’s diverse culture, the tables were decorated in bright colours.



Although the minister of agriculture could not attend the function, a special video message was shared.



Jane McPherson (fourth from the left), PGP advisor, handed over a certificate of recognition to all the funding partners of the PGP Farmer Development Programme – the Oil and Protein Development Trust (OPDT), Standard Bank of SA, Kgodiso Development Fund, the Maize Trust and the South African Cultivar and Technology Agency (SACTA).



Jerry Mthombothi, regional development manager at the Mbombela office (left), and Phillip Hollenbach from Pannar Seed (right) with the newest members of the 250 Ton Club: Thami Mtshali, Isaac Molakohane, Luvuyo Mbotho and Jabulani Ngwenya.

Katleho Mogase was the master of ceremonies at the 2024 Day of Celebration.

AND THE WINNERS ARE...

In preparation for the event, the judges travelled to all parts of South Africa to identify finalists in the following categories: Grain SA/ Absa/John Deere Financial New Era Commercial Farmer of the Year, Grain SA Potential Commercial Farmer of the Year, Grain SA/Land Bank Smallholder Farmer of the Year and Grain SA/Absa/John Deere Financial Subsistence Farmer of the Year.

Each category was designed to recognise different scales of farming operations:

- Subsistence farming: For farmers managing 1 to 3 hectares.
- Smallholder farming: For those with 4 to 49 hectares.
- Potential commercial farming: For operations producing 50 to 249 tons.
- New era commercial farming: For those exceeding 250 tons.

These categories ensure that farmers at all production levels are given the opportunity to shine and be acknowledged for their hard work and innovation.

Grain SA/Absa/John Deere Financial New Era Commercial Farmer of the Year

The highlight of the event was the announcement of the Grain SA/Absa/John Deere Financial New Era Commercial Farmer of the Year. This year Petrus Tsetetsi, who farms on Die Bult, in the Thabo Mofutsanyane



The Grain SA team who worked hard to get everything ready for this special event.

District near Kestell in the Free State, walked away with this prestigious award. He won a brand new John Deere 5075E utility tractor, a versatile piece of machinery to help expand his tractor fleet.

Petrus joined Grain SA in 2013 and became part of the mentorship programme in 2016. Johan Kriel and Jacques Roux, both regional managers in the Free State, have played a big part in seeing his farming operation grow.

He plants crops – maize, soybeans and sugar beans in a rotation system – on 206 ha of arable land, and his livestock graze on the other 110 ha. He is also an asparagus farmer and as it is a very labour-intensive operation, with the asparagus having to be harvested daily for about six months, people in the community benefit as they are employed by the cooperative.

One of his dreams is that as a fully-fledged commercial farmer he will be able to provide more jobs in the community and influence people to acknowledge the importance of agriculture.

Grain SA Potential Commercial Farmer of the Year

The 2024 Grain SA Potential Commercial Farmer of the Year is Alfred Gondo, a farmer from the Middelburg region in Mpumalanga, who



Petrus Tsetetsi, the 2024 Grain SA/ Absa/John Deere Financial New Era Commercial Farmer of the Year.



The other New Era Commercial Farmer finalists were Luvuyo Mbutho (top) and Bheki Mabuza (above). With them is Jeremiah Mathebula, Grain SA vice-chairperson.



Zoliwe Nombewu was a Potential Commercial Farmer finalist.



Alfred Gondo is the 2024 Grain SA Potential Commercial Farmer of the Year.



Celebrating with the winner is Johan Roux (mentor), Jeremiah Mathebula, Dr Langelihle Simela from Absa Agri Centre, Jacques Roux (regional development manager for the Eastern Free State), Dr Tobias Doyer (CEO of Grain SA), Derek Mathews (chairperson of Grain SA) and Pieter Pienaar (John Deere Financial).



The other Potential Commercial Farmer finalist, Dieketseng Mahlelele, was unable to attend. Her mother, Cathryn, accepted the certificate on her behalf.

A day to celebrate...

joined the Farmer Development Programme in 2015 and has gained a wealth of knowledge and agricultural skills from it.

Last season he planted more than 100 ha – 62 ha of soybeans and 42 ha of white maize. Although the climatic conditions were problematic, he still managed to realise a yield of 7,7 t/ha on the maize and 1,1 t/ha on the soybeans. He also plants spinach to help with his cashflow.

Alfred's love for farming motivates him to dream big and he plans to increase his area planted to 500 ha in three years' time. He has leased another 110 ha from a neighbouring farmer, but because he knows that healthy soil means a healthy crop, he still has to do a lot of soil preparation before he can plant there. Alfred also wants to buy more farming equipment to increase his efficiency and productivity.

Grain SA/Land Bank Smallholder Farmer of the Year

The 2024 Grain SA/Land Bank Smallholder Farmer of the Year, Jim Besabakhe Masemola, developed an interest in agriculture at a young age. His parents used oxen to work the land and he would help them on their fields. He did not complete his school education due to challenging circumstances and started working on a farm in 1980. In 1991 he changed careers and worked for contractors in Pretoria for three years, after which he started working for himself and trying his hand at farming.

He used to harvest between five and six bags of maize per hectare, but after becoming part of the Farmer Development Programme in 2019, he started to farm seriously, following the correct production practices. In the 2019/2020 season, he harvested 4 t/ha of maize. Last season it increased to 6 t/ha and he is hoping for at least 7 t/ha this season.



The 2024 Grain SA/Land Bank Smallholder Farmer of the Year, Jim Masemola.

Photos: Lize! Snyman



Smallholder Farmer finalists, waiting for the winner to be announced – Buyiswe Dhlamini (top) and Mandla Nkosi (above).



At 77, Mhlangenqaba Mkwizwana was the oldest nominee in the competition this year and walked away as the Grain SA/Absa/John Deere Financial Subsistence Farmer of the Year for 2024.



The Subsistence Farmer finalists were Mfaniseni Khumalo and Gcinile Beauty Gumbi.

Grain SA/Absa/John Deere Financial Subsistence Farmer of the Year

Although Mhlangenqaba Mkwizwana (77) from Maclear in the Eastern Cape is the oldest finalist in the 2024 competition, he still dreams of becoming a commercial farmer. At the Day of Celebration event, Mhlangenqaba was announced as the 2024 Grain SA/Absa/John Deere Financial Subsistence Farmer of the Year.

His devotion to agriculture comes from his parents, who were communal farmers. They produced maize using animal traction and owned sheep, cattle and pigs. Their produce was their only source of income.

After school he left home to look for employment and started working for various mine companies in Gauteng. In 1989 he returned home to follow his dream of becoming a full-time farmer and he has never looked back.

His agricultural knowledge has increased since becoming part of the Farmer Development Programme. He is the chairperson of the Gamakhulu Study Group. ■



VALERIE CILLIERS,
SA GRAIN EDITOR

Know the detail on minimum wages; rest periods

THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IS REGULATED BY THE SECTORAL DETERMINATION FOR AGRICULTURE (SD13). IT PROVIDES FOR MINIMUM WAGES AND RATES FOR FARM WORKERS. ALL EMPLOYERS OF FARM WORKERS MUST COMPLY AND IT MUST BE INCLUDED IN THEIR CONTRACTS. THESE WAGES AND RATES MUST ALSO BE ESCALATED ANNUALLY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE RELEVANT DETERMINATION.

Farm management is to plan, organise, implement and control all actions within each production area of the farming business (known as management tasks) to achieve the dominant objective of the business, to make a profit.

The production areas of the business are production, marketing, finance, purchase, administrative, employee, external relations, asset and general management. The two topics to be discussed – minimum wages and rest periods – both concern employee management.

MINIMUM WAGES

Ten years ago, the government decided to implement a system of minimum wages to be paid to farm employees – a system that was and still is met with criticism. It was recently announced that from 1 March 2024, the minimum wage for the next year is R27,58 per hour. The only way to cope with this aspect is to manage it properly.

To apply proper employee management, you must have a management policy document. This document must contain a diagram showing all the positions in your business. Examine the diagram regularly to decide whether each position is still necessary.

This major change in the wage structure has also put a strong emphasis on the appointment of suitable employees. All positions in your business must be supported by a proper job description to be used when appointing new employees.

Productivity

- Employees should work at an acceptable standard and tempo. If they do not, use the disciplinary code and process. Don't struggle with employees who are not productive.
- Consider the productivity of your workforce on a regular basis, as productivity measures the work done by your employees compared to their salaries and working time.
- When considering productivity, there are two resources involved, namely people (employees) as well as equipment and tools. Examine your tools and equipment. It is your responsibility as employer to provide suitable and well-maintained tools and equipment. You cannot expect an employee to do a job fast and to your required standard if suitable and well-maintained tools and equipment are not provided.
- Address your human resources. Do your employees have the necessary skills and expertise to do the required job? Train your employees properly to increase their productivity and therefore counter employee costs. Communicate with your employees on ideas to get a job done.



REST PERIODS

The Sectoral Determination for Agriculture (SD13) also determines that rest periods are applicable to a farming business – when work is stopped to relax or recover strength.

- The first rest period as determined by the SD13 is that an employee must be allowed a rest period of one hour after five hours of work. This period may be reduced to 30 minutes if agreed on by the employer and the employee. When referring to working hours, lunch and tea breaks are excluded.
- An employee must also be allowed a rest period of at least twelve hours between working shifts.
- Concerning overtime, an employee may not work more than twelve hours per day (including overtime) – and not more than 15 hours overtime per week. Remember that overtime can only be allowed on mutual agreement. An employee may not be forced to work overtime.

Sick leave can also be considered as a rest period. Normally an employer may approve two days sick leave without a notice by a legal medical practitioner. For longer periods proper legal notices should be required by the employer.

Annual leave is a longer rest period and must be a minimum of three weeks per year, which should be taken during the specific year or at the latest within six months after the end of the year.

TO SUMMARISE

These two aspects (minimum wages and rest periods) could result in employees not being motivated enough to deliver proper work, if not applied or managed properly. This will have a negative influence on the profit of a business.

Apply the labour laws and increase productivity. Train your employees, communicate with them and use functional tools and equipment to counter the effect of the new minimum wages. Thus, keep your employees motivated – treat them fairly and with respect. ■



MARIUS GREYLING,
INDEPENDENT AGRICULTURAL
MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT

GUIDELINES FOR outstanding soybean yields

THERE IS NO SIMPLE RECIPE FOR OPTIMUM SOYBEAN PRODUCTION. THE YIELD REMAINS A RESULT OF VARIOUS FACTORS THAT TOGETHER ENSURE SUCCESS. HOWEVER, THIS ARTICLE ATTEMPTS TO HIGHLIGHT JUST A FEW IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO ENSURING THE BEST POSSIBLE RESULTS.

Before one can look at what the principles are, a few non-negotiable critical prerequisites must first be in place to be able to plant soybeans:

1. **Soil structure and drainage:** The soil structure and drainage must be in place before even considering to plant soybeans. It will be very difficult for plants to produce a decent crop if they either suffocate or are waterlogged in the soil.
2. **Soil acidity, potassium and phosphorus:** It is very important to know what is happening in the soil, especially regarding the pH of the soil and the base level of phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) currently available and absorbable in the soil. This is why a soil analysis is always recommended, especially soil chemistry and soil mapping. Accurate predictions can then be made for the next season. Consult your fertiliser advisor about options.
3. **Weed and pest control programme:** Thirdly, a well-planned weed and pest control programme is essential. The previous year's pests and weeds should be taken into consideration. A well-designed chemical programme will sort out problems even before they appear.

WHAT INFLUENCES SOYBEAN PRODUCTION?

Soybean production is the sum of the plants per hectare, number of pods per plant, number of kernels per pod and kernel weight (**Figure 1**). All the variables are driven by several factors such as the planting date, cultivar, growth length, foliar feeding, seed treatment, insect control, fungal control, soil status (chemical and physical), tillage, soil pH and plant condition, to name but a few. Each of the individual factors plays a role in ensuring an optimal yield.

Plants per hectare

The first way to achieve an optimum yield is to optimise the plants per hectare. The choice of a cultivar that can grow optimally in the relevant geographical area is the essential first step. The cultivar must be able to handle stressful conditions such as heat and moisture restrictions well. Therefore the seed producers must be thoroughly consulted in the selection of cultivar for your specific farm.

Planters also play a critical role in the plants per hectare. It often happens on farms that the estimated plant population in the field differs from what is actually achieved. A differentiation of up to 20% is quite common. This difference can be directly correlated to the planter efficiency and this influences the yields directly.

Inoculation

There is no substitute for the best possible **inoculant** in soybean production. The inoculant must provide the largest amount of nitrogen for the plant's needs and poor nodulation cannot be corrected with fertiliser. In South Africa, farmers have access to some of the best international inoculants that have been tested to ensure optimum inoculation in the hot and dry conditions.

On-seed survival of the inoculant is not a given, especially if it is retained seed that is also treated on the farm for fungi and insects. So, make sure you use the best possible inoculant. Double inoculation on the seed and in the furrow did better in most trials compared to single inoculation, especially on virgin soils where soybeans were not planted before.

Two other factors that can also contribute to poor nodulation are very low pH soils, which leads to aluminium toxicity, as well as high levels of nitrogen. So make sure your soil status and pH are in place.

Pods per plant

Another way to speed up the yield is to grow more pods per plant. This means that the full growing season and optimum daylight length must be utilised. In most cases, the optimum planting date is one of the biggest requirements for maximum pods per plant.

1 Soybean yield is a function of yield components.



Plants per acre x pods per plant



Seeds per pod



Weight per seed



Sufficient boron during flowering to pod formation can limit the number of flowers and pods that are weaned.
Photo: Gerda de Kock

A typical soy plant has about 20 nodes, of which 16 can normally bear flowers and then pods. However, each node can carry more than one pod. Adding just one extra pod per plant can potentially add an average yield of 130 kg per ha.

An average pod has three seeds, but several genetics are available that can also produce four to five seeds. A soybean kernel's average weight is about 150 mg. Raising the kernel weight by 6 mg has the potential to produce 200 kg/ha more soybeans.

Leaf protection: The golden rule to keep in mind when striving for optimal soy production is the protection of the plant factory. Leaf protection, especially in the critical time from flowering to seed filling, is essential to ensure an optimum number of pods and seed weight. About 60% of soybean production comes from nodes 7 to 13, which are in the middle of the plant. The nodes must therefore be protected, especially against fungi and insects, in the reproduction growth phase. The use of fungicides during flowering and pod formation forms an integral part of protecting the leaves.

Nutrition also plays a very big role in the number of pods per plant.

- Sometimes farmers forget to manage the amount of **nitrogen (N)** required by a soybean plant. To achieve higher yields, the soybean plant needs higher amounts of N. The inoculant cannot always provide the large quantities of N that are required – therefore N fertilisation is sometimes necessary. Remember the principle, to measure is to know, so a leaf sample will be the only way to know.
- The role of **boron (B)** in optimum production is essential, as it plays a role in pollination, cell wall and cell membrane integrity and root growth. Soybeans' B requirement is much higher than, for example, that of maize, and therefore it responds very well to well-formulated foliar nutrition. Not all B foliar feeding is formulated to translocate well throughout the entire plant. Many B formulations are trapped only in the leaf structure and are not available to the whole plant.

A leaf sample alone can be misleading. The yield is the final indication of whether the B formulation is working. Sufficient B during flowering to pod formation can also limit the number of flowers and pods that are weaned.

Seed weight

Potassium (K) is particularly important to ensure the optimum seed weight and also plays an important role in heat regulation. This is especially applicable in K foliar feeds, supplementing enough K in the soil to push a good crop into a top crop.

In 'non-Intacta® gene' cultivars, the protection of pods against insects as a preventive strategy is non-negotiable. If you act reactively, the damage is already there, which can also lead to secondary fungal infections. The use of insecticides that have residual working provides better protection than just a contact product.

Harvesters that are not properly calibrated, can also lead to a yield loss of between 5% and 20% of the yield. It is not only your yield that is lost, but it will also increase the chemical spend to control volunteer soybeans in the follow-up crop.

Be committed to optimise your soybean yield by doing the right thing at the right time. Laevel Agrochem is committed to optimise soybean yields. ■



GEORGE PRINSLOO,
BUSINESS MANAGER,
LAEVEL AGROCHEM



Take note of the **CLIMATE OUTLOOK**

Photo: Vida van Schalkwyk

NORMAL SUMMER CROP PLANTING DATES ARE IN NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER, WHICH MEANS THAT CROPS WILL BE IN THE FLOWERING AND PITFILL STAGES DURING FEBRUARY AND MARCH. THE 2023/2024 SUMMER SEASON WILL BE REMEMBERED FOR EXTREMELY DRY AND HOT CONDITIONS IN THESE IMPORTANT PRODUCTION MONTHS. BUT WHAT DOES THE NEW SEASON HAVE IN STORE?

Very high temperatures due to drought can cause severe damage. It is estimated that yield reductions during extreme conditions can be as high as 5% per day, meaning that an entire crop can be lost or severe losses can occur within about three weeks.

These dry and hot conditions were caused by a very strong El Niño event. It is a known fact that an El Niño can be responsible for adverse rainfall conditions in the second part of the summer season. Other factors such as tropical cyclones in the Indian Ocean further strengthened the negative effect of El Niño on the rainfall. Drought conditions are unfortunately part of the normal climate due to El Niño events.

Considering the history, El Niño events occurred in about three to four out of ten years – although not all of them were responsible for disaster droughts. Droughts like the 2023/2024 season can occur in about one or two out of ten years. In the past, seasons with severe droughts occurred in 1982/1983, 1986/1987, 1991/1992, 1994/1995, 1997/1998, 2002/2003, 2015/2016 and 2023/2024.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EL NIÑO AND LA NIÑA

El Niño is the Spanish for “boy child” and the name originated from South America a few hundred years ago, where fishermen in the Pacific Ocean experienced very poor fish harvests in some years. It was in the midsummer

of December, near Christmas, when the central Pacific Ocean’s water was warmer than normal, causing the fishes to migrate further away from the mainland towards cooler and more nutrient-rich waters.

The opposite of El Niño is called **La Niña**, or “little girl” in Spanish, also with an occurrence of about three or four out of ten years. It is usually associated with above average rainfall for the summer rainfall area of South Africa.

The rest of the seasons (about one third of the years) are neither El Niño nor La Niña, and are referred to as **neutral seasons**.

El Niño and La Niña also differ in the timing of the rainfall distribution in a season.

- During El Niño years, the first part of the season is usually more favourable and the second part of the season is very dry. Very hot conditions are also prominent in mid- to late summer when an El Niño is present.
- Rainfall conditions are usually favourable during the mid- to late summer during La Niña seasons. Temperatures are also not extremely high from December to March, compared to El Niño years.

WHAT TO EXPECT FOR THE 2024/2025 SUMMER SEASON

After the 2023/2024 El Niño ended in April 2024, neutral conditions set in with forecasts of La Niña conditions from October 2024. However, the development of the expected La Niña for 2024/2025 is very slow and there is some uncertainty whether it will eventually take place or whether it will remain in a neutral state.

The forecasts favoured a weak to moderate La Niña by October 2024, with these conditions lasting until March 2025. There is a 70% chance that a La Niña will occur and a 30% chance for neutral conditions of the sea surface temperatures. On the positive side of the uncertainty about La Niña, the chance for an El Niño event similar to the past season is about zero.

for the 2024/2025 summer season

In terms of rainfall, the following is possible for the coming season for the summer rainfall area:

- Eastern production areas (KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Eastern Free State): Average to above average rainfall from the middle of October, with a good chance of heavy rainfall in November and December. Below average rainfall is expected for February and March, when the rainfall conditions are expected to move more towards the western parts of the country.
- Central to western summer grain areas (western parts of the Free State and North West): Average to below average rainfall for October and first part of November, but average to above average rainfall from December to March.

La Niña to neutral seasons (as expected for the 2024/2025 season) are not known for extended dry and hot conditions, as with an El Niño. There will be a so-called midsummer drought or dry spell in late December or January, but it is not expected to last for more than two weeks – although it may last longer over the eastern parts in February and March 2025.

The development of tropical cyclones in the Indian Ocean, towards the east coast of Africa, from January to March is of concern and something to be aware of. Tropical cyclones are responsible for heavy rain over the ocean and even over the east coast of Africa. However, they are also responsible for dry and hot conditions over the interior of Southern Africa.

The cyclone season is usually from January to March, with tropical cyclones lasting for about ten to 20 days, which coincides with the sensitive stages of crop development. This development is independent from El Niño or La Niña.

In terms of rainfall, the outlook for the summer crop areas is positive and favourable for crop production for the 2024/2025 season.

There are examples of crop failures in history during La Niña seasons due to the presence of tropical cyclones, but it is a very rare occurrence. An example was in January 1984, when a cyclone called Domoina battered the east coast of KwaZulu-Natal with heavy rain and storms, but also caused serious drought damage in the central to western summer crop area that included mainly the Free State and North West.

In terms of rainfall, the outlook for the summer crop areas is positive and favourable for crop production for the 2024/2025 season.

OTHER RISKS

Hail

This is a risk that is very difficult to forecast. The intensity and extent of hail occurrence differ from season to season, but the risk is usually higher towards the higher lying eastern production areas (Eastern Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga).

The question is always if a farmer must insure against hail damage. This depends on his financial capacity – if a severe yield loss will result in a farmer not being able to continue farming in the next season, then it is essential for him to insure against yield losses. If the insurance premium is high, then it is an indication of a higher risk because premiums are calculated according to historic yield losses.

Hail insurance should be part of the normal input cost budgeted to ensure the sustainability of farming activities.

Planting dates

Both too early and too late plantings can result in severe yield losses. The best planting dates for maize and soybeans are from October to the middle or end of November for the Eastern Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga. For the central to western parts of the summer grain area, it is from the middle of November to the end of December.

Too late plantings can result in insufficient heat or growth units to complete the growth cycle of a plant to reach maturity. Frost damage may also occur with too early or too late plantings.

Type of soil

The water holding capacity of soil is very important. With the increased effect of climate change, as well as factors such as El Niño, the intensity and extent of dry and wet spells can be responsible for drought or water-logged conditions.

Therefore, it is essential to produce on soils that can store water to be used during dry spells but are not responsible for serious water-logged conditions.



Photo: Tiani Claassen

LONGER TERM OUTLOOK

The country is currently still in a so-called “wet cycle”, despite some dry conditions due to the El Niño of 2023/2024. Forecasts indicate that drier conditions are likely to set in from 2025/2026, after completion of the expected La Niña of 2024/2025.

This drier cycle can last from 2026 until about 2030. It is important to take this into account and use the expected favourable rainfall season of 2024/2025 to restructure farming activities for the expected drier conditions that will follow.

A useful tip for grain farmers is to avoid chasing large areas, but rather to classify and select fields or parts of fields according to the yield potential. If the yield history of specific fields indicates low or highly variable yields, it is better to use such areas for cultivated pastures or even to identify areas that must be returned to natural grazing. ■



JOHAN VAN DEN BERG,
AGRICULTURAL METEOROLOGIST

Understand market trends before you plant

BY CONDUCTING A THOROUGH MARKET ANALYSIS BEFORE PLANTING, FARMERS CAN MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS THAT MITIGATE RISKS AND ALIGN PRODUCTION WITH THE MARKET NEEDS. THIS ARTICLE AIMS TO GIVE A SMALL OVERVIEW OF WHAT THE FARMER NEEDS TO CONSIDER IN PREPARATION FOR THE UPCOMING SEASON.

In today's dynamic agricultural landscape, finding a market before planting grains and oilseeds has become a critical factor in ensuring both profitability and sustainability. Farmers face numerous challenges, including a fluctuating demand, price volatility and increasing competition from both local and global markets.

PRODUCTION DATA

The data for **maize and soybean production** between 2015/2016 and 2023/2024 reveals interesting trends for both crops. Maize production shows steady growth overall, with a notable increase from 1 024,41 million tons in 2015/2016 to a forecasted 1 222,2 million tons for 2023/2024. This upward trend highlights the increasing demand for maize in world markets, driven by various factors such as its versatility in food, feed and the growing biofuel industries.

Similarly, **soybean production** has shown consistent growth, with a significant rise from 317,82 million tons in 2015/2016 to an estimated 375,91 million tons in 2022/2023, and a further increase forecasted to 392,24 million tons in 2023/2024. The steady rise in soybean production reflects its growing importance as a protein source and its increasing demand for oil production.

Both the maize and soybean markets are expected to expand, with increasing production to meet the global needs. However, the rate of growth in soybean production appears to be accelerating, with stronger year-on-year increases projected in the near future.

Furthermore, as the production levels grow, particularly with the 2023/2024 forecast (**Graph 1**), the risk of market saturation becomes more pronounced, which could lead to price drops due to oversupply. When looking at the local markets, one can see this phenomenon taking place.

NAVIGATE THE MARKET ENVIRONMENT

The bearish sentiment reflected in the above price differences signals that farmers may need to hedge their risks or secure contracts early to lock in more favourable prices, especially for white maize and soybeans, where the projected price drops are significant.

Overall, careful timing and risk management will be essential for both sellers and buyers to navigate this market environment. For soy-

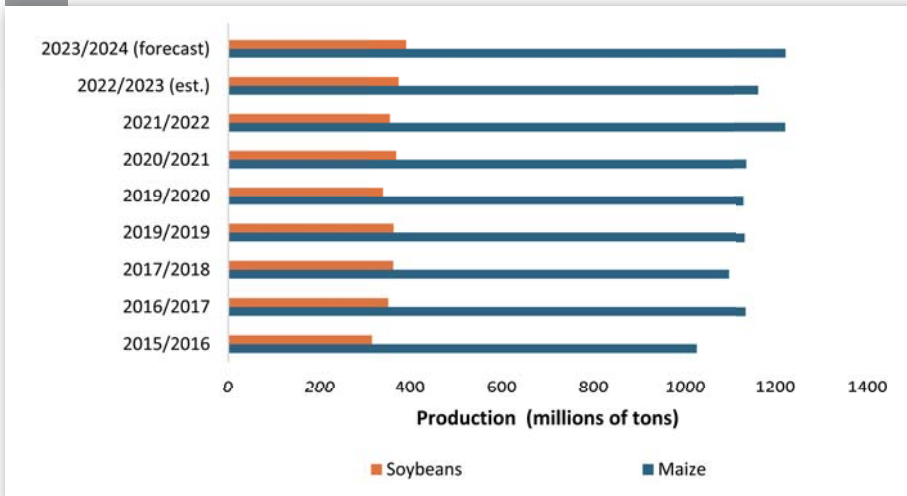
1 Local markets.

Commodity	Contract month			Difference March 2025 and May 2025
	Average August spot price	March 2025	May 2025	
White maize Safex price (R/ton)	5 357	5 018	4 065	-953
Yellow maize Safex price (R/ton)	4 060	4 139	3 819	-320
Soybean Safex price (R/ton)	8 547	8 387	7 671	-716

Source: Safex (Data correct as on 20 September 2024)



1 *Production of yellow maize and soybean, world markets.*



Source: International Grains Council

beans, production is expected to increase with 4,34%. This is due to better than expected yields in large producing countries such as the United States of America.

Local future contracts reflect this market supply as average local soybean prices, using the currently available August average information, are also expected to decline. The yellow maize world production is also expected to increase with 5,11%. Similar to soybeans, the yellow maize price is expected to decline.

The price trends for white maize, yellow maize and soybeans indicate a general market expectation of declining prices by May 2025, suggesting potential oversupply or weakened demand. This outlook could create price volatility, with farmers likely to face pressure to sell their crops earlier in the season, particularly around March 2025, to avoid further price drops. This poses a risk as buyers may delay purchases, anticipating lower prices later in the season, which could temporarily slow down market activity.

CONCLUSION

Finding a market before planting grains and oilseeds is essential for reducing uncertainty and enhancing profitability. Farmers must consider the demand, supply, price trends and competition to make informed planting decisions.

With these insights, they can strategically plan their production cycles and capture opportunities in both local and global markets.

Ultimately, a proactive approach to market research can transform traditional farming practices into a more strategic, market-driven operation, positioning farmers for success in an increasingly competitive agricultural sector. ■



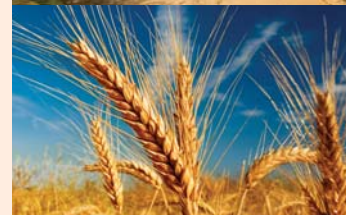
LERATO RAMAFOKO,
AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIST
INTERN, GRAIN SA

WORDS OF
WISDOM



Soil is a living ecosystem, and is a farmer's most precious asset. A farmer's productive capacity is directly related to the health of his or her soil.

~ HOWARD WARREN BUFFET
American philanthropist and writer



Effective cutworm control begins with TIMELY WEED MANAGEMENT

CUTWORM HAS BECOME ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PESTS OF MAIZE IN SOUTH AFRICA OVER THE PAST FOUR YEARS. DURING THE PREVIOUS MAIZE PLANTING SEASON, CUTWORM LARVAE DESTROYED THOUSANDS OF HECTARES OF MAIZE SEEDLINGS, NECESSITATING REPEATED APPLICATIONS OF INSECTICIDES, FOLLOWED BY REPLANTING OF SEED IN MANY CASES.

Since cutworm is a sporadic pest, it is difficult to predict if it will be economically important in a specific region or field. It is therefore imperative to understand cutworm biology and to scout fields for its presence and damage to seedlings.

CUTWORM BIOLOGY

Cutworm larvae have a very wide host plant range and the presence of weeds on crop fields ensures their survival during the off-season. Moths lay eggs on the bare soil and leaves of weeds and volunteer maize plants that may occur within fields. Small larvae emerge from the eggs after about a week. They hide under and feed on leaves of weeds or crops, on and near the soil surface. Large larvae burrow into the soil and emerge only at night.

This pest's development and ecology are strongly influenced by temperature. Under optimal conditions, the duration of the larval stage from egg hatch to the sixth instar development stage is approximately 42 days. During winter months larval development may take as long as 120 days to the sixth instar.

PEST GENERATIONS AND INFESTATION SCENARIOS

Because of the cold winter temperatures in the maize production region of South Africa, this pest goes through only two or three generations per year. In warmer regions such as Zimbabwe, four generations per year have been recorded.

Since cutworm moths and larvae can tolerate very low temperatures, overlapping generations occur and larvae in different stages are present in fields throughout the year. Moths that are active in autumn lay their eggs on weeds, which provide food for slow-developing larvae during winter months.

Depending on the time when the eggs are laid during the autumn months, larvae of all sizes are present in fields during the following winter months. During spring and in summer months, when temperatures increase, the larval development rate increases, pupae develop, and moths emerge to continue the pest cycle.

There is a strong interaction between environmental conditions, weeds, and cutworms. Depending on environmental conditions and planting time, two different scenarios regarding cutworm infestations may occur. In cases where planting is done during early spring and summer, seedlings can be damaged by larvae that overwintered on these fields.

Maize that is planted later (December onwards), may be attacked by larvae of the second-generation moths that emerged from fallow and other fields, and laid their eggs on weedy plants and volunteer maize plants during the preceding two-month period.

LINK BETWEEN WEEDS AND CUTWORM PRESENCE

Since moths lay their eggs on weeds and are active throughout the winter, it is generally accepted that an abundance of winter weeds may enhance cutworm infestations. Abundant autumn rains may also lead to increased cutworm populations during the following spring because of increased winter weed populations.

Studies have shown that the growth form of weedy plants plays an important role in cutworm survival. Cutworm larvae are much more likely to occur and survive under weedy plants that grow in a rosette form which covers the soil surface, than upright plants which do not provide protection for larvae on the soil surface. The protection provided by these rosette forms is especially important for small larvae that do not tunnel into the soil but remain on the soil surface.

CONTROL

There are two different approaches to cutworm management:

- One strategy is to apply insecticides prior to and after planting when damage is observed.
- The other is to kill cutworm larvae by removing their weedy host plants long before planting.



Damage caused by small cutworm larvae or other soil pests.



A cutworm damaging a maize seedling.



Preventing cutworms from damaging crops

Because the presence of weeds increases the risk of cutworm infestation, pre-planting weed management is key to cutworm control. Pre-plant weed control is the most effective strategy to control cutworms. Where practically possible, fields must be cultivated at least 35 days before planting and kept free of weeds and volunteer plants until planting. This will deprive the small cutworms present in the fields from food, causing them to die of starvation.

If no volunteer plants or weeds are present in fields at the beginning of spring, no food plants are available for moths to lay their eggs, eliminating the risk of damage to small seedlings by cutworms.

Scouting

Scouting for cutworm larvae under weeds during late winter is difficult and labour intensive. However, if needed, a spade can be used to dig up the soil below bushy weeds with aerial parts covering the soil surface.

The collected soil can then be sieved to determine if, and how many, cutworms are present. If many cutworms are found, weed control should be implemented and planting should be postponed for a period long enough for cutworms to starve. Seedlings are damaged if crops are planted in a field heavily infested with cutworm, which often necessitates replanting.

Scouting for cutworm damage to seedlings should commence immediately when the seedlings emerge. The first indication of cutworm damage is usually the wilting of seedlings or stand loss. During scouting, it is also important to inspect newly emerged seedlings for the presence of small holes in leaves. If such symptoms are observed, it could indicate that small cutworm larvae or other soil pests are present.

Chemical control of cutworm

The efficacy of insecticides for control of cutworm larvae is affected by many factors. Amongst these are the number and size of the cutworms present in the field, the moisture levels of the soil, as well as the ecology and biology of the pest.

Small cutworms are more susceptible to insecticides compared to fully grown larvae. Large cutworms surface at night to feed above ground. It is therefore important to apply pesticides during late afternoon if possible. It is preferable that the soil surface be moist during insecticide application, since larvae tend to remain below the soil surface when it is very dry. Since not all cutworms will surface on a single night, it may take several days before the full effect of the insecticide is achieved.

Cutworms do not feed during the moulting process. Since moulting from one larval stage to the next may take up to two days, some of the larvae that are present in a field will not be active above ground in the evening after the application was done. Under very warm and dry conditions, the larvae will also remain subterranean and may not come into contact with the insecticide for a few days after application.

In addition, breakdown of the insecticide in these conditions over days, may also result in the expected control levels not being achieved. Some live larvae may therefore be expected in the field after applications. It emphasises the importance of scouting for the presence of



Abundant winter weeds provide ideal hiding places and food for cutworm larvae.



Weeds with a rosette growth form provide protection and food for larvae.

dead larvae after applications were done. Registered insecticides generally have long enough residual periods to be active when moulting cutworms start feeding again.

CONCLUSION

The interaction between environmental factors such as rainfall and temperature, weeds, and cutworms determine the occurrence and prevalence of cutworms in fields. Seedlings are damaged by cutworm larvae that overwintered in fields.

The most important control measure for effective cutworm control is therefore to ensure that fields are free of weeds for a period of at least 35 days prior to planting. It will cause overwintering larvae in these fields to starve. Good, timely weed control is therefore the answer to effective early season cutworm control. ■

**PROF JOHNNIE VAN DEN BERG
AND PROF HANNALENE DU PLESSIS,
BOTH FROM THE IPM PROGRAMME,
UNIT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES
AND MANAGEMENT, NORTH-WEST
UNIVERSITY. FIRST PUBLISHED IN
SA GRAAN/GRAIN SEPTEMBER 2024.**



Cattle eat less when it is hot

When cattle are too hot, they tend to stop eating, said Raluca Mateescu, a professor in the Department of Animal Science at the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. This affects the cattle's health and growth and threatens the longevity of the food supply coming from that herd.

Climate change is making it more difficult to raise cattle – growth and reproduction are affected by heat – so it's critical to breed cattle that are better adapted to a hotter and longer summer. She explained that cows eliminate about 85% of their body heat via sweat.

According to prof. Mateescu, heat stress in subtropical regions, which are the areas just north and south of the tropics and generally considered



the hottest in the world, is such a significant limiting factor that about \$369 million of beef production is lost annually due to reduced performance nationally.

A new study from this department published in the *Journal of Animal Science and Biotechnology* shows it's possible to identify the genes within cattle breeds that would lead to the sweatiest, most heat-tolerant offspring.

The study found that there is significant variation between cows of the same breed – in this case, Brangus, which is a cross between Brahman and Angus. (The study looked at 2 401 Brangus cattle from two commercial ranches in Florida.)

Being able to select cattle to breed based on their sweating ability could lead to herds that can tolerate hotter climates and still grow and reproduce.

Skin biopsies helped the researchers to determine the phenotypes that contributed to the animals' ability to manage heat stress, such as the sweat-gland area, depth and length. Scientists genotyped all animals and used software to estimate genetic parameters.

The study found that a moderate amount of variation in sweating ability is genetic, so farmers could select sweatier cattle based on genetic markers. It found that genetics from both the Brahman and Angus genes positively contribute to the sweating ability in Brangus cattle.

Source: <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2024/06/240613221915.htm> ■

RPO NEWSLETTER, 5 SEPTEMBER

RAPID RESPONSE TEAM *ready for action*

The minister of agriculture, John Steenhuisen, has established a rapid response team in accordance with Section 2(1) of the *Animal Diseases Act*, to deal with all current outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD).

This follows a Disease Management Area declaration gazetted by the minister to prevent the spread of the disease through the movement of cattle, sheep, goats and products derived from these animals in certain areas.

The team comprises seven government and industry experts and is mandated to provide immediate support and critical decision-making assistance within the first 48 hours after an outbreak of FMD occurred.

Members of the team include Dr Mpho Maja (director of Animal Health at the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development), Dr Shaun Morris (veterinarian at OCTAVOSCENE), Dr Jared Strydom (veterinarian at the Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture and Rural Development), Dr Patricia Froneman (state veterinarian in Frankfort), Dr Matlou Rabala and Dr Gerhard Neethling (general manager of the Red Meat Abattoir Association).

They will ensure regular communication, assist with guidelines on how affected farmers handle milk, meat or other produce out of affected areas, and rope in agricultural specialists to advise on the economic impact on the affected areas.

Source: Media release by the DoA, 7 August 2024 ■



Corner Post

BY LOUISE KUNZ, ASSISTANT EDITOR

THE 38-YEAR-OLD **DIEKETSENG MAHLEHLELE** WAS CHOSEN AS A 2024 FINALIST IN THE GRAIN SA POTENTIAL COMMERCIAL FARMER OF THE YEAR CATEGORY. THIS VIBRANT YOUNG FARMER ATTENDED HER FIRST GRAIN SA STUDY GROUP MEETING WITH HER FATHER IN 2015. THIS HAD SET THE WHEELS IN MOTION TO REALISING HER DREAM.

In 2019 Dieketseng jumped at an opportunity to farm independently when she applied for the farm Vrede in the Brandfort area. Vrede is now 'home', where she is already an established livestock farmer who is working hard to develop as a crop producer too. She believes that the steps to success are a willingness to learn and listen, to implement what you have learned and hard work.

Dieketseng is currently farming on medium-potential cash crop soil but is looking to lease high-potential soil to grow the crop side of her business. This year she planted 180 ha of sunflower for the first time. Unfortunately, the climatic conditions were not favourable this season, with severe drought conditions and high rainfall at the wrong time, but she is still expecting an average yield.

Although her first year as a crop farmer may not be a huge success, Dieketseng remains positive as she knows every stumbling block offers an opportunity to learn and grow. 'In farming there are good years and bad years, but it can't deter us from doing what we love.'

This is one of the attributes that led to her nomination for the Farmer of the Year competition. She was thrilled to be announced as one of the finalists after judging took place and is very excited (and emotional) about the recognition she has received. 'It's a dream come true and all thanks to the input of my two role models, my dad and Ntate Johan (Kriel).'

The well-being of her workers is very important to her, as well as improving the lives of less privileged girls. She has taken 15 young girls in Brandfort under her wing by paying their school fees and buying them school uniforms. They also receive food parcels on a regular basis. She is also paying one college student's tuition fees.

However, she does not see any of these deeds as something extraordinary. 'I am just being a human being making sure others aren't left behind. People in privileged positions should take care of those less fortunate.'

DIEKETSENG'S STORY

WHERE DID YOUR PASSION FOR FARMING ORIGINATE?

It developed as a young girl. My father was a big cattle farmer and over weekends and during

school holidays I worked with him, gathering valuable agricultural skills. Whenever my father went away on business, he would put me in charge of the farm.

WHY DO YOU WANT TO BE SUCCESSFUL?

I am passionate about the role of women in agriculture, so I want to become a leading female farmer who inspires young girls to farm. I am also determined to change how farmers are perceived. So many people associate farming with poverty, but farming is a noble profession, where hard work pays off and it can improve your life.

WHAT IS THE BEST AND WORST THING ABOUT FARMING?

The best thing is that I get to contribute to food security. There is nothing that I don't like about farming – even dirt is good! Maybe the stress a farmer experiences because of circumstances out of our control – like weather and theft – is the less positive side of being a farmer. ■

THREE REASONS TO FARM:

- It is the most important job in the world as you contribute to food security.
- Farming is a "cool" job as you can work outside.
- You can be your own boss.



FARM FACTS

Farm: Vrede
Nearest town: Brandfort
Region: Western Free State
Size: 475 ha
Type of farming operation: Mixed – plants sunflower and maize/livestock and owns Bonsmara cattle, Dormer Merino sheep and free-range chickens

PGP'S CONTRIBUTION

- Joined Grain SA in 2015
- Study group: Ladybrand Study Group
- Congress delegate in 2023 and 2024

Training courses completed:

Has completed several courses including:

- Introduction to sunflower and sorghum production
- Resource assessment and farm planning
- Farm management and finances
- Farming for profit
- Basic maintenance: Tractors and farm implements

A mentor's view:

Johan Kriel, one of Dieketseng's mentors, believes this young, enthusiastic farmer has the potential to develop into a commercial farmer because she is keen to learn. 'She is like a sponge when it comes to learning – she absorbs knowledge.' Johan says he has not seen this kind of passion in a young farmer in a long time. 'With a degree in communication, she could have had a wonderful career, but she just wanted to farm and provide work for people in the area.'

A programme that is changing lives



Improving skills through training

GRAIN SA'S FARMER DEVELOPMENT TEAM ASSISTS FARMERS TO BECOME BETTER, MORE SUCCESSFUL FARMERS. THE TEAM IS ACTIVE IN THE FIELD, WORKING AT GRASSROOTS LEVEL THROUGH FARM VISITS, STUDY GROUP SESSIONS AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES.

This team brings experience, knowledge, expertise and commitment to equipping farmers towards better agricultural practices, as well as building a relevant support network around every dedicated developing grain farmer. During the period from 5 August to 3 September, a total of 21 training courses were presented.

INTRODUCTION TO MAIZE PRODUCTION

Paul Wiggill presented the Introduction to Maize Production course to farmers in the Dundee region. The training was held at the offices of the Department of Agriculture in Estcourt. This department still assists farmers in doing soil sampling.

The group of farmers who attended the course were mostly older farmers, who have been planting maize for some time. Because their practical knowledge is pretty good, Paul focussed on the theory related to the correct setting of machinery and the understanding of a more in-depth view of the maize plant and soils, which helped to increase their knowledge and understanding of why things are done like they are.

Farmer Mmiseni James Mnculwane said the following after the course: 'This course has helped us a lot as farmers. Sometimes the theory in the class can be difficult, but I found out during the practical training why we need all the calculations. We thank you, Grain SA, because this course was very well prepared and all the people enjoyed it. The setting of the machinery was the most enjoyable for me, as most of us are hands-on farmers.'

ADVANCED MAIZE PRODUCTION AND MARKETING

There was positive feedback after the Advanced Maize Production and Marketing course, presented by mentor and trainer, Timon Filter from the Louwsburg office.

'It was very interesting! We learned that when you are dealing with planning anything or producing food, you must firstly deal with the soil. Make sure that the soil is in a good state to produce what you need. Implements will help you get your soil in good condition. We also learned about insurance and how to calibrate the planter and boom sprayer so that you don't waste,' said Lungelo Ngwenya.

Nhlanhla Mlotshwa said the theory was very interesting. He learned a lot about soil elements and soil science. 'It is very important to take soil samples before the application of lime.'

PRACTICAL SKILLS: SPRAYING AND MIXING OF CHEMICALS

The Bettysgoed Study Group is made up of a combination of small-scale farmers and community members from areas in and around the Bettysgoed Village near Carolina in the Mpumalanga Province. The study group received a few implements. There is no tractor available, as the majority of the trainees do not have tractors of their own to do farming on a larger scale. Therefore they rely on the Department of Agriculture for support.

Trainer Phineas Ngomane from the Mbombela office presented the practical skills course. The study group showed great interest throughout the session. They asked many questions, which indicated a good level of engagement from their side. Those reporting on behalf of the group said that they had learned a lot and were looking forward to getting back to conducting their farming business with the correct mixing of agricultural chemicals. They now have a better understanding on how to calibrate both a planter and a boom sprayer, as well as how to dispose of the empty containers.

AT GRASS ROOTS



These farmers from Dundee learned more about the correct setting of machinery during their course.



Timon Filter (left) with the group who attended the course in Louwsburg.



Farmers from Bettysgoed Study Group learned about spraying and the mixing of chemicals.



Let's learn more about farming

A total of 19 study group meetings took place in August and it was the perfect opportunity to prepare the farmers for the coming planting season.



At the Schuezendal Study Group, Jerry Mthombothi, regional development manager at the Mbombela office, talked to the farmers about measurements, soil composition and the climate. Deliveries and other logistics for the Beyond Abundance project were also discussed.



At the Vrischgewacht Study Group, the meeting started with an introduction to financial management and the importance of proper recordkeeping. Du Toit expressed the importance of giving true figures through to the database and explained the whole process of application for funding.



Du Toit van der Westhuizen, regional development manager in North West, visited the Tlaakgameng Study Group. This area was severely affected by drought and a discussion was held about the possibility of other crops in the area, as maize is not a viable crop to plant for this study group.

GETTING READY FOR THE NEW SEASON

THE regional development managers and mentors did 116 farm visits during August. In the Dundee region, the team ensured that equipment was ready for the planting season. Apart from maintenance on equipment, soil preparation was also being done in the Eastern Free State.



John Ngwenya had to replace the drive belt on his combine. He uses the combine to shell the maize. He was still busy picking up maize that was scattered after a tornado swept through his lands.



Lucky Khumalo made sure his John Deere off-set disc was ready for the new season.



An on-farm maintenance course took place on the farm of Oujan Masiu, where farmers and farmworkers were taught how to weld and grind.



On the farm of Petrus Tsoetsi, the 2024 New Era Commercial Farmer of the Year, tractor maintenance was being done. Downtime because of faulty equipment can cause losses. ■



DAY OF CELEBRATION 2024
We were there!

FANIE FERREIRA - SAAL

GSA



BAYER

BAYER