



This edition



Future Challenges to African Food Production



Tips and tools: Companion Planting



ESO tip: When "sharing" on social media can go wrong



National ESO Top User: Sindlile Magoda

Future Challenges to African Food Production

Dr J. Lapham

It is estimated that the global population will increase from its current level of 7.3 billion to people to 9.7 billion by 2050, an increase of 2.4 billion or 33%. Of this increase, 1.3 billion will occur in Africa.

Another way of looking at this is that the world's population, excluding Africa, will increase by only 18% by 2050, while Africa's population will double.

At least 65% of Africa's population is involved in agriculture in some way, and it will be critical to improve productivity not only to feed people but also to drive economic development – i.e. addressing the hurdles faced by small-scale farmers who are the producers of over 80% of the food on the continent.

Small-scale farmers inherently adopt "low-input, low-return" farming because it is a less risky strategy. Only in extreme conditions are they unable to feed themselves. However, most often they only manage to subsist; in other words, they are trapped in a system that can be sustained but only at a subsistence level.

The means for improving production are evident. For decades, various technological improvement programmes have been promoted - improved varieties, fertilisers, irrigation systems, low-cost, sustainable organic solutions, and more – all with very limited success. However, all these require additional financing which small-scale farmers cannot afford and do their best to avoid with their "low-input, low-return, risk-avoidance strategy". The alternative is subsidies and assistance which helps, but at the same time generate a network of administrative and rent-seeking problems. For instance, it is estimated that only 11% of subsidised fertiliser reaches the target farmers in Nigeria.

However, circumstances are changing in Africa, and there is a new impetus from the private sector who are more aware of the agricultural needs and potential; a clearer vision is being imposed by prominent African business leaders on development strategies. More emphasis is

being placed on implementing business models which empower small-scale farmers throughout the value chain but particularly in the marketplace. These models are aimed at ensuring a more equitable distribution of returns, more price stability in the market, better coordination between farmers and eventually more affordable and easier access to finance. For small-scale farmers, this reduces the risk that they so intensely avoid with their "low-input, low-return" strategy.

- For example, price stability in the marketplace is improved by warehousing grains. A minimum price is guaranteed (underwritten by the government), and the facility is managed by the private sector; the result is small-scale farmers can sell when they need the money and obtain the guaranteed price. Their returns are predictable, planning is improved, banks have more confidence in their financial projections, and are willing to lend at more affordable rates.
- Price stability is also achieved with clusters of fresh produce growers having access to processors who require consistent and regular supply and are willing to pay constant prices. The producers win by avoiding intermediaries as transactions are a direct exchange between the producer and the market.
- EcoFarmer (Zimbabwe), has partnered with maize seed suppliers to offer crop insurance at a rate of a few dollars per hectare when seed is bought. With insurance, farmers are more inclined to purchase the seed because crop failure through drought or flood is compensated.

These are some of the measures aimed at enabling small-scale farmers an escape from the "low-return, low-income" subsistence system in which they are trapped. They all form part of the overall agri-business development models being promoted by private sector leaders in cooperation with the public sector in many countries in Africa. However, as is the case in any situation, some farmers will embrace the opportunity and succeed, and some, unfortunately, will not.

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Tips and tools for advisors

Companion Planting

Portia Phahlane

Companion planting is defined as planting of two or more crops together for mutual benefit. Specific benefits include; improved pest control, and enhanced growth. It is also a great way to save space and obtain plentiful, healthy harvests. Expanding diversity in the field and incorporating plants with particularly useful characteristics are both part of successful companion planting.

Companion planting produce higher yields of each crop and the crops are better able to defend themselves against disease and insects.

One should take care to plant compatible and complementary plants together to prevent hindering their growth and making them more susceptible to diseases and pests. Knowledge about compatibility of plants is therefore required to plan companion crop planting correctly for maximum results.

Provincial ESO Top User

Portia Phahlane

Our guest this month is Jacobus Sedrick Visser from Niekerkshoop in the Northern Cape. Niekerkshoop lies 40 kilometres north of Prieska in the Siyathemba Local Municipality, Pixley ka Seme District Municipality. Sedrick incidentally, was born in the very town where he now represents the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development as an Agricultural development officer. His District Manager is Ms Mokgalagadi.

Our interviewee holds a B-tech in Agricultural Management and has been with the department for three years. While most of the farmers that he works with, farm with livestock – small and large – he also gives agricultural extension advice to farmers on plant production. Sedrick services around 200 farmers in groups, six cooperatives and three associations in Niekerkshoop and Grogblershoop. The latter falls under the ZF Mgcawu District Municipality.

Sedrick started to take notice of Extension Suite Online during a departmental meeting in 2015 where managers emphasised that officials should use the tool. He was then registered and started using the system occasionally. He now uses ESO more frequently, and the system helps him to broaden his knowledge – the knowledge that he now uses to advise his farmers. Sedrick says that the full spectrum of information helps him tremendously.

Sedrick sees Extension Suite Online as a working tool that assists officials in agriculture to enhance their agricultural knowledge and one that helps extension officers to help farmers with information as and when it is needed. He recommends the system to all his colleagues.

National ESO Top User

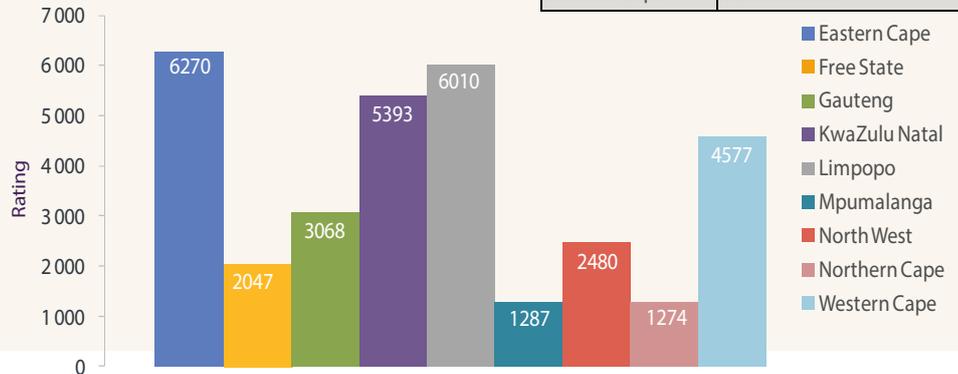


Sindlile Magoda

EXTENSION SUITE ONLINE® UTILISATION: February 2017

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	Sindlile Magoda
Free State	Mofokeng Paulus
Gauteng	Sizwe Nzuza
KwaZulu Natal	Dumisani Nzama
Limpopo	Morongwe Salome Mahasha
Mpumalanga	Petunia Magolela
North West	Tsholanang Molosiwa
Northern Cape	Jacobus Sedrick Visser
Western Cape	Riaan Nowers

CLIMATE WATCH

Issue #13

January 2017 started off with extremely hot temperatures over most areas of the summer rainfall region. Heavy rain brought welcome relief at the end of the first week of January (7th) with flooding reported in some areas, including Centurion (40mm), and Heidelberg (80mm). Read more...



Read the full article on the Manstrat AIS website.

www.manstrat.co.za - Climate Watch

ESO TIPS:

When "sharing" on social media can go wrong

Deon Erasmus

There are some things you should never share on social networks. Here is 5 of them:

1. Reconsider telling friends when and where you will be going on vacation, you never know who else is interested.
2. Smart phones can track your GPS location, which could be posted to your social media platform and this could have dire consequences.

3. Don't air grievances against employers, co-workers, friends or family members - if they don't see it, someone will make sure they do.
4. Not everything posted on social media is legal, i.e. posting that you drove home drunk, might have repercussions.
5. Being proud of a new gadget or toy is nice, but there are people on social media who are willing and able to take it from you.

So, be careful of what you post - the internet is public domain - and you have no control once your opinions and thoughts are out there.

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 following newsletter edition.

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