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Extension Suite Online – What's the Fuss All?

Piet Van Zyl

The days when farmers practiced monoculture and everyone, including agricultural extension officers and advisors had lots of time, are long gone. Today, time is money - even on the farm, and 3 000 extensionists in South Africa, must render services between 1.5 and 1.8 million emerging farmers and small-scale producers.

These producers in the developing world survive, maintain and improve their food security through diversification and multiple on-farm income streams by utilising available land to produce crops and animal products - exploiting every opportunity to increase yields and incomes to survive and to grow. To manage all this, they depend on agricultural extension advice from their governments - who in turn need to capacitate agricultural advisors with knowledge on a diverse range of production and agricultural related information. In South Africa, Extension Suite Online® (ESO) is an integral part of the ICT Pillar of the Extension Recovery Programme (ERP).

As a web-based agricultural decision support system, ESO provides extension advisors with plant and animal production information - from soil preparation to post-harvest and market information. Market information includes prices on fresh produce (FPM), grain (SAFEX), oilseeds, roots, and tubers, and animal produce market prices include beef, mutton, chevon, broilers, pork, milk, wool and eggs. ESO also offers geo-referenced Regional Data modules with climatic and infrastructure data, as well as a Farm Information System.

The Extensionist to farmer ratio of 1:500 (600) sums up the dilemma of extension in our country. Officers must provide answers immediately and accurately - the sheer size of their client-base makes second visits, follow-

ups, and corrective actions almost impossible. Problems raised, require them to revert to their knowledge, experience, and training. If they do not have the answer, ESO must provide immediately available, relevant, correct, updated, easily understood and practical information.

To measure the relevance and value of a decision support system, user statistics is one place to start. But the Number of Unique Visitors, Number of Visits, Number of Pages Visited, Time Spent, and the Amount of Data Downloaded, represents only one aspect.

The impact that quick, relevant and correct answers make on job creation, food security, financial stability, and the improvement in the relationship between farmers and extensionists remain the best yardstick. Diligent extensionists use ESO, and they use it extensively and are the people who continuously testify to the real value of Extension Suite Online. And in these terms, ESO hasn't stopped growing since June 2010.

Those who do not use ESO require re-training from Manstrat AIS, and motivation and support from their immediate superiors - helping towards service delivery improvements, and with it, food security, job creation, and prosperity, for those who need it most.



Piet Van Zyl

ESO WALLPAPERS

**DOWNLOAD YOUR FREE
DESKTOP WALLPAPER TODAY!**

Liven up your computer's desktop with an Extension Suite Online® wallpaper. Download wallpapers directly from the ESO newsletter e-mail or on the ESO media website: media.esuite.co.za



Tips and tools for advisors

Decision making guidelines

Portia Phahlane

As humans, we are inclined to put off decisions - we fear decisions that might be unpopular or cause us (or others) discomfort. Unfortunately, decision-making is part of life - essential for success, and a primary function of management. Many woes of commercial, smallholder and small-scale farmers can be linked to a lack of proper decision-making. To assist farmers with their decision-making processes, extension practitioners can look at the following:

- Identify the problem/opportunity
- Analyse the problem/opportunity
- Gather data and information about the problem/opportunity
- Analyse and generate alternative courses of action/solutions
- Evaluate alternative courses of action/solutions
- Select and implement the best option
- Conduct a follow up on action taken.

Remember, the more relevant information one has available, the more informed the decisions tend to be.

Provincial ESO Top User Article

Portia Phahlane

Our interviewee for this ESO Newsletter issue is Sindile Magoda from the Eastern Cape DRDAR. Sindile is not only a top Extension Advisor but is also one of the most prolific Provincial and National top users of Extension Suite Online.

From February 2011 to November 2016, Sindile has been amongst the Top Ten users in the Eastern Cape no less than 52 times (including 23 1st places)! During 2016 alone, he won 6 Provincial Top User honours, and has, to date won the ESO National Top User award 4 times already. This is no mean feat and something that Sindile and his provincial colleagues can be proud of.

We asked this remarkable Extensionist some questions:

Q: What thrills you most about your work?
A: "The most fulfilling thing as an Extension Practitioner is being able to assist farmers to work productively and seeing the positive impact on their livelihood. That makes me sleep well at night - knowing that my farmers are doing well."

Q: Which sections on ESO do you access the most?

A: "As a regular ESO user, I like to keep up to date with information. I mainly use the Animal Production Module, and particularly the Cattle - beef and dairy, Sheep - mutton and wool, Goat - meat, dairy and fibre, Poultry - broilers, layers and breeders, and Pig sections more often as I work with livestock farmers. ESO further assists me and my clients with more general challenges that they encounter in their farming activities. I also frequent Market prices under the Economics section for markets information."

Q: Please share a practical example of this with us.

A: "About a month ago during one of my routine farm visits, a pig farmer from the Ekuphumleni farm (Kouga local municipality), asked me for the latest pork prices. I whipped out my laptop, and we quickly checked on ESO. Not only could I provide him with the most recent prices of pork, but could also show him price trends and previous month's prices, allowing him to make an informed decision regarding the best time to sell his weaners for better prices."

Q: What advice would you give colleagues to help them become better extension officers?

A: "I would tell them that from experience, one can improve one's self-confidence when dealing with farmers by using a system like ESO as it provides a wide spectrum of relevant and correct information at the click of a button."

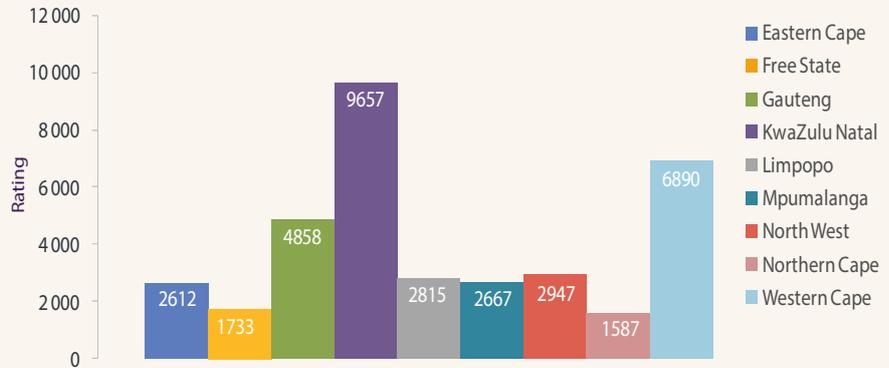


Sindile Magoda

EXTENSION SUITE ONLINE® UTILISATION: November 2016

Extension Suite Online® (ESO) utilisation is determined through monitoring user utilisation in the nine provinces and by attaching values to Visits, Pages Visited and Duration of Visits; a rating is calculated to establish the ESO National Top User of the Month.

ESO PROVINCIAL TOP USER GRAPH



ESO PROVINCIAL TOP USERS

Province	Name
Eastern Cape	Mthobisi Zuma
Free State	Annie Seutloadi
Gauteng	Sizwe Nzuzo
KwaZulu Natal	Dumisani Nzama
Limpopo	Louis Khomola
Mpumalanga	Lucas Shabangu
North West	Mompati Gabanakgosi
Northern Cape	Ernest Oitsing
Western Cape	Alicia Thomas



CLIMATE WATCH Issue #10

October started off with mild temperatures over Gauteng after light snowfalls on the Drakensberg mountains, but temperatures gradually increased towards extremely hot conditions - in the high thirties - by the end of the first week. Thunderstorms announced the summer rainfall season on the first day of October 2016 over. [Read more...](#)

Read the full article on the **Manstrat AIS website.**

www.manstrat.co.za - *Climate Watch*

TIPS:

Tech Tools to Better Automate Your Life

Mary Mavengere

Store documents with Google Drive, Dropbox, Skydrive and Box

Traditionally documents have been stored on laptops, desktops, tablets and mobile phones by default. As a result, documents were prone to getting lost when devices malfunctioned or were lost. Keeping documents centrally on cloud helps you to store and retrieve them from anywhere, and ensures that they are never lost.

Track daily tasks with Todoist

Manage your work by keeping track of your daily tasks. This can be done digitally using a solution called

Todoist. Todoist is a web service, accessible via any browser. The interface is simple, intuitive, and uniform across all devices. I can now create, check, and update my tasks on my Macbook, Chromebook, Android phone, iPad, and Nexus 7. The best part is email creation of tasks.

Automate your day to day with IFTTT

IFTTT is an acronym for "if this, then that". What it does is, if for example if you update your facebook profile picture, IFTTT will automatically change your Twitter profile picture to the same new photo. It can also be set up to automatically, save every email attachment in Gmail to Dropbox, thus saving you a lot of time.

Do you have any technology related questions? Send them to newsletter@esuite.co.za, with your name, province and the question and we will answer them in a



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