Extension Suite Online™
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

DATA MAINTENANCE TEAM

The information contained in Extension Suite Online currently exceeds 3 GB, comprising of almost 732,000 lines of coding, and which roughly translates to more than 15, 000 A4 size pages of data.

A significant portion of all this information consists of dynamic data which needs regular maintenance and up-date in order for ESO to retain its relevance, sustainability and eventual value. Data maintenance therefore is an important function executed by Manstrat Agricultural Intelligence Solutions (AIS).

To execute this vital function, almost all researchers; economists; statisticians; as well as animal, plant and GIS scientists; and IT specialists are in one or other capacity involved in the daily maintenance of ESO.

The Maintenance Team therefore… is the Manstrat Team.

Piet van Zyl

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

It is no profit to have learned well, if you neglect to do well.

Publilius Syrus

This issue

To receive the Extension Suite Online newsletter via email, register your details on:

www.newsletter.esuite.co.za

Become an information partner

Extension Suite Online ™ is at a stage where many new users are accessing the system every day; where they are using information that has been stored in ESO during the initial stages of adaptation for the Provinces; and where some are asking for more information.

Although Manstrat is continually building the databases, and populating it with information based on user requests, it should be noted that every user of ESO is regarded as a crucial part of the Knowledge Base and that it is, at least theoretically, possible for each user to make subject matter orientated contributions to the system.

Such contributions can be sent to the Manstrat Information Centre where it will be reviewed by our Subject Matter Experts and published in the appropriate section of ESO, together with an acknowledgement to its author(s) and institution(s).

Why don't you become an information partner to ESO? Here is an excellent opportunity to either write a short article on a subject close to your heart; or to develop a short information pamphlet; or to create a new tool or describe a technique used by you as an Extensionist in agriculture. You can even gather all those old information booklets and "almost lost" archived materials and send it to us for inclusion in the appropriate section of ESO. There are so many older – and still relevant - documents hidden away in the system.

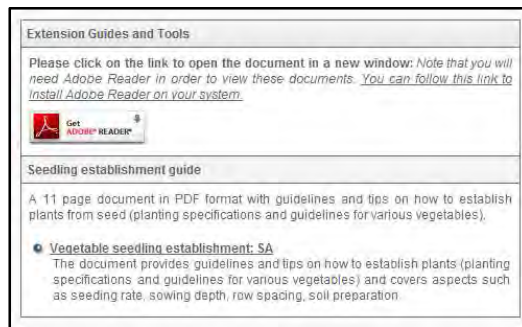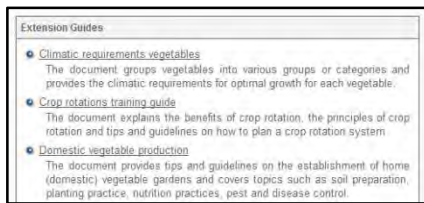When I started out on this article I briefly calculated the following:

- If each of the registered users on ESO would make just a simple one-page contribution, an additional 1 400 new pages would be added to the system.
- If these users are able to do the same each quarter, 5 600 pages would be added to the system annually.
- These contributions would have a positive impact throughout the country since whatever advice you have for your province may also be relevant to other users in other provinces. It would give at least 1 400 new authors access to a system where their published work is distributed and read by others.

There you have it, Extension Suite Online is not only a Decision Support System, it is also a system that allows you – the user – to contribute and be recognised for your contribution. All users are welcome to send their contributions to Piet van Zyl at the Manstrat Information Centre. Piet can be contacted at piet@manstrat.co.za.

Dr Roelof de Villiers

Tools, tips and guides in ESO

The various guides provide not only scientific information on the subject but also practical tips for on-farm procedures.

The **"Tools, Tips and Guides"** section can be accessed directly wherever the user is logged into Extension Suite Online. It is a **tool,** enabling quick access to **extension guides, learner guides, technical information** and **practical tips** that are normally presented at the end of every module. However, it is grouped into more general and different categories. A good example of this is the **"Legislation"** section which combines regulations on the post-harvest handling of produce (HACCP, Globalgap), irrigation, permissible pesticide residue level in produce, requirements for organic certification and other similar guides.

Similarly the **"Crop Specific"** option within Tools, Tips and Guides, groups all information for the specific crop that has been selected initially. This will include technical guides with production and post-harvesting information as well as budgets for production of the crop (specific to the province). The **"Economics"** section provides guides from that section, together with information on marketing of the specific crop or commodity that the user may have selected. For example, in the **horticulture** module Tools, Tips and Guides provide, under the "Economics" option, information on horticulture marketing, export and the industry as a whole.

The options **"Controlled Environment"**, **"Crop Protection", "Irrigation", "Nutrition and Soils"** and **"Organic Production"** present all the information on these subjects to the user in alphabetical order. There is no need for the user to search through a number of steps in order to find the relevant topic or a specific guide. The various guides provide not only scientific information on the subject but also practical tips for on-farm procedures. For example, under "Nutrition and Soils" there is instruction for taking of soil samples as well as a **practical guide** to testing the soil texture and interpretation of how the soil should be treated.

Dr John Lapham

TECHNOLOGY TIPS *by Francois van der Merwe*

Security details

Upon first login to Extension Suite Online, a user will be prompted to change his or her security details, of which the password is the most important. This procedure was put in place in order to protect the owner (the different provincial departments of agriculture) from unauthorized access. During this process the user is also prompted to select a security question and to type the answer to the selected question, which will assist the user authentication process in case a user has forgotten his or her password. Changes to the security details can also be made once logged into ESO under the My Profile section. It is important to keep track of changes made to the security details, since these details are a user's "key" to logging into Extension Suite Online.

The African Green Revolution Forum (AGRF)

African heads of state, industry representatives, the international donor community and farmers will meet in Ghana in the first week of September to create an action plan on the acceleration of a Green Revolution in Africa. It is the first time that the forum will be held in Africa and it is expected to be one of the continent's major gatherings of both public and private players to focus solely on agriculture development.

Mr Kofi Annan (Chairman of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa - AGRA who will chair the conference), voiced the high expectations for the event as follows "we will be looking to governments for leadership to create an environment that will enable agriculture to prosper and grow and we will be looking to the private sector to drive and sustain that growth - working together we can achieve a food secure and prosperous Africa." It is trusted that these deliberations will be successful and will establish best practice models for public-private-partnerships as it is envisaged as the most suitable approach for rolling out ESO to other parts of the African continent.

Jantus van der Linden

Extension Suite Online™
HOW TO

Gross Margin Budgets
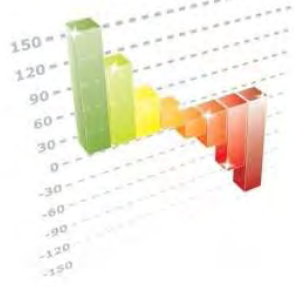
Enterprise Budgets:

The **Enterprise Budget** section falls under the **Economics** module of the ESO. Within the **Enterprise Budget** are two sub sections titled **Provincial combuds** and **Gross margin budgets**, as shown on the adjacent image.

These provide both information and functions for ESO users. The use of the **Gross margin budget** is explained in the accompanying article. **Provincial combuds** refer to the commodity budgets developed by each individual province. The actual combuds supplied by the provinces for use on ESO are attached at the bottom of the provincial combud section under the heading **Extension Guides**. These can be opened by clicking on them and are presented in a PDF format that is printable.

One of the objectives in developing the combuds was to standardize terminology to enable easy comparisons and interpretation of the data. This is outlined in the document titled *"Agicultural economics concepts"* which is also under the **Extension Guides**. The combuds available are for both annual and perennial crops. For annual crops, obviously only one combud is presented for a specific crop. The budgets for perennial crops are analyzed over a number of years until the costs and the incomes stabilize. This means there can be several budgets for one particular perennial crop. For example, if it takes five years from initial establishment of a plantation crop to the time when the cost of production and incomes are relatively constant, then there will be 5 annual combuds for that particular crop (with the final budget being from year 5 to 20, for example).

Dr John Lapham

The **Gross margin budget** function is found in the **Economics** module under the side bar heading **Enterprise Budget**. The **Gross margin budget** will be displayed for whichever crop has been selected. The question is, however, what is the **Gross margin budget** and how can it be used? The budget is defined as the gross revenue for the crop selected less the directly allocatable variable costs or more simply, the gross income less the total cost of producing the crop.

The information displayed for the particular crop is the average estimated costs and income for the crop. This is displayed initially as a budget summary, followed by the details of various costs and how they are compiled.

Obviously circumstances are different for every farmer. It is possible to enter and change figures such as the cost per unit of input (e.g. cost per litre of chemical) or the number of units used (e.g. number of labourers). Furthermore the farmer can select the most appropriate piece of machinery from a variety of implements used for land preparation, fertilization, crop spraying and cultivation. In this way a very specific budget for a particular farmer can be compiled (and printed out when needed).

All costs are updated routinely through the ESO maintenance program.

Dr John Lapham

Maintenance and Aftercare Service of Extension Suite Online:

The Monthly Report is an account of the maintenance and aftercare service performed in terms of the maintenance agreement between the DAFF and Manstrat.

These responsibilities include amongst others:

- **Maintenance of databases:** The largest part of the ESO database consists of dynamic data like market prices; production input data; and pest, weed and disease control data that are maintained/up-dated to ensure that ESO as a 'data driven' system, remains relevant and sustainable.
- **Support to extension personnel and other users:** IT support includes queries on how to access ESO (i.e. lost passwords); checking the system regularly, ensuring systems integrity and ensuring as little down time as possible.

Secondly, technical production related support is given where ESO does not provide clear solutions to production related queries and our experts solve the problems, with or without outside assistance. Finally training is given in order to ensure the correct and optimal utilisation of ESO including initial and advanced training.

- *Adding new information to the system:* New needs develop as the quality of usage improves, and Manstrat receive requests for the expansion of existing modules or even the development of new information modules, which forms part of the agreement.
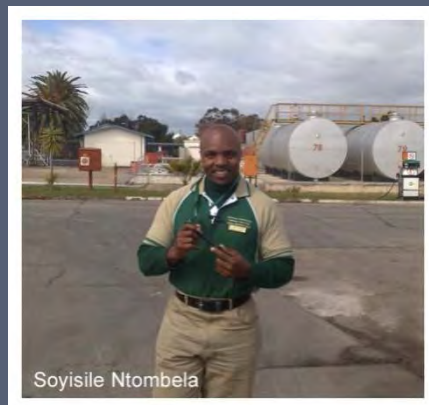
Awareness and Training: Awareness training is continuous and results driven, and is done to motivate users to utilise the best management and Extension decision making tool available in South Africa.

Piet van Zyl

Monthly Utilisation Reports

Manstrat has developed programmes to produce ESO utilisation in the following categories:

The Monthly Report shows usage during a calendar month with average annual use and displaying, unique visitors, number of visits, number of pages visited, and duration of visits:

The Weekly Report gives the weekly day-average use, the average daily usage of the current year, and shows the days which attract the highest volumes of user traffic;

The Daily Report provides monthly usage of the average daily usage for a month, as well as peak and ebb user activities; and

The Hourly Report provides daily usage on an hourly basis, with the average hourly usage per day, showing peak and ebb user activities during the day.

Piet van Zyl

Manstrat

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TOP EXTENSION SUITE ONLINE USER FOR AUGUST 2010

By monitoring daily utilisation of all users in the nine provinces it is possible to select the country's top user monthly and ultimately the national winner **(for the Grand Prize!)** on an annual basis.

Congratulations!!! Soyisile Ntombela (DaO:WC) You are South Africa's top ESO user for August 2010. Well done. Runner up: Thembinkosi Siguqu (Eastern Cape)

Soyisile Ntombela

During September, we had the opportunity to ask Soyisile Ntombela a few questions on why and how he uses Extension Suite Online.

What is your responsibility at the department?
My responsibility is to give advice to farmers, specifically upcoming farmers. I help with the development of farming processes and provide financial assistance.

How long have you been working for the department?
I have been working in the industry for more than 5 years. Previously I was situated in Gauteng, but have been in the Western Cape for 1 year and 8 months now.

How often do you make use of ESO?
I make use of ESO on a regular basis - I browse through the information at least once a day.

What do you use ESO for the most?
I make use of ESO to take relevant information to farmers. The PDF documents (Guides) are of great use, since I can download them and take a printed copy to the farmer.

How does ESO influence your relationship with farmers or clients?
My relationship with the farmers that I serve has improved immensely. The farmer now has confidence in the information I supply to him - the information is correct and updated.

What section or module in ESO do you use the most?
Mostly I make use of the vegetables and pasture modules, as well as the crop production section.

What have you learned from ESO?
I have learnt that ESO is the tool to use for information; one cannot learn all you need to know from school. ESO gives me the opportunity to have information ready, immediately, without having to search for days to get the relevant information that I need.

Do you have any tips to other users regarding Extension Suite Online?
A tip that I can give to my fellow users is, the more you use the system the sharper you get!

How would you describe Extension Suite Online as an Extension tool?
Extension Suite Online can be described as an information bank, and information on the go.

Does ESO really make the execution of your duties easier?
My duties as an Extensionist has become much easier, ESO offers a library of information, when a farmer contacts me, I have immediate access to a wide range of relevant information.

PROVINCIAL TOP USERS FOR AUGUST 2010

1	Eastern Cape	Thembinkosi Siguqu
2	Free State	James Ngobeni
3	Gauteng	Lesego Phakedi
4	KwaZulu Natal	Quintin Doidge
5	Limpopo	Jan Musa Kabini
6	North West	Molemoeng Diratsagae
7	Northern Cape	Tebogo Kadinda
8	Western Cape	Soyisile Ntombela