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FRONT COVER

Duck in flight.

Picture by Mabel Amber

COMMENT, by Pete Bower

Future gazing



Let's not be Pollyannas about this virus crisis. Coronavirus, and the effects it has forced upon us, are not going away any time soon.

And even if, or when, a vaccine or a cure is discovered and implemented it will only be a matter of time before someone goes into a Chinese "wet meat market" and buys another eye of newt or ear of bat that is infected with the next generation of this, or another, virus starting the whole cycle again.

During World War 2, shopkeepers and civil servants who were reluctant or unable to provide the goods or services requested would say so, adding the words "for the duration". Well, in a way, we're now at war (with a virus) and we, too, are facing hardships, and strictures, "for the duration".

Yes, hard it may be to believe, but mask-wearing, social distancing and sneezing into one's elbow have become the new norm, and it's only the really, really stupid of Middle America, or the lager louts of a no-longer so-great Britain who believe it is their God-given right not to wear a mask if they so choose, as the virus "is a hoax" and surely "won't happen to them". But for us on our plots in South Africa, let's not waste effort worrying about the terminally stupid in other countries, for we have enough problems of our own to contend with.

So, after four months of lockdown, let's do a stock-take. Firstly, how well has the government handled the pandemic? Many would say appallingly, but that's not entirely true. OK, the first month of hard lockdown was supposed to give the government the time to put in place emergency resources to help "flatten the curve". In reality, all it did was break the economy and give the government time to spend millions, much of it wastefully, on Cuban doctors and masks and other protective gear. But in truth, given the creaky, leaky bureaucracy that passes for our government, that's about all that could have been expected in the first month. Field hospitals? Not so much. Flattening the curve? All it did was push out the time-span before the curve started to rise (which it's now doing). And while things may look dire here, the truth is that our health services have actually done brilliantly by African standards, and very well even measured internationally. For while we groan with dismay at being the fifth most infected country on the planet (at the time of going to print), that's on a measure which puts us alongside the very first of First World countries, such as the UK (with its fabulous National Health Service), Germany, France, Italy, and the USA. A fairer measure would be to compare us to our peers. Let's look at Africa. Most of the continent doesn't even publish Covid statistics (and do a little investigation into how well they're doing in Zimbabwe). And the Brics countries? Brazil? And India? China?

The harsh reality is that, before this pandemic dies down many more of us will die. Over, probably, many months. And in those many months ahead it would be foolhardy to suspend or revoke many of the measures already taken to slow the spread of the virus. Which means that there are activities that were commonplace last year which won't be this year or next. Such as travel, eating out, going to cinemas, concerts, clubs, raves or pubs. Big sporting events, too. And full classrooms. This, in turn, means that anybody employed in those sectors is probably going to be without a job, and anybody who owns a business in those sectors may need to reinvent or repurpose his or her operation or close up shop.

And it's becoming clear that social distancing means more than standing 2m apart in a supermarket queue, or only partially loading a taxi. In time, a good internet connection is going to become an absolute necessity, because that is going to be your link to the outside world, not hugging, kissing, dancing and gossiping over coffee. Zoom dinner parties, virtual sex ~ ways of communicating and interacting that haven't been invented yet will become commonplace.

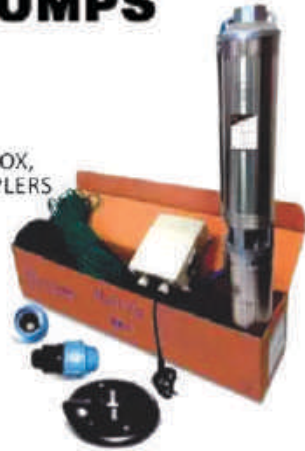
And as time moves on it will also mean that whatever support you have received from government, your bank and your building society, in the form of UIF, a grant, or a payment holiday, will come to an end, and you will be left to fend for yourself.

But one thing is certain, and that's that people will find ways to work around the most stupid regulations. Already, anybody who smokes has found a Pakistani shopkeeper who will furtively slip a pack or two at a price inflated sufficiently to allow him to pay whatever bribe is required to prevent arrest. And the pineapple farmers are smiling as people resort to home-brewing. It may take the government a while to wake up to the fact that it, in fact, is the only loser in this picture as it forgoes tax revenue.

The fact is, our lifestyles will change, in ways we can't yet imagine. But we will survive. Because we have to. Welcome to the new normal.



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Don't throw away your surplus veggies

With the effects of the lockdown being felt acutely among the poor, farmers and smallholders are having to find creative ways to make ends meet, and in some cases in how to support the hungry in their surrounding communities. Some are donating produce

grown for the restaurant industry, now all but closed, which they therefore cannot sell, while others are hawking their wares to nearby residential areas in an attempt to generate some income. As a result, some urban residents are starting to buy from fruit 'n veg hawkers, who arrive weekly in their

bakkies, in the way their parents did many years ago, thus enjoying farm fresh produce at off-farm prices, and in quantities that they can manage without wastage. In other cases many farmers and community organisations are rallying support for initiatives to provide food in various forms to the needy.

While some of these initiatives revolve simply around the collection and distribution of locally-grown fresh produce, others have started crowdfunding platforms with which to buy seed, fertilizer and tools to help indigent families to start their own food-growing activities. 🌱

NEWS

Garden World's new shop to help small growers

In a bid to give a pandemic boost to home producers and small growers, Garden World in Muldersdrift is launching a home produce shop at the nursery. According to Garden World general manager JJ van Rensburg the shop hopes to stock all manner of home industry goods, from pickles

and jams to biscuits and bakes throughout the week, and will add fresh produce in the form of freshly picked vegetables and fruit, over weekends. To stock the enterprise, JJ is inviting small growers and home producers to become part of the enterprise. He is very cognisant of the

fact that many small producers do not have a constant, year-round supply of produce, but rather need an occasional outlet for that produce which they grow surplus to their own requirements.

"So if you have a few spare heads of cabbage, or some bundles of beetroot, this

week, but nothing available

Continued on next page

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Why and how to grow Moringa

Moringa has been used in Asian and African medicine for centuries and its reputation as a superfood is encouraging smallholders to plant it.

Moringa oleifera is a deciduous tree which, within the first year of planting, can grow up to 3m in height and can subsequently grow as tall as 15m. Described as a "very fast growing tree", moringa is drought resistant and quite hardy, with a straight trunk (10 – 30 cm thick) with corky whitish bark and an open, umbrella shaped crown. The tree does not do well under frost conditions, although it is being cultivated in Gauteng and also in some other provinces. The SA National Biodiversity Institute (Sanbi) considers moringa naturalised in Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga, which gives a good indication of the growing conditions that it likes.

It prefers daily temperatures of 25 to 30°C.

The most favourable soil type for *Moringa oleifera* cultivation is well-drained, sandy loam. If you have clayey soil it is suggested that you grow the trees on mounds, as one should never allow water to sit around the roots.

The plant can grow in both acidic and basic soil types, with pH levels ranging from 5.0 to 9.0.

The plant can adapt to a range of climatic conditions. However, it cannot survive in flood prone areas or areas

with poor drainage. It can cope with 250 to 300mm of rainfall.

The trees are sensitive to transplanting, so it is best to plant directly into the ground. The trees have a very long tap



Moringa trees.

root, often one and a half times longer than the stem, and any obstruction to its growth will

permanently stunt the tree. It can be planted one to 1,5m

apart in rows 3m apart, and the rows inter-planted with vegetables, especially leaf crops. Moringa also works well in mixed orchards, providing an easy way to obtain harvests while you wait for the other trees to mature. However, if you are thinking of a high intensity production system, geared towards leaf production, trees can be

Continued on next page

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Screen filters are probably the most common filters and are excellent to remove hard particles - such as sand.

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Disk Filters

Disk filters are good at removing both sand and organic matter.

**Both type of filters
is easy to clean.**

HOW TO CALCULATE THE SIZE FILTER NEEDED for dripline:

E.g. if you have 30 cm spacing for a field with 18 lines
of a 100 meter each with a flow rate of 2L/h.

The number of emitters multiplied by the flow rate
per hour of the emitters.

$$= [(1m / 3 \text{ spacing}) \times 100 (\text{length of the dripline})] \times 18 \text{ lines}$$

$$= [3.33 \times 100] \times 18$$

$$= 5994 \text{ emitters}$$

$$= 5994 \text{ emitters} @ 2L/hr \text{ per emitter}$$

$$= 11988L/hr \text{ flow rate for the entire field.}$$

You will need a filter that can accommodate at least
12cubM/H, but it will be advised to use one size up
which is the 15cubM/H Y-type filter.

Filters in Irrigation Systems

Water filtration is important for ALL irrigation systems

including the Quick Coupling Sprinkler System and Dripline

Filters can extend the life of and lower the maintenance of your
sprinkler system; for drip systems **filters are an absolute necessity**
to prevent emitters from becoming clogged.

Which filter to install?

When deciding which filter to install, the following factors should be
considered:

- The source of the water
- The level of filth in the water (the density of pollutants)
- Flow rate of water
- Diameter of pump outlet

When deciding on the size of your filter you need to consider the
cubic meters that needs to be filtered per hour (cub M/H). You can
either go for a big filter at the start of your system, or smaller filters
at the start of each individual field.

What if you already have an irrigation system without a filter?

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and can be inserted at any
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Moringa seed pod.

From previous page

planted up to 10cm x 10cm apart. In some parts of Africa moringa is sometimes planted as a living fence, and will serve as a good windbreak for other crops in diversified systems.

The trees enjoy full sun. Initially the seedlings must be protected from strong winds. In very hot areas water them daily, making sure the roots are not water-logged. In colder areas make sure the tree is well-mulched to protect the root ball from cold. Cow manure and compost are recommended as fertiliser.

Pruning is important to ensure a dense bushy tree, so that the leaves and pods are easily accessible. Moringa is not prone to pests, though some caterpillars will attack the leaves. Research shows that not only are the leaves of the *Moringa oleifera* highly nutritious, but the entire *Moringa oleifera* tree (with the exception of the roots) is edible, with above average levels of carbohydrates, protein, minerals and

vitamins. Its medicinal value seems almost never-ending, for diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, anaemia, arthritis, liver disease, as well as respiratory, skin and digestive disorders. The powdered leaves, roots, bark and immature pods are used for its nutritional, anti-inflammatory, immunity boosting, antioxidant and tissue-protective benefits. Moringa is also used as a feed for livestock and poultry.

Studies have shown a positive effect on animals fed a Moringa leaf and seed supplemented diet. The oil is used as biofuel.

Moringa is already being commercially cultivated in Pretoria and in the western regions of Gauteng. 🌱

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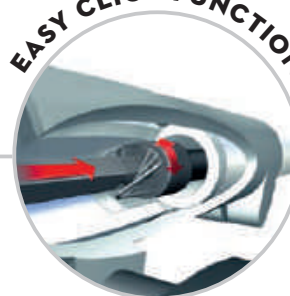
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Treating fleas and ticks on pets

Smallholders with dogs and cats will know the dangers of ticks, fleas and, to a lesser extent, lice. All are bloodsucking parasites, with varying degrees of danger to both pets and humans. Ticks are part of the Arachnida class, the order of Anactinotrichidea and sub-class Ixodida. They cannot survive without feeding off a host. Ticks are divided into two families: soft and hard. Soft ticks are quick feeders, mostly taking a quick blood meal before dropping off the host, digesting, laying eggs and then reattaching to a host. Hard ticks are single feeders that remain attached, feeding over several days. There are more than 700 species of hard ticks, 83 of which are found in SA, with 22 unique to this region. Ticks attach themselves to their hosts in various ways. Some lie in wait on plants, allowing themselves to be brushed off by a passing animal. Others actively seek out a host and use their barbed mouths to anchor

The second in a series of articles, in partnership with Bayer, on common ailments in pets, livestock & poultry

themselves to the host's skin. Pathogens and diseases are spread

via the tick's saliva.

Depending on the species, both adults and juvenile ticks can be found on cats and dogs. Ticks populate in warmer weather, but can still be found in winter.

In SA, the most common tick-borne disease in dogs is biliary or Tick Fever. The potentially fatal disease is caused by *Babesia canis* or *Babesia rossi*, parasites carried by the Yellow Dog tick and the Kennel tick. The parasite enters the dog via the bite and multiplies in the bloodstream. The infection as well as the dog's immune response results in a loss of red blood cells (anemia). Biliary can also



Male brown dog tick.



Adult flea.

cause kidney or liver failure. It can be fatal.

Symptoms include loss

of appetite, weakness, fever, pale gums. Some animals simply present as being "off-colour". The disease has a 10-20 day incubation from the bite, so owners should look out for symptoms, even if the animal is currently tick-free. The disease is diagnosed by a blood test. Prevention is the best method of avoiding this disease. This means preventing ticks from infesting your dog.

It is a common assumption that cats cannot get ticks. But, just as with dogs, ticks on cats can be fatal. Common illnesses caused by tick bites on cats include feline infectious anemia, as well as

Feline biliary, more common along South Africa's coast.

Fleas are also very common in Gauteng, especially in spring and summer. As with ticks, there are a number of species. Fleas move much quicker than ticks and have the ability to jump. Flea infestation can manifest differently, depending on the constitution of the infested animal and the number of fleas. Symptoms also vary in severity according to the sensitivity of the host to allergens in flea saliva (flea allergy dermatitis/FAD). FAD is a common cause of serious skin conditions. Severe flea infestation can even cause anemia.

Fleas are transferred directly between animals, or contact with pupae-laden environments with infestation resulting from newly emerging fleas. Itching, hair breakage, alopecia, crusty lesions on the skin are all signs of infestation. As with ticks, prevention of infestation is preferred and the animal's bedding, blankets etc should also be washed.

Treatment and prevention options

BAYER has three products to assist dog and cat owners in preventing ticks and fleas.

Advantage is a topical solution, administered on the back, between the shoulder blades. It can also be used on rabbits. It kills fleas on cats within 24 hours and will continue to protect the animals for another four weeks. It can be used on kittens from eight weeks.

Advantage for dogs can be used from six weeks old and, like the treatment for cats, remains effective for up to

four weeks.

Advantix helps treat ticks on dogs. It repels ticks for up to four weeks and is effective one day after application. It will also kill fleas and flea eggs in the dog's surroundings. It can be used on pregnant and lactating females and on puppies from seven weeks, or 1,5kgs. The treatment is topical, applied on two spots on top of the back from the shoulder to the base of the tail. **Advantix** is not for cats.

Seresto tick and flea collars for cats and dogs are effective

for up to eight months. They are water resistant* and remain effective after shampoo washing, swimming or exposure to rain. The collars have a safety-closure mechanism that allows an animal trapped by its collar to pull free.

They are available in various sizes, for dogs older than seven weeks, and cats older than 10 weeks. *Excessive water immersion may lead to a gradual decline in efficacy after month 5.



Seresto collars for dogs and cats.



Advantix for dogs.

Advantage for cats.



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Keeping your cattle in good condition

During the cold, supplementing one's cattle feed becomes important to keep the animals in good condition through the harsh winter months.

First, it is important to understand that a cow will graze until its big stomach (the rumen) is full.

Then it will rest and regurgitate bunches of coarse grass back up and chew it for a long time until it is a finely-ground grass (this process is called rumination or 'chewing the cud').

The micro-organisms (bacteria and other microbes) in the rumen will digest this finely-ground grass. During this digestion, these microbes use

enzymes to break down the grass, releasing the nutrients. The more microbes present, the quicker digestion will take place.

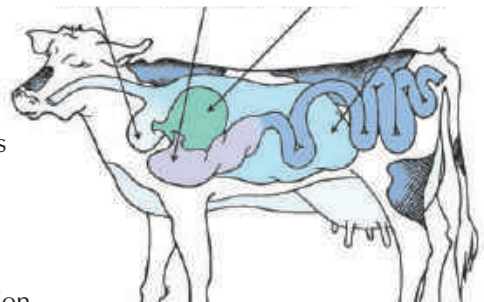
Once rumination and digestion is complete, the undigested grass mixed with the microbes, flows through the second, third and fourth stomachs. In the fourth stomach ~ the abomasum ~ the cow secretes her own digestive enzymes designed to kill and digest the microbes ~ this is a form of microbial protein that the cow then absorbs as nutrition.

In winter, the quality of grass and therefore the nutrients in the grass declines.

So there are fewer nutritional substances available for the rumen microbes to digest, and because of this there are fewer microbes, so digestion takes longer. Because digestion is slowed, it takes longer for the cow to empty her rumen, so she eats less and loses condition as a result.

Giving a cow a protein lick means they are maintaining the level of protein intake and therefore feeding the microbes and speeding up digestion. This will help keep your animals healthy and in good condition during the months when grazing is poor. 🌱

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The four stomachs in a cow.

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Is 5G the next big threat to our bees?

Good news for cellphone users: 5G is here! But wait... it's sinister, say Donald Trump and Boris Johnson, because it will make it possible for the Chinese to harvest our personal information, and it's dangerous, say others, because its radiation will turn us all into three-headed zombies and kill insects and, in particular, the world's bees.

In the interest of a rational look at this development we attempt to explain what it is, and whether it is harmful. In the telecommunications sphere, networks such as 5G (which means fifth generation), and 1, 2, 3 and 4G before it, are cellular networks, in which the service area covered is divided into small geographical areas called cells. Analog signals

One of our periodic articles on bees and beekeeping, this time independently of the views of Gauteng's 3 beekeepers' associations.

representing sounds and images are

digitised in the device (phone, computer, tablet, etc), converted by an analog-to-digital converter and transmitted as a stream of bits. A bit being, if you think back to your schooldays, what happens when you reduce numbers and letters to zeroes and ones (aka binary code), represented electronically by positive and negative electrical charges.

This stream of bits is then communicated between devices and a transmitter/receiver using radio waves. The transmitter/receivers are contained in the cellphone masts we are all familiar with, either in the form of metal scaffolding structures, or fake

palm trees. Each tower transmits and receives only over a limited area around it, called a cell. The towers themselves are connected with the telephone network and the internet by a high-bandwidth (ie fast) optical fiber or wireless connection. As you move with your phone, your connection is automatically handed off to

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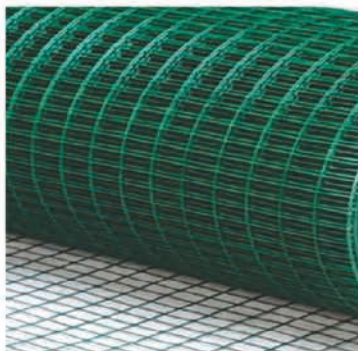
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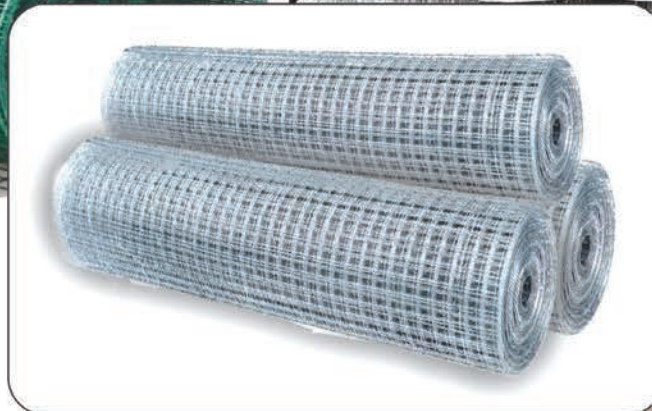
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BEEKEEPING

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an adjacent cell or tower. 5G can support up to a million devices per square kilometer, compared to 4G ~ our current network ~ at only 100 000. Apart from being able to handle more devices 5G is supposed to be faster with higher download speeds. This is achieved partly by using higher-frequency radio waves than what is currently in use. However, higher-frequency radio waves have a shorter range than the frequencies used by previous cell phone towers, so to ensure wide service, 5G

networks operates on up to three frequency bands ~ low, medium and high. A 5G network will thus be composed of networks of these three different cells, each requiring different antennae, each giving a different ratio of download speed versus distance. 5G devices will connect to the network through the highest speed antenna within range at their location. So, if you are further away you will connect via the low frequency band as it has the largest reach. So, 5G is designed to improve

the speed of our networks ~ in some cases leading to a 10 gigabyte per second download speed ~ the equivalent of watching three and a half hours of high definition Netflix. It will also help take pressure off the current 4G LTE networks used by most carriers, which is becoming overburdened. Will 5G, or 4G for that matter, cause health problems? The answer is...maybe. The power of radio waves emitted from a cell phone tower decreases four times over as you move away from

the tower. And this will apply in the same way to a tower with more antennae. So proximity to and the number of antennae in a tower is not a huge concern. Of greater concern than the radiation

Continued on next page



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from a tower is that emitted by your cell phone itself. But there's more, namely the release of electromagnetic radiation. The main biological effect of this radiation is an increase in temperature. However, the power levels involved in mobile and wireless telecommunications are very small, involving at most temperature rises in tissue of a few tenths of a degree. Additionally, the amount of power ~ heat ~ a device is able to emit is regulated, and is the same for a 4G or 5G device.

However, with the addition of medium and high frequency bands in 5G, this has an effect on the frequency of radiation. In 4G, the frequencies range between 4 to 6 gigahertz (GHz) ~ which is the unit used to measure frequency. In 5G, the current maximum frequency is 86GHz, considerably higher, and falling into the millimeter-wave range.

But what is this actually? A photon is a particle representing electromagnetic radiation. Each photon carries energy proportional to the radiation frequency. So, because 5G has higher frequency, it will therefore also have higher energy. These energies are non-ionising which means the photon energy is not big enough to remove an electron from an atom or molecule. The sun, for example, emits four times

more millimetre-waves (between 400-800 terahertz, tera being 1 000 giga.)

In fact, we already use items daily that emit millimetre-waves. The reverse parking sensors in your car emit up to 77GHz. A microwave emits between 3 and 30GHz. A Wi-Fi router emits up to 6GHz. Body scanners such as those used at airports emit, depending on their sophistication, up to 80GHz.

Clearly, the decades-long risks of exposure are unknown because the technology has not been around long enough for prolonged study. And this is why the answer to the question "can 5G cause harm" is a maybe...but it is

also a maybe for 4G and probably the other Gs too. And also wind turbines, red meat and prolonged exposure to the Kardashians. But, what about smaller creatures such as bees? Will they be affected? Again, the answer is maybe...but unlikely, and it is clear more research needs to be done, because much of what has been done is unsophisticated, at best. For example, as far back as 2006, a Landau University researcher in Germany placed two digital enhanced cordless telecommunications stations (the docking station you put a cordless landline phone into) in two bees hives. He also

left two hives untouched as a control. Continued on next page

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BEEKEEPING

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He then trapped 25 bees at the entrance to each hive

and released them 800m away from the hives, recording how many made their way home. The bees from the hives with docking stations built smaller combs and found it harder to come home. But, the researchers didn't know if the bees they trapped and released had ever left the hive or if this was their first sojourn into the world ~ there was no way of proving the bees' competence at wayfinding prior to the

experiment. They also had no proof that it was the radiation emissions that halted comb-building and not just the presence of a foreign object in their hive. Bees can be finicky and will be affected by any foreign object. For all we know, bees with an old shoe suddenly placed in their hive would build less comb. Honey bees have ferromagnetic crystals, or magnetite, in their abdomens, which act as magnetic sensors. Bees use

this capacity for orientation and navigation. Research into the effects of telecommunication on bees' internal magnetic receptors has been, well, inconclusive. Research conducted by the EU-funded Eclipse Project in 2018, found poor scientific evidence to back up claims that bees are affected by telecommunications. And, in those experiments that can be considered adequately conducted, there is little to no evidence that the presence of antennae, or the distance between hives and antenna has much effect on the swarm's population size, reproduction capabilities or production efficiency. Research into hives versus cell towers on two Aegean islands showed varying effect on the bees in relation to the antenna ~ and some effects were also contingent on other factors. Eclipse found that those studies that showed negative effects on the insects were lab-based experiments, putting the bees in unnatural situations (for example, testing the bees' flight pattern when exposed to radiation at a height that a bee would likely never fly at and therefore not be exposed to). As with humans, the long term effects of 5G on insects is unknown but appears at the outset to be low-risk. In fact, there are more immediate risks to bees ~ the use of pesticides, monoculture crops and certain invasive parasites ~ than 5G. 🌱

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Their pregnancies last for about 150 days, depending on the breed and the individual animal. Both sheep and goats can produce more than one offspring per pregnancy, breed

dependent (and based on the quality of the parents). The oestrous cycle is similar in both species, as is the timing of ovulation.

A smallholder should manage the breeding in the flock by only allowing the ram or buck to run with the females when it is appropriate. Although she can fall pregnant at eight months, it is prudent not to allow a ewe or doe to become pregnant until she is a year old. By then she is mature enough physically to cope better with pregnancy and delivery and she is better able to care for her lambs/kids.

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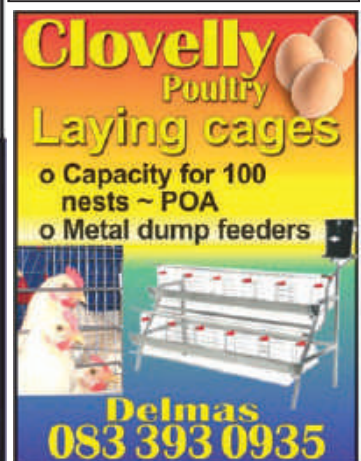


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Also, it is recommended to keep the male away from lactating females. They can fall pregnant while they are still feeding a lamb or kid, but it is better to allow their bodies a chance to fully recover and build up strength, before they fall pregnant again. Nutrition becomes even more important, particularly in the last two months of pregnancy and the first two months after giving birth. This will help to improve milk production, along with the birth weight and growth of the kid/lambs.

During these four months, the doe/ewe needs three kinds of additional food, or feed supplement:

□ Each day, a pregnant doe/ewe that is grazing and weighs about 30kg needs about 400g of additional feed that is high in energy. Such feeds include molasses, maize, barley, brewers' grain, wheat bran and cotton seed oil cake meal.

□ The pregnant doe will also need about 400g of additional feed that is high in protein per day. Such feeds include fishmeal, peanut oil cake meal, cotton seed oil cake meal and brewers' grain.

□ She must also get about 8g of salt, along with trace minerals and vitamins such as selenium, zinc, salt, magnesium, phosphate, copper, manganese, calcium, and vitamins A and E. Mineral supplements are often are molasses based, but you also find licks that will meet your

needs. Extra nutrition is needed to support foetal growth, mammary development and to ensure a plentiful milk supply, and prevent the occurrence of pregnancy toxemia (ketosis). It will ensure the birth of strong, healthy kids/lambs that aren't too big and aren't too small. Birth weight is highly correlated to lamb survival.

Pregnant and lactating females lose immunity to intestinal worms as a result of the hormonal changes that are occurring. Foetal demand for glucose and protein also lessens the ewe's ability to resist parasites. It is the primary source of parasite infection for the new kid/lamb whose immune system is still undeveloped. Deworming will help the doe/ewe expel the worms and reduce the exposure of new-born lambs to infective

worm larvae. Deworming can be done at the same time as CD-T vaccinations, which are given for immunizing sheep and goats against tetanus and overeating disease (enterotoxemia). This is done four to six weeks prior to parturition. Vaccinated females will pass antibodies in their colostrum to their new-born offspring. Ewes/does should not be vaccinated within two weeks of giving birth. 🌸

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The next big idea

Twenty-odd years ago, just at the time that this magazine started up, the big thing in smallholder farming was giant garlic. To make your fortune you bought a bag of seed garlic (at some considerable cost) dug up a patch of land, stuck the stuff in the ground, added some manure, watered it copiously ~ and watched your profits growing daily. Well, that was the idea. The problem was that giant garlic wasn't garlic at all. At best it was a very mild garlic substitute, at worst not much more than a very smelly onion. As a result, the greatly hyped-up so-called demand for this culinary miracle never materialised, and many smallholders lost thousands.

Also in the early years of this magazine, another "revolutionary" big idea in small farming innovation was launched. The boffins at one of the seed companies lit upon the idea of cutting out the eyes of seed potatoes, encasing them in a nutritious coating and selling them as "sowtatoes", ie potato seed that could be sown by a seed planter and didn't require the grower to bury a whole seed potato. What a saving in transport and storage costs! What convenience in being able to use a conventional seed planter, instead of a specialist tuber planter! Indeed, a great idea.

We all bought packets of the wonder seed, and sowed away. And found ourselves spending the summer watering and weeding barren potato patches.

More recently than that, if you'd bought into the notions of the permaculture movement, you would have read the founder of the movement, the late Bill Mollison, expounding on the value of the tagasaste tree. This small leguminous tree, Mollison maintained, provided excellent nutrition to livestock, was hardy, quick-growing, and a real life-saver in areas of little rainfall. In South Africa, it was introduced as tree lucerne, and was punted widely as the answer to just about everybody's fodder needs. Again, you bought tree lucerne seed, or saplings, at some considerable expense, and hoped that after a couple of years your livestock nutrition needs would be taken care of, and your fortune would be secured. Yeah, right. While it has some application in marginal summer-rainfall regions it proved another flop on the highveld.

More recently, the answer to livestock farmers' needs was extolled as Russian Grass and, even more recently still, various species of Brazilian grass.

Notwithstanding the obvious differences between Russia or Brazil and South Africa in terms of climate, soil composition and

rainfall, may I please be forgiven if I express a minor concern about the importation of yet more South American invader species? It was South America, after all, that blessed us with cosmos, blackjack and khakibos (among many other weeds) thanks to the British Army importing fodder from that continent with which to feed their horses during the Anglo-Boer War. But if you are worried about putting seed, alien or otherwise, into the ground, there's another way to make your fortune.

Grow barley fodder. All you need is an air-conditioned room, some lights, trays, sprayers and seed, which needs to be top-quality food-grade barley, not the chemically-treated seed one would normally plant. Get the ratio between light, air, water and heat right and after seven days you have a thick and nutritious mat of sprouts that is devoured with relish by everything from a chicken to an elephant, and can even be mushed up to provide a green, grass-flavoured health drink for humans.

Get the ratio wrong and you have a mouldy mess that will kill your livestock and even your compost heap.

All of this came to mind this month after we dug up a turmeric plant we'd planted two years ago, which yielded an astonishing 7,5kg of turmeric root growing in an area of about a square metre. "There must be money in this," I muttered, as I sorted through the root, separating the big pieces from the fiddly bits and cleaning the best stuff. That brought the yield down to 3,5kg. Still not bad if the price is right. So I checked the price on the Joburg market. Yes, even at 3,5kg per square metre there's money in fresh turmeric. The only problem is that the demand for fresh turmeric isn't exactly huge in South Africa. Not even Indian chefs are keen to spend hours (literally) peeling and drying the stuff for use. They'd rather use already dried and powdered turmeric imported from India. Anybody interested in 3,5kg of clean, top-quality fresh turmeric root?

So, back to the drawing board ~ my fortune is not yet secure. But never mind, there's a new big idea that will make us all rich: It's Moringa. Good luck!



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