

# **SOUTH AFRICAN SMALLHOLDER**

**FEBRUARY 2022**  
**EVERYTHING A SMALL FARMER NEEDS**



**In this edition:**  
**Keeping dairy cows**  
**Alternative energy on plots**  
**Lessons from a Cape Town organic farm**  
**...and more!**

# **SOUTH AFRICAN SMALLHOLDER MAGAZINE**

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## **Front Cover**

Laurica Petersen of Ocean View Organic Farm.

Image courtesy: Y Our Stories\_Amplifying our Narrative

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### **FEATURE**



Getting started with organic growing

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## EDITOR'S COMMENT

# Working together, locally



Followers of last year's municipal elections will know that the Democratic Alliance gained its first foothold in the Natal Midlands when a DA mayor was installed in uMngeni Local Municipality. In his election campaign 30-year-old Christopher Pappas made all the usual promises of cleaning up the streets, cutting verges and filling potholes in the town. So, soon after his installation as mayor he went walkabout through the town's municipal workshops, garages, etc looking for the equipment with which to fulfil his promises ~ tractors, gang-mowers, brushcutters, compactors. What he found was, well, nothing. Nothing much of use, anyway. It was either broken or ... gone. How, therefore, to fulfil those election promises? Pappas approached the town's businesspeople with an idea. Divert the money you would spend on marketing for a few months to a fund in the municipality. This kitty would be used to repair and buy the equipment necessary to start fixing the town's infrastructure. In turn, the businesses and their workers would enjoy a visible improvement in their environment, and the municipality would undertake to promote those participating businesses through its own channels. As one businessman commented, "It seems ridiculous that we should have to contribute more, having already paid our rates and taxes, but if we want our town to thrive that's what we've got to do."

This kind of "stop complaining and do something" attitude is gaining hold countrywide, it seems. In Gauteng, for example, there's the Heal the Hennops initiative which has been busy for a couple of years, constantly cleaning a river which runs through the heart of the Jo'burg/Pretoria conurbation. And there are the Litterboom Projects, trying to control the flow of plastic and rubbish on major rivers such as the uMngeni in KZN and the Liesbeeck in Cape Town. Elsewhere, throughout the country, groups of residents are increasingly coming together to put right what irks them. In one case it has involved the community replacing a hopelessly rutted track through their village with a road made of closely-packed rocks, Roman road style. Most ordinary South Africans want the same things: a harmonious life with functioning amenities of convenience. And, as many local municipalities throughout the country increasingly let us down we are prepared to come together to do it ourselves. And that feeling is deeply satisfying when the task is complete and the outcomes are visible.

Much more satisfying than endlessly protesting by blocking a highway with rocks and tyres or burning down a shopping mall. That behaviour will, frankly, get us nowhere.

**Pete Bower**  
*Editor*



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## NEWS

# Agri shows back in full force this year

**A**s life returns to normal after the Covid pandemic 2022 is shaping up to be “the year of the shows” again, with a full calendar of agricultural events pencilled in countrywide.

But, the unusual times have necessitated some reshuffling of dates in certain cases. Most obvious of these is the 59th Walkerville Agricultural Show, last held the weekend before the initial hard lockdown was imposed in 2020. It is now scheduled to take place on 3 and 4 September, in place of its usual dates earlier in the year. Meanwhile at Nampo Park outside Bothaville preparations are well under way for a full Harvest Day show this year after, effectively, a break of two years (in 2020 the physical event was replaced with a very innovative, yet scaled-down virtual event, which was not repeated last year). The Nampo Harvest Day is thus back on track in its usual place



on the calendar, namely 17 to 20 May.

Thereafter, exhibitors who do a circuit of the big shows have a week in which to move their stands to Pietermaritzburg for KwaZulu-Natal's biggest show, the Royal.

On the Highveld, the popular self-sufficiency show Kragdag is to be held from 11 to 13 August. Cancelled by order of the Tshwane Municipality in 2020, it was the one show in Gauteng that went ahead late last year. Also back on the calendar after a break of two years is the Nampo Cape show, to be held as in the past at Bredasdorp from 14 to 17 September. And, spread throughout the year are smaller regional shows in many towns across the country, giving local producers and farmers a chance to showcase their products and livestock, and giving manufacturers and dealers a chance to interact with their clients in the region. 🌸

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## EVENTS

# Mark these dates for agri events in 2022

To help you plan your activities, here is a list of some of the shows and exhibitions planned around South Africa during 2022.

3-5 March: Swellendam Show, WC

12 March: 14th Overvaal Dexter Club auction, GP

15-17 March: Africa Agri-tech, Pretoria, GP

24-26 March: Beaufort West Show, WC

1-3 April: Bathurst Show, EC

7-9 April: Clanwilliam Show, WC

23-27 April: Protea Cullifest, Cullinan, GP

27 April-7 May: Bloemfontein Show, FS

28 April-1 May: East London Show, EC

17-20 May: Nampo Harvest Day, Bothaville, FS

27 May-5 June: Royal Show, Pietermaritzburg, KZN

9-12 June: Western Cape Poultry Show, WC

27-30 July: Lutzville Show, WC

11-13 Aug: Kragdag, Pretoria East, GP



25-27 August: George Show, WC

26-27 August: Porterville Show, WC

3-4 September: 59th Walkerville Agricultural Show, GP

7-10 September: Swartland Show, WC

14-17 September: Nampo Cape show, Bredasdorp, WC

29 September-10 October: Tulbagh Show, WC

4-8 October: Robertson Show, WC

13-15 October: Villiersdorp Show, WC

20-22 October: Prince Albert Show, WC

21-22 October: Loeriesfontein Show, NC

22-23 October: Cradock Agricultural Show, EC

27-29 October: Malmesbury Show, WC



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## NEWS

# OBP's woes continue, veterinary industry suffers

**T**he ongoing management mess at the government-owned Onderstepoort Biological Products (OBP) has now prompted an open letter from a group of heavy-hitters in the animal veterinary sector, who have suggested that the time has come to allow pharmaceutical producers in the private sector to take over the production of vital animal vaccines if OBP continues to be unable to supply.

The problems that have beset OBP are nothing new. OBP is a state-owned entity that manufactures and distributes the vaccines developed by



the Onderstepoort Veterinary Research Institute, which falls under the control of the Agricultural Research Council (ARC).

Vaccines and drugs produced by OBP cover the whole gamut of livestock ailments, including African horse sickness, Rift Valley fever, bluetongue disease, heartwater, anaplasmosis, red water and lumpy skin disease, etc. With many of the vaccines produced by OBP unavailable elsewhere in the world, OBP is a

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## NEWS

vital link in the health of livestock. More than a decade ago it was becoming apparent that OBP needed expanding, with money needed for refurbishment of critical machines and replacement of others.

In 2014, R500-million was given to OBP to build a new vaccine plant, say the writers. However, nearly eight years after the funds were made available, OBP has little to show for it, apart from nearly R100-million spent to upgrade offices, install a private toilet for the CEO and build a new canteen. For the last few years, stock owners have been faced with periodic delays and shortages of vaccines. Now, even delayed deliveries seem to have ground to a stop, and news is spreading that OBP is effectively defunct as a vaccine company, says the group. As long ago as 2017, the minister of agriculture, forestry and fisheries appointed a new OBP board which was supposed to correct the situation. After a long process Dr Baty Dungu was appointed the new CEO. Skilled and experienced, he

completed his PhD while working at the Onderstepoort Veterinary Research Institute.

Under his guidance, the building of the new vaccine plant was put back on track and within a few months, the supply of vaccines improved. However, disgruntled staff started making allegations against the new CEO and in December 2020 went on strike. In 2020, however, the board's term expired and new members were brought in, very few of whom had any experience in the field of vaccine production or even agriculture. Dr Dungu was summarily placed on suspension and, after almost eight months, remains suspended. The minister appointed an interim CEO, who resigned after only a few months for health reasons. And now, "vaccine provision seems to have ground to a halt".

The vaccine strains that have been developed by OVR (with taxpayer's money) must be made available to private companies if OBP cannot guarantee availability, say the writers. "This is essential for the maintenance of livestock and animal health in South Africa and neighbouring countries." 🌸



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## SMART SMALLHOLDERS

# “Kos Gangsters” find peace in organics

Smallholders looking for inspiration will find it in the Ocean View Organic Farm (Ovof), where a co-operative of five women took the opportunity that was offered to them.

Ocean View is a township near Kommetjie, Cape Town. Justin Bonello, the television braai master, enabled a horticultural learnership for 20 members of this disadvantaged community.

The group ~ known as the Kos Gangsters ~ cleared 600m<sup>2</sup> of land at Ocean View High School and started a small vegetable farm from scratch. Co-operative chair lady, Sophia Grodes, told the *SA Smallholder* how it was all done by hand, as they had no machinery. “You should have seen the blisters! And now, I could grate cheese with my fingers, 'cos they're so rough.”

After ten participants had qualified, they were offered the farm to carry on with their work. “Five of us women farmers ~ they called us the compost ladies ~ decided to take up the offer. We registered an agricultural co-operative and now this is our project.”

The other members of the co-operative are Nikky Jacobs, Laurice Petersen, Carrin Roberts and Merna



All images courtesy:

[Y Our Stories Amplifying our Narrative](#)

Booyesen. They lease the land from the Dept of Public Works (PWD). They follow organic growing practices and are part of a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS). Their farm was assessed and, apart from their seeds, everything was declared to be organic.

“It's very difficult to get organic seeds and they are very expensive,” Grodes comments.

In a PGS group, members visit each other's properties annually, so that they can inspect their farming methods, as well as share knowledge based on their own experiences. Grodes is also trained as what is known as a pollinator, to assess other organic operations throughout the Western Cape and to establish new PGS groups.

Their fundamental focus is soil building. “You've got to love the soil. Like a doctor does ward checks in the morning, so do we take an hour to check the land and the plants.

If we see insects, we pick them off by



## SMART SMALLHOLDERS

hand. We put the snails in a bucket of water. After a while we will pour the water on our cabbages, because snails don't like the smell of their own dead."

They use other produce on the farm, such as chillis and marigolds, to make organic pesticides.

This is not just a job for these women. "Some of us used to suffer from depression, but once we developed this connection with the soil, we were able to stop taking our medication."

Ovof produces 150 boxes of organic produce a month. They take their produce by wheelbarrow into the community to sell. They also have stalls at markets such as the



Merna Booysen of Ovof.

Collaborate Market in Fish Hoek. They don't have access to a vehicle, so they have to factor the cost of an Uber into their budget.

"Somebody donated a trailer to us, which we have called Lollipop. We are going to attach it to a bicycle, which will make our deliveries easier."

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## SMART SMALLHOLDERS

Their produce is seasonal. They not only grow fresh vegetables but also herbs and flowers.



Some of Ovof's produce.

"I say that plants have their birthdays and graveyard days. So they must be planted at the right time for each kind of vegetable, so they have the right weather for their life cycle." Summer or winter, a farmer must be there every day. In the Cape winters they use black bags to create their rain wear. "So we are fashion designers and seamstresses as well," laughs Sophia. They have learnt a huge amount in the last three years. Not only have they learnt about living soil and planting, organic fertilising and pest control, but also about succession planting and production plan-

ning. "When we started the co-op we had no business skills. We had to learn about budgeting and marketing."

Their biggest challenge is theft. They can't afford security. They have a borehole, with six large storage tanks to support their irrigation system. However, the wiring for their automated system was stolen, so they need to operate it manually. "We do get discouraged sometimes, but this is our baby and we wouldn't dream of walking away from it or giving it to someone else." They have a small café, called the Hoenderhok, where they serve pizzas, sandwiches, scones and freshly made juices. The café is currently being renovated and they are looking forward to reopening with a bang. It supplies an additional revenue stream. Ovof is included as a destination in tours around the South Peninsula. Visitors are shown around the farm and educated about organic farming, before they sit down to a delicious meal.

"There's a magic about this place; we can see how it affects people when

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## SMART SMALLHOLDERS

they come here." A future plan is to establish a processing centre on the farm. "But, our goal is zero hunger. We are becoming trainers, so that we can teach people in the community to grow their own food."

For more information about these highly motivated women, check out their social media presence, phone Sophia on 072 984 8815 or email [sophiagrodes7@gmail.com](mailto:sophiagrodes7@gmail.com). 🌸



## All about organic growing

If you have been inspired by our article on an organic farming operation on the Cape Peninsula, you may be interested to learn more about organic farming practices.

Follow the links below to see our latest special feature all about organic growing.



- ☐ [Getting started with organic growing](#)
- ☐ [Crops & Livestock: The principles of organic farming](#)
- ☐ [What goes into healthy organic soil?](#)
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## LIVESTOCK

# Keeping dairy cows

**M**any smallholders have a romantic dream of being able to look out of their window and seeing a cow contentedly grazing in a field or being able to bring in a bucket of fresh milk.

However keeping a cow in milk is a big commitment and it takes careful planning.

Before starting out on something new it is always a good idea to talk to people who are already doing what you want to do. Find smallholders in your area who are keeping dairy cows and spend time with them and their beasts, so that you get a sense of what is entailed.

### **Budget**

The best place to start is with a budget. The early stages (first one to two years) are tremendously expensive, unless some resources are already in place.

To keep cattle you need pasture, somewhere to keep them at night and good fencing.

Ruminants require a basic diet of roughage in the form of veld grass or conserved feed in the form of bales of hay, as well as supplementation, usually in the form of meal or cubes and licks to provide specific nutrients at various stages of production cycles. Animals must get sufficient fibre, energy, protein, minerals and vita-



mins to remain healthy and productive. Another most important need is water. Cows in milk need up to 70 litres of water a day, so you should have a strong and consistent supply. You should also consider the medical expenses during an average year. Cattle need inoculations and deworming. You must maintain hooves and horns in good condition. You might wish to castrate your male calves.

What transport costs will you have? Do you have a bakkie and/or a big enough trailer to transport your new cattle to your property? If not you will have to hire vehicles.

### **Choosing a Breed**

The most popular dairy breeds are the Holstein Friesland, Jersey, Guernsey and the Ayrshire. You might also consider the Milk Shorthorn, SA Dairy Swiss, Simmentaler or Dexter. You can read all about this latter breed and why it is ideal for a smallholding or small farm on page 24.

A small scale farmer would do better with a breed that does not produce



## LIVESTOCK

so much milk.

Maybe a dual-purpose breed such as a Braunvieh, or the indigenous Nguni or Bonsmara might be a good compromise, as you have the advantage of good meat as well.

### Keeping a Cow in Milk

The cow has to keep giving birth, in order to keep producing milk.

The easiest way to do this, unless you wish to keep a bull is by artificial insemination.

Or you may have a neighbour with a suitable bull. If so how much will you have to pay for the “service”?

When the birth is over you have to get to grips with milking by hand. Be ready to take on the responsibility of a milking schedule. Perhaps the traditional methods have been handed down within your family.

A less fatiguing way is to spend a few thousand rand to buy a small one-cow milking machine. These devices will cut down the time taken for the task each milking, but need to be scrupulously cleaned after each use.

## Surplus Produce

Unless you have a very, very big family, even the most shy bearing cow will, in full production, produce more than you can consume.

Thus, unless you pour a lot of it down the drain or use it as pig food you will need to process it in some way or other.

A good cow, in the peak of production, can give you 15 or more litres a day. Every day. For 200-odd days. Your choices, therefore, include (but are not limited to) separating the milk from the cream, making butter, yoghurt, or soft and hard cheeses. All of these options will require processing or storage facilities, particularly if you choose to make hard cheeses, which can lie maturing in a cool, dark room for many months.

Or you can simply sell the surplus. Be aware that, to do so legally requires you to be granted a permit which will mean having your premises

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## LIVESTOCK



Dairy cows drink up to 70 litres of water a day.

inspected and constantly maintaining strict hygiene.

Even if you are just informally supplying friends and neighbours, it is still a serious commitment for health reasons.

And don't be tempted to water the milk down in order to make it go further. You will get away with it once, but a buyer who is caught with this ploy will never return as a customer. Rather sell your milk on the basis of its freshness, purity and wholesomeness.

One cow will give you milk for 200-odd days of the year. Thus, if year-round consistency of supply is necessary you will actually need two cows,

each calving a few months apart.

### Time

There is a commitment of time as well as labour. Once the calf is weaned, the cow needs to be milked twice a day, as evenly spaced into two twelve-hour intervals as possible, which tends to limit your social life unless you share the duties among family members or have knowledgeable and reliable staff. Failure to milk to schedule, or missing a milking, will result in the cow's udder becoming painfully engorged, in severe cases allowing for mastitis to develop.

Consider the time you or your staff will need to spend in keeping a cow:

❑ Milking ~ once you've got the hang of it and providing you have a co-operative cow, 20 minutes in the morning and 20 minutes at night if done by hand, and a bit less by machine;

❑ Feeding ~ you will need to put out supplementary rations, ten minutes in the morning and ten minutes at night;

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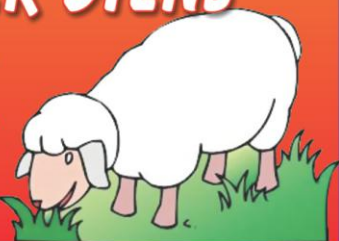


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## LIVESTOCK

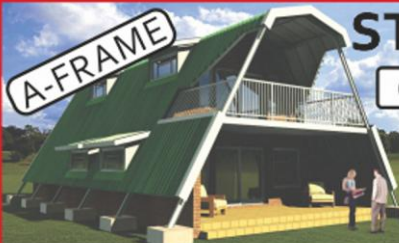
- ☐ Pasturing ~ somebody will need to take the cos out to the field, which will take a bit of time, depending on the size and location of your pasture;
- ☐ Straining and cooling milk ~ and allowing time to wash, fill and date bottles;
- ☐ Washing utensils ~ hygiene is extremely important when dealing with milk products, five to ten minutes per session;
- ☐ Separating the cream and cleaning up ~ ten to 15 minutes daily or every other day;
- ☐ Making butter ~ minimum of 30 minutes (Add more time for making other products such as cheese or yoghurt);
- ☐ Cleaning the shed or kraal and removing manure ~ about 15 minutes;
- ☐ Grooming the cow ~ about five minutes;
- ☐ Watering by hand ~ five to ten minutes.

Then you'll have to think about working with the calf. The time required depends on who feeds it: you or the


cow. You'll also need to teach it to lead and respect the fence. Providing fodder, making hay or growing other crops to feed the cow will also take time, if you're growing the feed yourself. So you'll need two to two and a half hours for daily chores, and more time to train the calf and cultivate or buy feed. Furthermore, both cow and calf will need to be medicated at various stages, which will take more time.

### Land and Feed Requirements


How much land do you need to keep a cow? Obviously it varies according to the vegetation that you have, the number of cattle you want to keep and even the breed that you choose, but generally in most parts of the country, one head of cattle (a single Large Stock Unit or LSU) requires at least one hectare of grazing. You will need to manage the grazing of the veld, which will mean moving the cattle from field to field over a period of time. Before a grazing system is considered, camps must



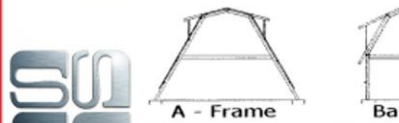
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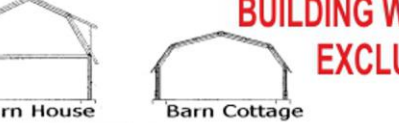
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## LIVESTOCK



be properly fenced off.

When putting up camps, veld variation must be considered to prevent area selective grazing.

You will also need to ensure that there is water available in each camp. It is also be good to have trees for shade and protection from wind. On top of all that, you will need to budget for supplementary rations. If you do not have sufficient grazing are

there neighbours who would be willing to let you graze their pastures? How practical is this, in terms of walking the cattle there and back, ensuring that they are safe, that the field is clean, the fencing is strong and safe and that there is sufficient water? And will you have to pay for it?

### Housing

Apart from somewhere under cover in which to milk them daily the animals require shelter at night, to protect them against cold and for security. Do you have an existing out-building?

Check [here](#) for what is required in most municipal bylaws for a cowshed. 🌸



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## LIVESTOCK

# Why you should choose Dexter cattle

The 14th annual auction of Dexter cattle by members of the Overvaal Dexter Club, to be held at the Willem Prinsloo Agricultural Museum near Rayton in Gauteng in March highlights a breed of cattle perfect for small-scale farmers and smallholders.

Standing not much more than a metre high, Dexters are a dual purpose breed, being good producers of both meat and milk. Of all the small breeds, the Dexter is the only one that is small by virtue of its genetics, and not because of human manipulation or genetic engineering.

Dexters are hardy non-selective grazers, and are generally placid animals that because of their size, could be classed as “medium” stock units rather than large stock units when calculating stocking densities on one's land. Smallholders with their limited grazing, therefore, should seriously consider the breed as an alternative to larger, hungrier breeds such as Friesians, Jerseys or Ayrshires, only very few of which can be kept sustainably on an average smallholding if any semblance of healthy pasture is to be maintained.

Figures produced by animal researchers in the Free State show a feed conversion ratio of 5,4:1, meaning that for every 5,4 kg of feed con-



Image: David Merrett

sumes the animal will gain 1kg. The average daily gain for one of the young bulls tested was 1,429kg. Dexter cows mature early and produce their first calves at about two years old. They can continue calving up to the age of 15 or 16 years. Dexters' carcasses have a high meat to bone ratio and the meat is well-marbled and tender and, being smaller, the cuts are well-suited to supplying the needs of smaller households with their smaller freezers. Dexter cows are dependable milkers, with yields of up to 15 to 20 litres per day, with a high butter-fat and protein content. Production is also prolific, with more than 1 100 litres of milk over a 299 day lactation period having been recorded. The breed is believed to have originated in the 13th Century around what is now County Kerry in south-eastern Ireland, although this has never been conclusively proven. The first registered Dexters appeared in South Africa in 1917. However, there is a romantic story that Dexters, because of their size and milk yield,



## LIVESTOCK

were carried aboard ships sailing the African coast, and were put ashore in South Africa at the end of their lactation. More practically, Dr Eric Nobbs of the Cape Province imported a consignment of Dexters from various well-known herds in England. The animals adapted well to their new, very different environment and were soon in high demand among small and large farmers alike. True Dexters are found in only two colours, namely black and red or dun, although a small amount of white is allowed on the underline behind the navel. Another benefit of the breed is its apparent immunity against Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis, aka Mad Cow Disease, and its resistance to many other



Red dun Dexter heifer.

common ailments and mastitis.

When breeding Dexters one challenge can present itself, namely spontaneous abortion of what is called a “bulldog calf”.

Breed standards, promotion of the breed and all official matters pertaining to Dexters in South Africa are looked after by the SA Dexter Cattle Breeders' Society, which maintains a comprehensive website.

[Click here](#). There are two regional Dexter clubs, namely the Overvaal Club in Gauteng and the Free State Dexter Club. Membership applications can be found [here](#). 🌸

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## BOOKSHELF

# Books to help your dairy farming efforts

There are a number of American and British books on keeping a cow on your “homestead” which can be bought off second hand book sites etc. More pertinently to South Africans, however, there are two books on the subject which small scale farmers are able to download.

### **Dairy Farming Handbook**

Smallholders who are interested in dairy farming will find a great deal of useful information in the *Dairy Farming Handbook*. The purpose of the handbook is to offer information to farmers (both commercial and smallholder) to remain sustainable despite fluctuating farm-gate prices and increasing production costs. Compiled by experts in their particular fields, the handbook aims to support dairy farmers with problem-focused information based on scientific research. Increasing the efficiency of milk production is critical under these circumstances; either by increasing production per cow or by decreasing the production cost of milk. To this end, the comprehensive Dairy Farming Handbook includes sections on the most important aspects of dairy farming: nutrition and feeding, housing, reproduction management, breeding, milk production and quality and health



and biosecurity.

Compiled by Dr CJC Muller, the book can be downloaded free of charge [here](#).

### **Milk SA Handbook**

Milk SA is the umbrella organisation for the milk industry in South Africa. The members of Milk SA comprise the Milk Producers' Organisation (MPO) and the SA Milk Processors' Organisation (Sampro).

As part of their mission to support new dairy farmers, they published the Milk SA Guide to Dairy Farming, which was updated in 2014.

It covers the South African dairy farming environment, calf and heifer rearing, feeding and health care, animal health care, animal production, livestock feeding, milk harvesting and in-parlour processing. Click [here](#) for more.

❑ *The Code of Practice for Milk Producers* is also available on the Milk SA website. This sets out requirements for the milking shed, milking parlour, the milk room, and also elaborates on good dairy farming practice. 🌸



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## IN THE FIELD

# Manage your mud: Soil, rain & livestock

**M**any regions have been receiving higher-than-usual rainfall this summer.

This will have led in certain areas to a problem in smallholder pastures called pugging.

Pugging happens when grazing animals tread wet soils, sink into the pasture surface and leave large holes. Their hooves create shallow holes of compacted soil, damaging the pasture by burying it in the mud.

Continual pugging will lead to the paddock looking like brown soup. The smallholder will think that all that is needed are few days and it will all dry out. However, in some cases pugging causes the delicate crumb structure of the soil to break down. The crumbs are smeared by the pounding action of the feet, and the soil air is squashed out.

Indeed, it can be a period of months to years, or perhaps longer, before this delicate crumb structure is restored. Research has shown that on average return to full pasture production can be delayed by up to nine months. The problem will have been made worse by the tendency of small-scale livestock owners to overstock the pasture, which means there are more animals on a patch of land than there should be.



You will know you have this problem when:

- ☐ Paddocks soon turn to mud when grazed during wet periods;
- ☐ Gateways and around water troughs are particularly bad;
- ☐ Deep tracks develop along fences or stock camp areas, which then act as runoffs for surface water;
- ☐ Water in drains and streams beside the grazed paddocks becomes coloured by sediment;
- ☐ There is nutrient loss from surface runoff;
- ☐ It becomes impossible to walk across your field without sinking in or your stock is sinking into the veld while they are grazing;
- ☐ You will observe lower overall production when the pasture dries out;
- ☐ You will have areas of bare ground that do not grass over for long periods or you have rapid weed growth on bare areas;
- ☐ Damaged drains no longer function, so surface water is visible.

On the other hand, you will know that you don't have that problem when you can continue to use that



## IN THE FIELD

field for grazing into winter and the signs of hoof marks disappear. Your pastures should then achieve their full annual growth potential.

If you do have a problem, ideally you would withdraw the animals altogether for a number of months to enable the soil to recover ~ but few small scale farmers have enough grazing land to be able to do that. So you will need to keep a close watch on the pastures when they are grazed in wet conditions. Be prepared to remove stock from pasture when the first signs of damage appear and then use on/off grazing strategies.

As a last resort you might have to temporarily fence off the damaged areas and where stock like to congregate, and only allow the livestock onto the well grassed areas. You can speed up your rotation system, so that the animals are not in the field for as long as usual. Don't graze areas next to waterways ~ fence them off. Provide extra water troughs to prevent stock walking long distances to drink.



Muddy sheep.

Move stock across grassed areas rather than across grazed areas. Don't let stock get too hungry so they walk along the fences while waiting to come in at night. Then you must consider if you need more than just rest to bring about rejuvenation of the grass. You might need to plough up the damaged areas and reseed in spring with a good veld grass seed mix.

Alternatively you could embrace the collection of mud and water and turn the area into a mini wetland, wildlife pond or marsh garden. Read [here](#) to learn how to do that. Now might also be a good time to reassess your stock numbers. The excessive rains have affected grain and fodder production. This means that the price of feed is going to start rising. Perhaps you should consider selling some of your livestock, before the prices of animals begin to drop. 🌸

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## ENERGY

### What are your alternative energy options?

**W**ith the threat by Eskom of a more than 20% hike in electricity prices this year, and at least the certainty of a price increase of some sort, the prospect of generating one's own electricity becomes increasingly attractive, if not downright necessary.

And the good news is that while the technology to do so is improving year by year, so too is it coming down in price.

In short, going off grid is becoming a feasible and sensible option.

Nevertheless, to do a complete job and be free of Eskom forever requires a considerable outlay, the total cost of which will in most cases require financing and which will be measured by the number of years it will take for the system to start paying for itself.

Is your wish to be totally independent of Eskom forever? Or are you merely wishing to have some form of backup in the event of power failures? Or are you looking to reduce your energy bill while still using bought power for certain tasks?

And, what forms of alternative energy are you willing and able to use?

Machine-generated electricity, eg a generator or inverter? Solar electric? Wind powered electric? Hydro-electric? Gas? In which case are you



considering bought-in LPG? Or biogas?

#### ***Inverters & generators***

At the lowest end of the scale, both of cost and hassle, is the installation of an inverter to tide you over when the power fails. An inverter is, effectively, an oversize uninterruptible power supply (UPS), which is plugged into the mains from which it charges itself when the power is on, and which feeds power into your system when there is a power failure. An inverter is silent (it might emit a slight hum when in use), emits no odours, doesn't need refuelling and can be left to its own devices. For keeping critical appliances running, such as computers, lights, incubators etc, an inverter is an attractive and relatively inexpensive option.

However, in a domestic installation an inverter has a limit to both its running time and the number and type of appliances it can handle. Thus, you could find yourself still in the dark if the power failure is lengthy.

A bit more hands-on, but still



## ENERGY

reasonable in terms of cost, is to invest in a generator. This can be a simple job, recoil or electric start (preferably the latter), plugged into the house's circuit via a changeover switch. The changeover switch should have two LEDs on it, one to show when mains power is available, the other to show when power is coming from the generator.

Again, you will need to match the power of the generator to the power required in the house.

Also, you will need to ensure that the generator is serviced periodically, is fuelled up and ready to run at all times, and that the battery that starts the machine is charged.

Where you site the machine is also

critical. They are hardly things of beauty, and even the silent ones make some noise (not to mention exhaust fumes), so you will want to site it in an unobtrusive spot. Make sure, however, that you can get to it easily for refuelling, particularly if it's a big diesel that needs topping up from a tank trailer.

Finally, of course, consider not only the purchase and servicing costs of the generator, but also the fuel cost which, like the cost of electricity itself, does not decrease. And, a generator is absolutely not a “green” installation.

Neither of these two options will lead to you going totally off-grid. To do that will require a solar installation.

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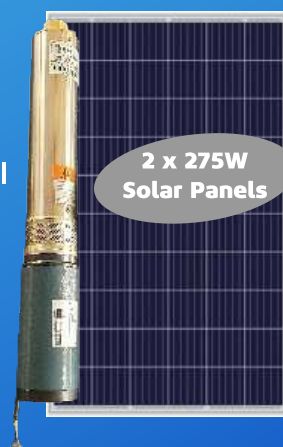
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## ENERGY

Or, if you live in a particularly windy area and have the space, a wind turbine installation. (Or, if you are lucky enough to live on a mountain-side with a permanent stream running through your property, by a small hydro-turbine).

### Solar

A solar installation on its own will generate free electricity only when the sun shines, while a wind turbine will generate only when the wind blows. The problem is that, in the case of solar at least, one's maximum need for power is at night, to keep the lights on etc.

Thus, in both cases, batteries and other devices are necessary to store the electricity and convert it into a form usable by household appliances, for example.

How big a set-up you require will depend on the size of your house, the appliances you run electrically,

and the steps you may already have taken to reduce your electrical usage, such as swapping incandescent lights for LEDs, replacing electric stoves with gas or wood-burners, and heating your water by solar or gas geyser etc.

### Gas

Perhaps, if you live on a smallholding that generates a lot of organic waste, you will have enough to fuel a biogas digester. From this you could run a gas stove, gas water heater, and even gas lighting.

The old expression "nothing for nothing and damned little for sixpence" applies to biogas, however.

Firstly, biogas has a lower calorific content than, say LPG, so you need to burn a greater volume to achieve the same degree of flame as LPG.

Technically, this means that LPG gas stoves will not burn biogas unless, at least, the jets are replaced with ones with a much bigger bore.

Secondly, to generate enough biogas for a normal smallholding household



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## ENERGY

you need an extraordinarily large amount of feedstock. This is the organic matter that, as it decomposes in the digester, gives off the gas. The point is that an awful lot of feedstock is required to generate a modest amount of gas. A normal suburban household will never generate enough organic waste, or have a constant enough supply, to run a household on biogas, except perhaps sporadically.

But a smallholding or small farm might, especially if the agricultural activity on the plot or farm involves commercially processing lots of vegetables, or livestock, and particularly livestock such as chickens, cattle, pigs and horses.

Used bedding and manure make excellent feedstock, as does any truly wet vegetation (vegetable peelings and water hyacinth being excellent examples).

One of the issues often overlooked with running one's home on alternative energy sources is the amount of time and labour required to run the installation.

With the exception of solar and wind power (which you will only worry about when the sun doesn't shine or the wind doesn't blow), you or family or staff will have to spend time ensuring wood is available for your wood stove, that feedstock is available for ~ and is fed into ~ your biogas digester, etc. 🌸



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## Smallholders: Always complaining

**S**outhern Africa, the experts say, is a water-scarce region. Well, you could have fooled me, judging by this summer on the Highveld.

Don't get me wrong. As a smallholder who tries to grow stuff I like a few nice rainy days in summer, because I know that in a few short months we'll be staring up at the endless blue skies of a dry Highveld winter. And good rains mean that, if nothing else, groundwater levels are replenished, which means good water from our boreholes in the dry season.

But this year, the tales of woe from farmers and smallholders have been endless. Down in the western Free State entire crops have been washed out of the ground by flowing runoff. In our case our fields and vegetable beds have been waterlogged to the extent that all the earthworms have surfaced so that they can breathe. And the effect on our crops has been unhelpful. Mealies don't grow if their roots stand in water for two weeks. And tomatoes, full of water though the fruit may be, likewise. And endless grey wet days make a very conducive environment for plant diseases and pests.

But the problem has beset the big boys as well, and we can all expect higher prices for vegetables in the coming months. What the effect of

washaways will be on the maize harvest, and thus on feed prices and staples such as meal remains to be calculated.

Hopefully it won't be too great, as while some farmers' crops may indeed have been wiped out, others may have received only enough rain to enhance, rather than destroy, their crops. The one good thing about above average rains is that it means many of South Africa's dams are full, or filling. And it enables a good flush-out of the river system. In the case of the Vaal this is a good thing for those living in the Vaal Triangle and on to Parys, as it means all the accumulated raw sewage which has been allowed to flow into the river from broken wastewater treatment works can be washed downstream. Less happily, however, it also means that tons and tons of solid waste that has had months, if not years, to accumulate in the catchment areas becomes dislodged and flows relentlessly downstream, eventually out to sea if it's not caught by hardworking volunteers first.

But in the final analysis, of course, when it comes to rainfall smallholders and farmers are never happy. It's either too much, or it's too little. At least it means we always have something to complain about.

