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PULA

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A WORD FROM... *Eric Wiggill*



IN THE EASTERN CAPE, THE FIRST RAINS SHOULD BE FALLING BY MID-SEPTEMBER, BUT AS EVERYBODY KNOWS, NOTHING IN FARMING IS WRITTEN IN STONE. SOIL PREPARATION AND PLANTING ARE SOME OF THE KEY ELEMENTS DURING THIS TIME.

The first rains should loosen the soil enough to be able to get a ripper into the lands to reduce the compaction layers created by cattle and machinery and reduce waterlogging. This will ensure that a farmer has better soil drainage and crop roots will be able to utilise the full soil depth.

Soil samples should be done to understand the soil's pH and determine what is lacking in the soil. This shows what corrections must be done with lime and fertiliser. Crop stubble should be incorporated into the soil with lime. If compost or well-rotted manure is available, spread it evenly on the soil and disc immediately to avoid the leaching of valuable minerals and loss of nitrogen into the atmosphere (nitrification).

All inputs should have been ordered for the season and stored correctly. Equipment needed in the planting process should be serviced in the winter and must be in good working order. Remember to grease the bearing, not the nipple. The window for planting is basically 30 days, so planning is of utmost importance and a machine that is not working correctly will affect the yields, profitability and stress levels.

Remember with the costs of inputs rising, the margin of error is very small. Planters, boom-sprayers and spreaders must be calibrated properly and tested twice to avoid expensive errors. Remember that too much or too little can have a devastating effect on production. The farmer should also check the contractor's machinery – because if the job is not done properly, the expensive problem lies with the farmer.

Areas on the farm that were not productive due to waterlogging, shallow soils or marginal lands must be corrected or planted with a crop that will be productive. Therefore, lands must be utilised correctly, based on the performance and yields of the previous season.

Crop insurance is something that should be at the top of a farmer's list. Most insurance companies will be able to ensure the crop before it is planted according to the information that is supplied during the planning stage. Eliminate the risk by sending through the actual hectares planted and maps to the insurer to avoid discrepancies later.

– *Eric Wiggill is the PGP regional development manager in the Eastern Cape.* ■

CUTWORM management is crucial

THERE ARE SEVERAL *AGROTIS* CUTWORM SPECIES (*LEPIDOPTERA: NOCTUIDAE*) PRESENT IN SOUTH AFRICA, NAMELY BLACK CUTWORM (*AGROTIS IPSILON*), GREY CUTWORM (*AGROTIS SUBALBA*), BROWN CUTWORM (*AGROTIS LONGIDENTIFERA*), SPINY CUTWORM (*AGROTIS SPINIFERA*) AND THE COMMON CUTWORM (*AGROTIS SEGETUM*). THE COMMON CUTWORM IS THE MOST PROMINENT AND ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT SPECIES PRESENT IN SOUTH AFRICA.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CUTWORM MANAGEMENT

- Larval feeding can result in severe damage to crops during the seedling stage.
- The larvae move from one seedling to another, cutting and destroying the stems of seedlings close to the ground level, which often results in death.
- One larva can damage numerous plants in a single night.
- If outbreaks occur, replanting of the crop often must be done.
- These larvae are active at night and during the day they can be found close to the soil surface near dead seedlings.
- Damage resulting from cutworm is not only restricted to seedlings. Plants at the four-leaf stage or older can also be damaged.
- This damage in older plants can be identified as round holes in the stem, just below the soil surface.

SCOUTING IS NECESSARY

- Scouting is one of the best weapons farmers have in their arsenal to combat cutworm.
- Emerging crop seedlings must be continuously inspected for signs of cutworm, preferably twice per week, and treated when necessary.
- Scouting after spraying is vital to determine if the initial application was successful or if a second application (depending on the label of a product) is required.

- Farmers who apply insecticides at planting must also scout to determine if control has been achieved.
- The edges around bare regions should be inspected by farmers for recently 'cut' plants. In addition, the top 5 cm of soil should be thoroughly searched for larvae.
- Where any notched, wilted, dead/cut weed or crop seedlings are observed, one should start digging around the roots of plants to identify cutworm larvae.



Scouting after spraying is vital to determine if the initial application was successful or if a second application is required.



MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Genetically modified maize (Bt)

While genetically modified (Bt) maize is effective against stalk borers, it is ineffective when it comes to cutworm. The reason is simple – cutworm and stalk borers are different species. Cry proteins in Bt maize are species-specific. In addition, as with insecticides, the size of the larvae being treated is crucial. Therefore, the bigger the larvae, the less effective the cry protein.

Cutworm larvae that target maize seedlings are generally large, late-instar larvae. Farmers must be vigilant of any seed companies claiming that the Bt gene will control cutworm larvae – this is patently false based on the reasons highlighted, as well as the fact that there are no legal registrations for this purpose.

Controlling weeds is crucial

Conventional practices of tilling in the form of ploughing, well before planting, are aimed at destroying winter weeds and any volunteer plants present in a crop field. The larvae that become buried or exposed on the soil surface may be damaged, injured or preyed on.

Weed control through the responsible application of registered herbicides prior to planting is the commonly used method to manage cutworm larvae in reduced and no-tillage systems.

Weed control in this context is crucial to deny newly hatched larvae a food source in the absence of crops. In general, a minimum of 35 weed-free days prior to planting (where practically possible) are required to starve larvae. While farmers may not have weeds at the time of planting, the presence of weeds four to five weeks prior will exacerbate cutworm issues. Therefore, in almost every situation, insecticides must also be used for effective cutworm management.

Farmers who plant maize cultivars with herbicide tolerance, probably must wait for seedling emergence before applying an herbicide. This is also true for insecticides.

Insecticides

Applications of suitably registered pyrethroids and organophosphates are considered essential in controlling cutworm larvae infestations. When applied preventatively at planting, it is important to monitor after spraying, especially during emergence and throughout the seedling stage to determine if a second application may be required.





Characteristic cutworm larva damage to a seedling.

Photo: Clemson University – USDA Cooperative Extension Slide Series, Bugwood.org



The larvae are dirty-grey or brown in colour with a smooth, waxy appearance.

Photo: http://www.pyrgus.de/Agrotis_segetum_en.html

Importantly, many pesticides registered for use against cutworm make it clear that where reduced or no-till is practised, particularly with maize, populations of cutworm can be expected to be higher where scouting after spraying is crucial to determine if a second application is required.

When using an insecticide against cutworm larvae, keep the following in mind:

- Where possible, apply during the afternoon – this reduces the degrading effects of heat and direct sunlight on the product, and ensures that the larvae, which are nocturnal, receive maximum exposure to it.
- Personal protective equipment and clothing (PPE) must be correctly used by employees whenever handling a pesticide product. The risks associated with pesticides can be negated by using the product responsibly.

CONCLUSION

Cutworms have been relatively well managed in the country to date and there is no doubt that this will continue. Although there have been isolated issues recently, the Insecticide Resistance Action Committee (IRAC) remains firm about the fact that there is no resistance issues with registered pyrethroids, given the available information.

Farmers must strictly adhere to product label instructions without deviation in any manner whatsoever when applying a pesticide, whether a herbicide or an insecticide. The label of a pesticide product is the law in terms of the *Fertilisers, Farm Feeds, Agricultural Remedies and Stock Remedies Act, 1947 (Act No. 36 of 1947)*. It is important to read the label instructions carefully.

Product registration holders have done copious amounts of research to compile the label instructions and if not strictly followed, then efficacy against the target pest, in this case cutworm, cannot be guaranteed. Further, guard against irresponsible tank mixing and consider the conditions of the spray water in terms of the hardness and pH in relation to the product label instructions.

Finally, farmers are encouraged to keep records of pest experiences linked to climatic conditions, given that the influence of soil moisture on factors such as cutworm biology and behaviour is often overlooked. This will enable farmers to better anticipate and prepare for potential issues in following seasons.

For more information, send an email to CropLife SA at info@croplife.co.za. ■

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Keep farming equipment in tip-top shape

FARMING RELIES ON MACHINERY AND EQUIPMENT TO KEEP PRODUCTION MOVING. AN OFTEN OVERLOOKED COMPONENT OF GETTING CROPS PLANTED AND GROWING IN A PRECISE WINDOW OF TIME, IS THE MAINTENANCE OF SPRAYING AND PLANTING EQUIPMENT. HERE ARE SOME MAINTENANCE TIPS TO KEEP YOUR FARM EQUIPMENT IN TIP-TOP SHAPE.

THE 'PRE-FLIGHT' PLANTER CHECKLIST

Before heading to the field this season, some maintenance items on your planter should be addressed. Some maintenance can be done in the off-season, while other issues should be addressed when the farmer is in the field for the first time. It is always important to read the operator's manual before using any equipment.

- 1 Make sure the planter stays in line by checking for any excessive sway in the tractor's drawbar or three-point arms, as metal wear can develop over time.



- 2 Check the manufacturer specifications for the specific tyre pressures. Also check the hydraulic lines and cylinders for wear, cracking or rubbing. Pay special attention to high-flex points such as fold joints and wing pivots, where lines may get pinched or stretched. Inspect the planter's frame components for damage or signs of wear.



- 3 Remove the vacuum cover and check for small missing pieces or cracking in the impeller vanes. This can cause issues in creating enough vacuum pressure at the meters. Remember to remove all frame plugs before heading to the field.



- 4 Make sure that the chain tension is correct and that the chains are flexible. Lubricate the chains well. Inspect the chain clutches, lubricate and look for metal wear. Examine the row unit components for wear and accuracy. Use a measuring tape to ensure all row units are spaced correctly. A small offset can lead to big problems during later field operations and at harvest time, especially on larger width planters.

- 5 Check that the double disk openers are still sharp and within the diameter tolerance specified by the manufacturer. Adjust the contact point of the disk openers using the business card check – most commonly this should be 40 mm to 50 mm.



6 Adjust the contact between the gauge wheels and the disk openers so that the gauge wheels are contacting the disks but can still be turned by hand with slight pressure. Inspect the bearings in the wheels. Check the alignment of the closing wheels by setting the planter down on concrete and pulling it forward 5 m. Make sure the closing system wheels are centred over the line that is created on the concrete by the double disk openers.



7 Inspect the vacuum seals and brushes on the meters. Double-check that the correct seed disks, knockouts and double eliminators are installed for the crop you will be planting.



8 Clean seed tube sensors and check the condition of the seed drop tube.

9 When the planter is hooked and in the field planting at the correct planting depth, make sure it is running level.

THE TRACTOR SPRAYER

Before using your agriculture sprayer machine, it is essential to conduct a pre-use inspection. This inspection will help you to identify any potential issues before they become more significant problems.

1 Inspect the tank for any signs of damage, cracks or leaks. Ensure that the tank is properly secured and that all fittings and connections are tight. Make sure that the tank is cleaned properly and that all chemical residue is washed out.



2 Examine the pump for any signs of damage, wear or leaks. Make sure that the pump is properly lubricated and that all fittings and connections are tight. If the sprayer is experiencing low pressure, check the pump for any signs of damage or wear. Calibrate the sprayer by checking the flow rates, pressure levels and nozzle patterns.

3 Check the nozzles for any signs of damage, wear or clogging. If the nozzles are clogged, clean or replace them promptly to prevent damage to the crops. If the sprayer is experiencing low pressure or the spray pattern is out of line, clean or replace any clogged or damaged nozzles and filters. Ensure that nozzle patterns are clean or replace.



4 Inspect the hoses for any signs of damage, wear or leaks. Make sure that the hoses are properly connected and that all fittings are tight. Replace any damaged or worn hoses or fittings. It is important to clean the inside of the hoses as well as the spray-body fittings.

5 Check the filters for any signs of damage, wear or clogging. Clean or replace any clogged or damaged filters. Most importantly, make sure the sprayer is calibrated and that the same colour nozzles are inserted. ■



PIETMAN BOTHA, INDEPENDENT AGRICULTURAL CONSULTANT

Marketing options for small-scale farmers

MARKETING IS A STRUCTURED PROCESS THAT ENTAILS FARMERS GOING THROUGH A SERIES OF STEPS INVOLVING DISTRIBUTORS, MERCHANTS AND AGRICULTURAL DEALERS (ALL BUSINESS ACTIVITIES) BEFORE THEIR PRODUCTS REACH THE FINAL CONSUMER. FOR SMALL-SCALE FARMERS, MARKETING OFTEN ENTAILS SELLING OR EXCHANGING WHAT THEY PRODUCE ON THE FARM TO OTHER FARMERS, NEIGHBOURS OR THE LOCAL COMMUNITY.

Small-scale farmers encounter distinct challenges in accessing markets often including insufficient market information, difficult entry standards for formal markets, inadequate road infrastructure, distant market locations, insufficient municipal services, transportation limitations and inadequate storage systems. This further affects their ability to engage in profitable markets.

Despite these challenges, small-scale farmers remain significant contributors to rural economies and play a vital role in reducing unemployment. To navigate through these challenges, they need to employ efficient diversified marketing strategies.

The creation and execution of a diversified marketing plan is essential for building a successful farming enterprise. Such a strategy enables informed marketing choices, aiding in the management of pricing uncertainties and enhancing market profitability. This article explores effective marketing strategies tailored to maize production in the small-scale farming context.

ALTERNATIVE MARKETING STRATEGIES

Cooperatives: The growth and stability of the grain industry have been significantly attributed to the cooperative business model. This method affords farmers the opportunity to pool resources, maintain market access, share risks and take advantage of economies of scale. These are crucial for preserving rural economies and bargaining strength. Furthermore, when small-scale farmers pool their resources and experience together, they can help each farmer to achieve higher crop yields and better market prices.

Processors/millers: Establishing a relationship with maize processors (millers) can significantly enhance market access for small-scale grain farmers. Processors provide a stable and reliable market outlet for raw grains, ensuring a consistent demand, which reduces the risk of unsold produce and stabilises the income. They often have established distribution networks and market insights that small-scale farmers can leverage to access other new markets and expand their customer base. Additionally, processors may offer technical support, training and guidance on agricultural practices and quality improvement, which helps farmers to meet market requirements and enhance their product offering.

Feedlots: Feedlots provide a steady and consistent demand for grains as livestock feed, ensuring reliable sales and income stability

for farmers. This is because feedlots often purchase grains in bulk, which can lead to more stable pricing and better negotiation power for farmers compared to selling smaller quantities on the open market. Additionally, collaborating with feedlots provides farmers with valuable market insights, access to new opportunities for value-added products such as specialised feed blends or by-products, and potential for long-term contracts that support business growth and sustainability.

Livestock: By feeding maize directly to livestock, farmers can reduce their feed costs and improve the profitability per animal. This cost savings can be substantial, especially during periods of fluctuating feed prices. Utilising maize for livestock feed can create a diversified revenue stream for farmers, tapping into both grain and livestock markets. This integration also promotes sustainable farming practices, as maize residues and by-products from livestock feeding can be recycled back into the soil as organic matter, supporting long-term soil health and fertility.

Local market: Selling to consumers within the farmers' communities can help farmers to retain more of the profit from their harvests, thereby increasing their income margins. Direct sales to local markets also foster stronger relationships with community members, building trust and loyalty. Farmers can adapt their packaging and marketing strategies to meet the local preferences and demand, potentially commanding higher prices for specialty or branded products. Furthermore, participating in local markets enhances visibility and recognition within the community, paving the way for repeat business and word-of-mouth referrals.

CONCLUSION

Enhancing market options for small-scale grain farmers not only strengthens their economic viability but also fosters broader rural development. Farmers' active engagement in market activities should extend beyond just agricultural production by offering opportunities for engagement with millers, feedlots and direct sales to local markets, which are essential for small-scale grain farmers.

By leveraging partnerships with processors and exploring value-added opportunities, small-scale farmers can further optimise their market presence, enhance their profitability and achieve sustainable business growth in the agricultural sector. Implementing a diversified and efficient market system can enhance market participation, stabilise the income and support sustainable agricultural practices among small-scale farmers, thus contributing significantly to rural economic development. ■



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Part 3

Presenting your business plan TO STAKEHOLDERS

IF A FARMER DECIDES TO COMPILE A BUSINESS PLAN HIMSELF OR PAY SOMEONE ELSE TO DO IT, HE REMAINS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROCESS AND THE CONTENT OF THE BUSINESS PLAN. THE FARMER WILL BE THE ONE WHO IMPLEMENTS THE PLAN ON HIS FARM AND LEADS HIS BUSINESS INTO ITS IDEAL FUTURE.

The development of a business plan is not a once-off document writing exercise that a person will submit and forget about. In the previous articles, the definition of a business plan and the reasons why a farmer might need one were covered. The second article explained what should be included in a business plan and provided a framework to be used.

Remember, a business plan represents the roadmap of the future for successfully developing or expanding a farming business. It spells out where the farm is heading and explains how it intends to reach this destination. The farmer should be informed about everything that is included in the roadmap and comfortable that he would be able to execute it.

After a business plan is submitted, financiers or government institutions will do an initial evaluation to see if the plan meets their requirements and if they are interested in funding the business. If they are interested in the business, they will invite the farmer to a meeting to present himself and his business and ask more questions.

BE PREPARED

It is important that the farmer prepares well for this meeting because the impression he makes will have an impact on whether they would be willing to fund his business.

- The following can be done to best prepare for such a presentation:
- Read the business plan and ensure you know what is written in it so that you will be able to address any questions arising from the submitted plan.
 - If you appointed someone to write the plan on your behalf, invite them to the meeting so that they can support you in addressing the questions, especially if it is more technical or financial.
 - Be self-assured and confident that you will be able to implement the business plan and be a good steward of the resources handed to you.
 - Take ownership of the process and do not only rely on other people to make decisions on your behalf. Be part of the process, ask questions and be part of the discussions.

If the business plan/application is turned down, ask the stakeholders to provide feedback on the reasons why they turned it down so that it can be improved for the next time.

Do not be discouraged if the first application is unsuccessful, continue working in the business and improving to become a worthy partner for external stakeholders. ■



YOLANDI KRUGER,
AGRICULTURAL ADVISOR
AT DUNAMUS



Because of their connection to the land, farmers do more to protect and preserve the environment than almost anyone else. They are some of the best environmentalists around.

~ IKE SKELTON (1931 – 2013)
American politician and lawyer



Sclerotinia diseases: *cultural control*

A GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF HOW DISEASES CAUSED BY *SCLEROTINIA SCLEROTIORUM* DEVELOP WILL HELP DETERMINE INTERVENTIONS THAT WILL MITIGATE, DELAY, OR MANAGE THE DISEASE INTENSITY. WHEN ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS ARE COOL AND MOIST, *SCLEROTINIA* INFECTS PLANTS IN TWO WAYS, EITHER BY THE MOST COMMON ENTRY THROUGH THE ROOTS (BY WHITE MOULD ON THE GROUND) OR WOUNDS OR NATURAL OPENINGS, SUCH AS THE FLOWERS, DURING THE FLOWERING STAGE (BY SPORES).

Sclerotinia sclerotiorum is a fungal pathogen causing significant epidemics of canola and soybean stem rot, as well as sunflower head rot. Symptoms associated with *Sclerotinia* diseases are sudden wilting and the stems/heads of infected plants becoming covered in a dense white fungal growth, known as mycelium. Towards the end of the growing season and pathogen lifecycle the mycelium develops into sclerotia, the hard black survival structures. Sclerotia may develop on the inside and outside of the stems, pods or head (**Photo 1**).

This article is the second of two that are an extension of a summary of the 'Tactics to disrupt *Sclerotinia*' article (Visit sagrainmag.co.za or scan the QR code to read the article). The focus of this article is to provide cultural control strategies that can be useful in managing *Sclerotinia* diseases. Cultural control practices include crop rotation, reducing plant density, and practices to reduce spore production and release. These cultural control practices follow key strategies of avoidance, exclusion and eradication (**Figure 1**). Various tactics exist within each of these strategies to manage *Sclerotinia* diseases (Zadoks & Schein, 1979). To read more about the chemical control of *Sclerotinia* diseases, scan the QR code.



Photo: Godfrey Kgatle

1 *Sclerotia* developing from white *Sclerotinia* mould on the stem of soybean plants.

1 Key strategies associated with the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) toolbox.

	Avoidance works towards creating an unfavourable environment for the pathogen and reducing the exposure of a susceptible host to virulent pathogen inoculum.
	Exclusion is designed to reduce the likelihood of pathogen entry into a conducive environment where susceptible host plants are present.
	Eradication targets physically removing already diseased material from plant populations, reducing pathogen viability and persistence.

STRATEGIES

Discussed below are the various tactics within the three key strategies suggested at a recent *Sclerotinia* Research Day:

Avoidance as focus

- *Avoid a dense canopy*

Sclerotinia thrives in a cool and moist environment, particularly at a microclimate level where sclerotia can be found on the soil surface. Avoid the formation of an overly dense soybean canopy. Recent studies on a range of different crops have shown that a canopy can increase disease incidence (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2021).

The canopy provides the ideal microclimate for sclerotia to germinate to form structures that will release and spread infectious spores. A dense canopy is favoured by narrow row width, high plant populations and high soil fertility.

- *Avoid coinciding flowering stage with conducive periods for pathogen*
- Canola, soybean, and sunflower are normally more susceptible to *S. sclerotiorum* from flowering to flowers dying off. Avoid the co-occurrence of spore release during the rainy summer days with flowering. Where possible, plan for the completion of pod formation by the time environmental conditions are conducive for germination of sclerotia. Preferably use registered chemical control just before the flowering period to suppress disease development. Scan the QR code to read 'Sclerotinia diseases: Biological and chemical control'.



Avoid irrigating during the flowering period as this may favour the germination of sclerotia encouraging apothecia development and ascospore release, increasing the risk for disease development. Apothecia are spore-producing structures found on the ground (**Photo 2**).

- *Avoid late planting dates*

Late planting can cause some problems for crops. If producers plant later than recommended for their production region, their crops might still be developing in late March and April when the conditions are colder and dew remains on the crop for extended periods, creating a microclimate favouring the pathogen.



Photo: Lisa Rothmann

2 Spore producing trumpet-like apothecia which develop from sclerotia buried in the soil.



Photo: Lisa Rothmann

3 Beneficial common bird's nest fungi are often mistaken for Sclerotinia-causing apothecia.

Sclerotinia management by exclusion

Use healthy seed

Retained seed can be a risk if infected with mycelium or contaminated with sclerotia which are not removed through sieving. As such, it is recommended to thoroughly clean seed before planting. The purchase of certified seed ensures limiting pathogen presence in fields, as certified seed may not contain more than 0,2% sclerotia, a standard set by the South African National Seed Organisation (SANSOR). Seed treatments should be applied to keep seed as healthy as possible, reducing the risk of disease spreading.

Sclerotinia management by eradication

• Manage the inoculum level.

Inoculum refers to the amount of pathogen (sclerotia and infected plant material) present in the field, posing a risk for disease development. Scouting for the pathogen, i.e., apothecia, throughout the season provides an indicator of disease risk. As apothecia germinate, they release ascospores and under conducive conditions there is greater potential for the onset of disease.

Try and avoid confusing apothecia with non-plant-pathogenic fungi such as the common bird's nest fungus (Photo 3). Regular drone or satellite images during the season may be useful as an overview of the field.

Once symptoms are present in the field, a record of infected areas or 'patches' should be mapped out and maintained, allowing the producer to target future scouting for apothecia, as sclerotia will develop as disease progresses or the season comes to an end.

The inoculum load can be reduced by selectively removing and burning heavily infected plants (if there are only a few). Additionally, crop rotations with non-hosts may reduce the sclerotia build-up and persistence across seasons.

Weed control is important, as many weeds are hosts to *S. sclerotiorum* – those confirmed in South Africa are the common blackjack (*Bidens pilosa*), common cosmos (*Bidens formosum*), pigweed (*Amaranthus deflexus*) and tall khakibos (*Tagetes minuta*). Scan the QR code for more information.



There is no silver bullet in Sclerotinia disease management – an IPM approach to manage sclerotinia stem and head rot is recommended. Select and combine cultural control tactics which suit the production system. In summary: rotation with non-host crops, plant clean or certified seed, increase row spacing or reduce plant populations, practice weed control, and clean implements and harvesters to remove sclerotia. The information in this article supplements the information regarding biological and chemical control by treatment of seeds and spray programmes during the period of greatest susceptibility of the crop (beginning of flowering until the beginning of pod formation) that appeared in the August 2023 edition of *SA Graan/Grain*.

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 UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE.



MADE POSSIBLE BY
 BAYER

Beware of **INKBERRY** near livestock

CESTRUM LAEVIGATUM, OR THE INKBERRY PLANT (ALSO KNOWN AS INKWEED OR NIGHTSHADE), IS AN EVERGREEN SHRUB OF APPROXIMATELY 1 M TO 2 M IN HEIGHT. ALONG COASTAL AREAS IT CAN FORM TREES UP TO 15 M TALL.

The shrub was brought to South Africa as an ornamental plant for gardens and to also serve as a windbreaker. It is known for its elliptical shiny green leaves, green to black olive-shaped berries, thin pale grey bark, yellow trumpet-like flowers and an unpleasant pungent smell if you bruise the leaves and/or stems.

Poisoning from this invasive plant, originally from Brazil, usually occurs among cattle in June and July, when it is drier. During these months, the pasture is usually grazed bare, and cattle then eat this plant in a non-selective manner. At this stage, the concentration of toxins – gitogenin and digitogenin – is at its highest in the green berries of the plant.

Although the shrub was originally found mainly in certain parts of KwaZulu-Natal, it is now found in areas along the Vaal River in the Northern Free State and North West as well. It is easily spread by birds that eat the berry with the seed and excrete it in manure. Berries can be poisonous to cattle, sheep and goats.

SYMPTOMS IN CATTLE

Symptoms of poisoning are typically these of colic, namely restlessness, grinding of teeth and moaning. The animal will kick its belly and crouch. Eye discharge, constipation, poor balance, sunken and staring eyes are also symptoms of this poisoning.

The poison works quickly and often the animals are found dead before any symptoms can be recorded. There is also no treatment for a sick animal, but in cases of poisoning with a low dose, the animal can survive after three or four days with veterinary help.



An inkberry shrub.

PREVENTION

- To prevent cases of poisoning, avoid grazing in camps where inkberry occurs.
- Chemical control of the bush must also be undertaken. A mixture of Browser, crop oil and Ecoblue in water is recommended. The chemical application must be done with a backpack sprayer. It is important to limit the application of the poison to the target plant to prevent it from damaging beneficial trees such as sweet thorn and white stinkwood and consuming unnecessary amounts of expensive products. ■



The berries are extremely poisonous for livestock.



The flowers of the poisonous Cestrum laevigatum plant.

DAWID VAN HEERDEN, JUNIOR ANIMAL SCIENTIST, NWK



Tips to help with good recordkeeping

RECORDS ARE VITAL TOOLS FOR ACHIEVING A MORE ADVANCED LEVEL OF MANAGEMENT. IT ALSO ASSISTS IN IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT. YOU CANNOT MAKE DECISIONS WITHOUT INFORMATION, AS INCORRECT DECISIONS COST YOU MONEY.

HOW TO GET STARTED

- It is important to be able to identify what happened to which animal, so tag and brandmark all animals.
- Records should address the needs of a specific farmer, be easy to understand and must be affordable.
- It is up to the farmer how in-depth records are kept. However, some basics shouldn't be skipped.
- Records should preferably be done electronically, as it is then easier to search for. However, if this is not possible, written documents will also be sufficient.

WHAT TO CAPTURE

- Identification number
- Date of birth
- Breed
- Origin/supplier
- Pregnancy record
- Vaccinations received (withdrawal period, booster date)
- Sickness with date
- Medical treatments (withdrawal period, booster date)

BENEFITS OF RECORDKEEPING

Some of the benefits of keeping records of your livestock are:

1. Effective disease treatment.
2. A track record of diseases allows you to discover unusual animal conditions.
3. Recordkeeping offers a basis to evaluate and select the animals ready to be slaughtered.
4. You can easily identify unproductive cows.
5. It is a way to check inbreeding.

6. You can pinpoint issues in your farming operation.
7. It assists in the formulation of economic feeding approaches.
8. Analysing the financial inflow and outflow makes cost inefficiencies clear so you can economise your operation.
9. Overall improvement in the management of your farming operation.

TRACEABILITY

Traceability is about animal identification to ultimately trace the movement of animals. Although there is no legislation to report animal movements, a farmer shouldn't just move an animal without recording the start and end location to which it is being transported. This has a larger impact on the industry than the farmer realises.

Traceability is important to the farmer for the following reasons:

Market access: Entering the commercial value chain will yield higher per kilogram prices for livestock. In the future, if a farmer wants to access the commercial value chain (and therefore a better price), he will be required to show records for the identification and movement of animals.

Improve herd management: Having a proper recordkeeping system in place and recording the movement of animals to and from your farm will improve the management of your herd and in turn your productivity and income.

Traceability is important to the industry for the following reasons:

Recall: To track the origin of diseases when outbreaks occur in the country – such as foot-and-mouth disease – to contain the disease as fast as possible and more effectively.

Stock theft: Traceability will assist with dealing with stock theft cases and addressing the risk thereof.

Exporting: The industry needs to have a traceability system in place to access higher quality markets/countries, which will yield a premium price for meat.

Economic stability: All the above will assist with stability in the industry. ■

INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE RMIS (RED MEAT INDUSTRY SERVICES)



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NEW REGULATIONS

to avoid harmful products

THE REGISTRAR OF ACT NO. 36 OF 1947'S DECISION IN 2022 TO PHASE OUT ACTIVE INGREDIENTS AND FORMULATIONS THAT MAY POTENTIALLY CAUSE CANCER, GENETIC MUTATION AND DAMAGES TO FERTILITY CAME INTO EFFECT RECENTLY.

On 14 April 2022, the Registrar announced his intent to phase out active ingredients and formulations that meet the criteria of carcinogenicity, mutagenicity and reproductive toxicity (CMR) categories 1A or 1B for the Globally Harmonised System (GHS) of classification and labelling. According to the new regulations, products that meet these criteria will not have their registrations renewed from June 2024.

CMR category 1A refers to active ingredients and/or co-formulants that meet the criteria of being a known human carcinogen, mutagen or reproductive toxin, largely based on human evidence. Category 1B refers to a presumed human carcinogen, mutagen or reproductive toxin, largely based on animal studies.

The process involves discontinuing the registration and sale of products containing these hazardous substances. The Registrar has provided a maximum phase-out period of one year for stock of these remedies to be depleted from warehouses and on farms. These remedies will no longer be registered and cannot be used after 1 June 2025.

SUBSTANCE OF CONCERN

According to the regulations relating to agricultural remedies as promulgated under the *Fertiliser, Farm Feeds, Agricultural Remedies and Stock Remedies Act (Act No. 36 of 1947)* on 25 August 2023, the definition of a substance of concern refers to any substance that has an inherent capacity to cause an adverse effect on humans, animals or the environment and is present or is produced in an agricultural remedy in a sufficient concentration to present risks of such an effect.

Such substances are further defined in the annexure to the regulations. Some of the criteria used to identify substances of concern are based on their intrinsic hazardous properties, according to the GHS, which was implemented through the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* by the Department of Employment and Labour in March 2021.

According to the GHS, the nature of a hazard is assigned by a hazard class, of which there are currently 29. Of these, 17 are physical hazard classes, ten are health hazard classes and two are environmental hazard classes. These classes belong to a hazard group or type, depicted by a pictogram that can be used for several different hazards.

Within these classes, the severity of the hazard is then allocated in terms of a hazard category expressed as a number – for instance, category 1 would be the most severe. Some of these categories are

further sub-divided into divisions, which are expressed as a letter – A, B, C and so forth.

THE WAY FORWARD

Since 1 June 2024, the Registrar may not approve or renew registrations for agricultural remedies identified as substances of concern. Registration holders may, however, apply for derogations that are specific to a tradename and for specific essential uses. Whether these remedies remain available, is dependent on the outcome of the application for derogation after conducting a risk assessment, making it available for public comment and getting approval from the Registrar.

Registration holders needed to inform the Registrar of their intention to conduct risk assessments and seek derogations for the temporary extension of registrations by 31 May 2024.

If an agricultural remedy is classified as a substance of concern due to the hazard classification of a co-formulant in it, and not the active ingredient, the registration holder could either replace the co-formulant with a less hazardous co-formulant or conduct a risk assessment and apply for a derogation. If none of these routes are followed, the remedy must be phased out.

Registration holders could also contest the hazard classification of their remedies if they have the necessary data to have the remedy reclassified. Should such an application be successful, the remedy will be exempted from the requirements of a substance of concern and will likely stay on the market for all registered uses.

The converse could also apply, namely if data becomes available to the registration holder that classifies a remedy as a substance of concern, but which was not classified as such by the sources used in the original classification, then that remedy will be phased out.

In all other cases, remedies that are classified as substances of concern and for which registration holders will not apply for a derogation, will be phased out.

Please consult with the relevant registration holders for more information regarding which of their products (specific tradenames) will be available for which time period and for which essential uses.

Please note: The information in this article is based on CropLife SA's interpretation of promulgated acts, regulations and notices as received from the Registrar of Act No. 36 of 1947 and does not constitute a legal opinion. CropLife SA, its members and staff shall not be held liable for any damages, commercial or otherwise, to any parties as a result of their actions or interpretation of this position statement. ■



SA GRAAN/GRAIN EDITORIAL TEAM. FIRST PUBLISHED ON WWW.SAGRAINMAG.CO.ZA ON 2 JULY 2024.

Grain SA assures new ministries of partnership commitment

GRAIN SA ASSURED THE NEW MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURE AND LAND REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT THE ORGANISATION'S PARTNERSHIP COMMITMENT – A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE FOCUS ON GRAIN PRODUCERS, ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND A CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE NATIONAL AND RURAL ECONOMY.

Grain SA eagerly anticipates depoliticised government service delivery, with a focus on public service efficiency and international competitiveness. This organisation believes that the Government of National Unity's focus on nation building and inclusivity through economic growth will support the different departments to achieve goals as captured within the various well-developed plans.

The agricultural sector has a substantial capacity to sustain and create jobs in rural areas, especially if all the departments focus on the commercialisation of farmers and fostering an export-led agricultural sector. Agriculture already contributes significantly to social and economic job creation and growth in the broader economy and can do more with the right support.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) in the South African agricultural sector can play a pivotal role in driving growth, enhancing productivity and fostering sustainability. By combining and optimising resources, these partnerships can improve service delivery and aid in developing the necessary infrastructure, such as irrigation systems, storage facilities and transport networks. Infrastructure is an essential component for agricultural success.

The adoption of modern technologies can revolutionise farming practices. Effective partnerships will stimulate and promote the use of technology in agriculture, enhancing productivity and sustainability. Combining resources will improve the focus on training and skills development, equipping producers and workers with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in today's competitive agricultural landscape. Working together can help South Africa to gain better access to grain and oilseed markets, both locally and internationally, ensuring fair prices and wider distribution of produce.

Given the inherent risks in South African agriculture, forming a crucial partnership to implement comprehensive crop insurance schemes is essential. This collaboration would leverage the private sector's efficiency, innovation and capital with the public sector's regulatory framework and extensive reach, effectively mitigating risks for farmers.

Activating rural economies requires a comprehensive approach that includes prioritising infrastructure, often overlooked on the national agenda, and promoting local and rural manufacturing. It is essential to support rural communities through training and to create business opportunities that are linked to urban markets. To counteract or slow down strong urbanisation, local opportunities must be created, infrastructure connections to urban markets must be established, and safety and security must be ensured.

Agriculture is the backbone of the national economy, with substantial potential to contribute even more to the country's growth and development. This potential can be realised through robust PPPs and the creation of an enabling environment that supports the agricultural sector's expansion and innovation. The future of South African agriculture depends on collective efforts to nurture and sustain this vital sector. ■

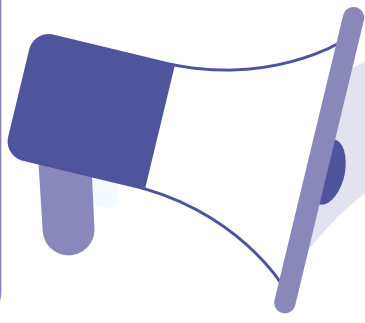


John Steenhuisen (left), the newly appointed minister of agriculture, at NAMPO 2024. With him is Dr Dirk Strydom (right), managing director of NAMPO (Pty) Ltd.

GRAIN SA PRESS RELEASE, 3 JULY 2024



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HAVE YOU HEARD?

GRAIN SA ABROAD

Lerato Ramofoko, agricultural economics intern, represented Grain SA's Applied Economics and Member Services Department at the 2024 International Grains Council (IGC) Grains Conference in London in June this year. This year's conference focussed on global trade's critical role amidst volatile markets and food security challenges. Grain SA's participation emphasised the organisation's commitment to stay ahead in global grain discussions, fostering collaborations and propelling South Africa's grain industry growth.



NEWS FROM THE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

Grain SA's research team hosted a Weed Science Day on 26 June to establish a collaborative platform where the various stakeholders could share knowledge, discuss challenges relating to weeds and potentially foster collaboration to address the issues that were identified. Weed management remains one of the most significant challenges in agriculture, with weeds such as *Amaranthus*, *Lolium* and *Conyza* becoming an increasing cause for concern within the farming community, particularly due to emerging herbicide resistance observed in certain weed species.



The research team and the University of the Free State (UFS) met to finalise the last preparations for Phase 3 of Nixtamalisation. This partnership will focus on the following:

- The UFS Department of Consumer Sciences will develop new recipes and products with high nutritional value. For example, they have developed corn chips. Imagine farmers being able to locally produce their own 125 g corn chips at a cost of R3 and sell them locally, instead of relying on expensive retail brands, which are ten times more costly. There are plans to make tortilla, nacho and taco recipes.
- The PGP Farmer Development Team will then train farmers on how to prepare the various recipes.
- A few female smallholder farmers will be selected and trained more closely on entrepreneurship and business development. All this aims to boost agro-processing and rural economies.

NEW RESTRICTIONS ON ANIMAL MOVEMENT

New restrictions on animal movements, particularly in the Eastern Cape, were announced in the *Government Gazette* in July.

- No cloven-hoofed animals, derived animal products or genetic material of these animals may be moved from, to or within the disease control areas of the Eastern Cape, except under the authority of a state veterinary permit as stipulated in the regulations of the *Animal Diseases Act (Act No. 35 of 1984)*.
- The movement of live cattle, sheep and goats in the disease control areas of KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo is restricted, except with the necessary permit obtained from a state veterinarian.

Please remember that animals transported elsewhere in the country must be accompanied by an owner's declaration, confirming the origin and health status of the animals, as well as a signed undertaking from the recipient at the destination. Scan the QR code to read more.



A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE

To celebrate 60 years of existence, the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) campus of Plant Protection embarked on a journey to honour its past, present and future employees who contributed to the legacy of this scientific establishment. Scan the QR code and enjoy this trip down memory lane. ■



Corner Post

BY LOUISE KUNZ, ASSISTANT EDITOR

SIMON SHABANGA (53), WHO FARMS IN THE CAROLINA DISTRICT IN MPUMALANGA, WAS A NOMINEE IN THE 2023 POTENTIAL COMMERCIAL CATEGORY OF PGP'S FARMER OF THE YEAR COMPETITION. HE IS GRATEFUL TO THE PHAHAMA GRAIN PHAKAMA (PGP) TEAM FOR EVERYTHING HE HAS LEARNED THROUGH THE FARMER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME.

The farm Welgevonden, where Simon farms, belongs to his brother, Joseph, but the brothers work on a profit share structure where Simon is in charge of the crop production. He also shares in the profits of the other businesses – cattle, sheep, goats and chickens. Joseph works in transportation in eMalahleni (Witbank) and tends to the livestock side of the farming. Any profit made through the livestock is put back into the crop production.

To Simon, who is also the chairman of the Carolina Study Group, the theory and practical knowledge that are shared during training and study group sessions go hand in hand and help farmers to understand better. 'Theory and practical knowledge are needed. I learned everything I know from the programme – everything I do from soil correction to harvesting, is a result of the training and practical sessions and the sharing of knowledge during farm visits. As the knowledge came, the understanding came – and then came the success.'

Simon has a rotational planting system on 140 ha of arable land. Last season he realised a yield of 7 t/ha on maize and depending on the field where the soybean was planted, between 1,5 t/ha and 2 t/ha on soybean. Due to the drought, he was not very positive about the results of this season's crops. 'My crops are not looking so good this year. It has been a very dry season, a very stressful time for me and the plants.'

SIMON'S STORY

WHAT IS IMPORTANT FOR CROP PRODUCTION?

The most important thing is soil correction, which you can only do through soil sampling. The roots must be able to reach the deeper layers, where the moisture and nutrients are. Secondly, you get out what you put in – so if you don't feed your plants with the necessary fertiliser and nitrogen, the crops won't develop into healthy plants. Thirdly, for healthy crops, you need to control weeds, pests and diseases. Without healthy crops, you won't realise a good yield.

WHAT HAS CONTRIBUTED TO YOUR SUCCESS?

The things that have made me successful are the things I learned in the hard times – to trust God and to diversify. We invested in livestock – cattle, sheep and goats – and added chickens as another source of generating extra income. In the difficult times, the cattle carried us through and provided the necessary funds to plant the following season. Without diversity there would have been no success. A farmer needs to trust in God because He makes things grow and gives us success.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR FARMING DREAM?

I want to leave a legacy for my children that their father contributed to food security. ■

3 TOP TIPS

1. Get up early and be prepared for the day.
2. Be a hands-on farmer who is on the farm.
3. Make sure you know what is going on with your crops and your animals. Check every day that nothing is wrong.



FARM FACTS

- Farm:** Welgevonden
Nearest town: Carolina
Region: Mpumalanga
Size: 1 000 ha, plants 140 ha, the rest is used for grazing
Type of farming operation: Mixed – plants maize and soybeans and has a Bonsmara herd, which is sold on auction. Also owns sheep, goats and chickens.

PGP'S CONTRIBUTION

- Joined Grain SA in 2012
- Study group – chairman of the Carolina Study Group

Training courses completed:

- Has completed several courses including:
- Introduction to maize and soybean production
 - Introduction to soybean production
 - Business ethics and farm management
 - Maintenance on tractors and farm implements, farming for profit

A mentor's view:

Timon Filter, PGP mentor and trainer, says Simon is someone who is always walking the extra mile for the farmers in his study group and anyone in need.

'This is probably why he has been the study group chairperson for many years. He takes time from his busy schedule to drive around to take inputs to the farmers if they couldn't fetch them. Although he is aspiring to reach greater heights, he will never forget to reach down and pull others up along with him.'



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A programme that is changing lives



Helping farmers become better farmers

IN SOUTH AFRICA A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF GRAIN IS BEING PRODUCED BY DEVELOPING FARMERS. THE PHAHAMA GRAIN PHAKAMA (PGP) FARMER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (FDP) IS TAILOR MADE FOR FARMERS OF DIFFERENT LEVELS WHO WANT TO KEEP ON PRODUCING GRAIN PROFITABLY AND SUSTAINABLY, ACHIEVING OPTIMAL YIELDS.

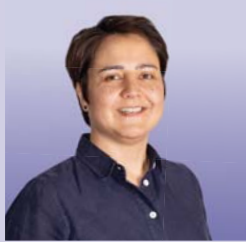
The programme offers a clear roadmap to all farmers – subsistence, smallholder, potential commercial and new era commercial farmers. Up to date and modern information is shared during farm visits, study group sessions, farmer's days and training opportunities.

The FDP team understands that development is a process and not an event and track the development of each farmer who joins the programme. The team has a good understanding of the industry and its challenges. They train, teach and expose farmers in all grain producing areas of South Africa to modern farming methods and facilitate access to appropriate mechanisation, inputs and or production financing. Through being in the field and working at grassroots every day, this team brings experience, knowledge, expertise and a commitment to equipping farmers towards better agricultural practices as well as building a relevant network of support. ■

MEET THE TEAM



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PGP advisor



Liana Stroebel
Operations and training manager



Jean Adams
Secretary: PGP

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Graeme Engelbrecht
KwaZulu-Natal



Nathie Mazibuko
Dundee



Lanelie Swanepoel
Vryheid



Johan Kriel
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Jacques Roux
Eastern Free State



Eric Wiggill
Eastern Cape



Luthando Diko
Kokstad



Cwayita Mpotyi
Mthatha



Harvesting results are in

THE Phahama Grain Phakama (PGP) offices are busy planning for the next season. While the team is identifying new and current farmers for the next season's projects, farm visits still had to be done. A total of 73 farm visits took place between 12 June and 8 July in the following regions: Dundee, the Eastern and Western Free State, Kokstad, Louwsburg and Mbombela.



Mentor Johan Roux visited Matshinini Madinda Jabulani. The sunflower crop was harvested and Matshinini realised an average yield of 1 t/ha. Planning for the new season was also discussed.

Oujan Masiu harvested 71 t of sunflower and about 50 t of maize on his farm in the Eastern Free State.



When Eric Wiggill (regional development manager from the Kokstad office) visited Nomlala Siyabonga, harvesting began when the tapkar and two trucks from Kokstad Milling arrived. Nomlala realised an average of 5,5 t/ha on 35 ha.



Mentor Timon Filter from the Louwsburg region visited Siph Vilikazi, who is the chairperson of his study group. Siph credits Grain SA for his farming knowledge and is very thankful for what Grain SA is doing for the country's farmers.

GOOD NEWS FOR STUDY GROUPS

DURING June and July, the PGP team visited 58 study groups to inform them about the next round for the Beyond Abundance (BA) Project. There was some good news for the farmers – this season they will pay less for their inputs than last season.



The Manthole Study Group with their Pula magazines!



At the Dundonald Study Group, farmers were encouraged to participate in the BA Project. They were informed about the content of the input packages they would receive and the cut-off date for payments.



Graeme Engelbrecht, regional development manager, gives a demonstration of a maize thresher at the Isandlwana Study Group. ■

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