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Let's head for sunny uplands



As the “green shoots” of the approaching spring start to make their appearance, it's a good time to take stock of our situation. To count our blessings, if you will.

For we have just come through two and a half of the most difficult years in, certainly, the last quarter century, and possibly since World War 2.

Many people, young and old, have died of the virus, many more live with the ongoing effects of long Covid, and many, many more still have suffered huge financial hardship as businesses have collapsed, and others have downsized their workforce.

But despite whatever may have happened to one, and whatever misfortune one may have befallen, we believe there is, now, some hope.

We get the sense that South Africans are rebounding, and enthusiasm, optimism and drive are becoming stronger as people say “Enough. We want to get back to a normal productive life.”

Politically and economically, of course, South Africa is still a mess, and will remain so, with political commentators now openly saying that the ANC regime will be gone in its current form after the general election in 2024, or at least rendered so weak that it is forced into coalitions in order to remain relevant.

This will usher in a messy political era, when parties with very different ideologies are forced to work together. But hopefully one effect will be to put a stop to the wholesale looting and corruption that characterise current ANC political circles.

Also, coalitions may ~ just may ~ lead to improved service delivery in those municipalities and utilities that have collapsed under ANC misrule. This could happen as coalition member parties seek to impress their electorates by shaping and controlling their municipal infrastructure with greater vigour, in the hope of winning an outright majority in some future

election.

Having made that point, it should also be noted that any real reform is going to need rolling back some of the ideologically desirable but economically destructive laws and edicts imposed upon South African in the past 25 years. Some of these are big, such as wholesale Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment which has seen many politically-connected individuals ascend to highly-paid positions for which they have neither the experience nor the necessary skills, to the detriment of experienced counterparts who have been sidelined. Others, however, are relatively small, such as trade minister Ebrahim Patel's recent edict to retain, rather than increase, a 62% anti-dumping duty on chicken portions, allowing producer countries to sell their unwanted cuts on the South African market at below-cost prices that local producers could never meet. The effect of this will mean that while consumers have access to cheap protein in their diets, South African broiler farmers have warned that such a move will jeopardise investments in the industry of up to R570 million. Hardly a win for a South African industry from Patel, then.

And then there's the ANC's National Health scheme, which the party is intent on pushing through in some form or another, despite having absolutely no clue how it will be managed, or funded, and which South Africans can't afford anyway.

Yes, South Africans are in for some interesting times in the next few years. So let's just hope that we can slowly make our way forward from the murky swamp we find ourselves in today, to the sunny uplands of a brighter future.

Pete Bower

Editor

**SOUTH AFRICAN
SMALLHOLDER**
AUGUST 2022
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FRONT COVER

SA Phendula Rabbit. Image: Sally Giebelmann, Zenzele Farm, home of the SA Phendula Rabbit.

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New regulations for honey-based liquors

Beekeepers and others who make any form of alcoholic beverage containing honey should take note of changes in descriptions promulgated in *Government Gazette* 46681 of 8 July. The changes published are amendments to the Liquor Products Act, No 60 of 1989 as amended. As far as honey-based liquors are concerned the scope of the amendments are broad, covering every

imaginable drink which incorporates honey, regardless of its alcohol content. Significantly, the amendments also include regulations on the production and sale of traditional African meads. The relevant Gazette can be downloaded free of charge from gpwonline.co.za. 🌿

WINNER

Nelspruit resident wins big at Magnum Power

Nelspruit resident Mandla Mamba was drawn as the first monthly winner of a portable power washer worth R1 500 in a lucky draw organised by Magnum Power of Benoni. To qualify for the draw Mamba spent more than R9 000 with Magnum in July. The promotion is on-going with the next winner to be drawn at the end of August. For information call Magnum Power 011 422 6354. 🌿

Ode to plot life

Pressure pump's packed in, the wife shouts to me.
A sad start to the day, bad news before my tea.
The next day there's a rinkhals pestering the hens,
I grab my old air rifle and he dies in their pens.
Two days pass quietly, no problems on the plot,
Then bad news again, lawn mower engine's shot.
It'd be easier, I sometimes think, living in the town,
But then every evening when the sun is going down,
I sit under a gum tree with a beer in my hand,
And think to myself - "Ain't plot life just grand".

Fred Pearson, Walker's Fruit Farms



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A man wearing a black helmet with a clear face shield, a black long-sleeved shirt, black pants, and gloves is using a STIHL brushcutter. He is standing on a grassy hillside with a blue sky and white clouds in the background. The brushcutter is cutting through tall grass, and some grass is flying in the air.

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Battery chicken regulations to be updated

The NSPCA has been pushing for battery-housed laying hens to be housed more humanely, but the SA Poultry Association (Sapa) proposes to just increase the space for battery hens from 450cm² to 550cm², which the NSPCA finds unacceptable.

Moreover, the SPCA council believes that Sapa has been claiming that the NSPCA agreed to the proposed increase in cage size. The NSPCA has denied this, adding "Until such a time that chickens live a life that is in line with the five freedoms of animals, there will be no agreement from the NSPCA."

Globally, says the NSPCA, chickens are among the most abused animals bred for food, and says it is estimated that more than 86% of (commercial) egg-laying hens in South Africa are kept in battery cages. The NSPCA explains that battery cages offer extreme confinement, with each hen having less living space than a standard A4 piece of paper. The sole purpose of a caged hen system is to maximize profit and productivity, with more hens being housed in a small area and higher egg production in comparison with free-range alternatives. "There is little to no consider-

ation for the welfare of the hens."

Moreover, battery cage systems deny the hens the opportunity to exhibit even the most basic and key behaviours that are fundamental to their welfare. Most are unable to even stretch their wings, let alone forage, preen, dust-bathe, exercise or perch. Such intense confinement results in hens beginning to engage in unnatural behaviours as a coping mechanism. "They begin to self-mutilate or cannibalise other hens."

The human response to this is not to allow more freedom, space etc, but to surgically remove parts of the hens' beaks (without any anaesthesia or pain killer).

"Physical alterations to farmed animals are predominately carried out in an attempt to 'adapt' these animals to overcome behavioural problems and injuries associated with inappropriate or inhumane husbandry systems."

But it is not just hens in the commercial poultry system that are ill-treated.

As male chicks in the egg industry are not bred for human consumption, ie as broilers, they are deemed

Continued on page 7

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LIVESTOCK

Dairy farmers can prevent bovine mastitis

Smallholders with lactating cows must be aware of the dangers of bovine mastitis. This is the inflammation of the udder and can be caused by bacterial infection or physical trauma. It can lead to a reduction in milk production, and can be very painful for the animal. For small-scale dairy farmers, mastitis is a big concern and treatment can become costly. A cow that has had mastitis previously can take longer to get pregnant again, adding to the cost of owning her. And the quality of her milk can be made worse.

Prevention of mastitis starts with making sure your cow has a dry period between weaning and her next pregnancy. Studies have shown that infection with mastitis in up to 60% of cases actually originated during the dry period. After drying, a plug made of keratin forms in the animal's teat canal to close off the teat and udder to outside pathogens. If lactation is

induced too quickly after weaning, this plug does not have sufficient time to form and pathogens can enter the mammary system. The speed at which this plug grows varies from animal to animal.

In high-producing cows, there are ways around this. Teat sealants have been used successfully in other parts of the world and are starting to emerge in the market in South Africa. But, for small-scale producers, prevention in other ways might be more cost effective than buying medicaments. Ensure your milking machines are properly functioning by doing adequate maintenance at regular intervals. Keep your milking machines and shed clean. Make sure your cows go through adequate dry periods between lactation periods. This will vary according to breed, age and size of the cow. Keep up to date with vaccine schedules to prevent compromised immune systems. 🌸

POULTRY NEWS

"worthless" by the industry. "Upon hatching, therefore, male chicks originating from egg-laying breeder farms are disposed of in a manner which involves grinding them alive using industrial macerators."

Further down the value chain, many popular egg and chicken producers and retailers in South Africa keep their consumers in the dark regarding the conditions their chickens are being reared in, says the NSPCA. Inaccurate labelling prevents correct traceability of products by consumers, and the NSPCA says consumers should not be fooled by labels that use terms such as 'farm grown', 'country eggs' etc, and should even be sceptical about eggs that are labelled as 'free range'.

A case in point is the fact that the government has made it legal for producers and retailers to label eggs as 'free range' even though the hens could have been confined indoors for a 24-week period for quaran-

tine. The NSPCA says that consumers are unaware that due to Avian Influenza outbreaks, free-range layer hens are often 'quarantined' indoors for 24 weeks, yet the eggs are still sold to the public as 'free range'.

The NSPCA has thus approached retailers to place signs to inform customers that the hens were quarantined for 24 weeks, but doing so remains at the discretion of the retailer. 🌸



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IN THE GARDEN

Let's give agave a shot

Although many of the species of "orphan" plants we feature are indigenous, there are some which are not. However, they will grow readily in South Africa, and hold great potential for harvesting and producing a variety of edible or medicinal products. One such, indigenous to Central America, specifically Mexico, is Tequila Agave (*Agave tequilana* var 'Azul').

According to Mexican law only one cultivar, or clone, of one species of Agave, can be used to produce the fiery distilled spirit known as "Tequila". All other Agave derived spirits are known as "Mezcal". It's considered a class difference, and for a very good reason: no other Agave species produces the levels and purity of sugars needed for brewing and distillation, in the amount of time that this plant does. This is the true "Blue Agave", and it thrives in South African conditions.

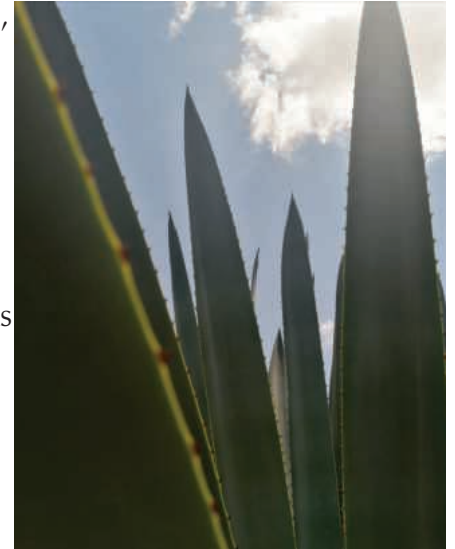
In recent years a fledgeling agave industry has sprung up in the Little Karoo around Graaff Reinet, and South African-distilled "agave spirit" is sometimes

Another in our series on "orphan" and unusual crop species, by University of Pretoria horticulturist Jason Sampson

and craft brewers will begin growing and using the "real deal" in coming years.

Large and imposing, this extremely blue leafed and spikey plant thrives on neglect. It can be included in multi-cropping, used as a security barrier (it was once mooted as a possible solution to curb illegal immigration across South Africa's porous northern border), planted on

seen in South African bottlestores. But, although the South African agave spirit industry is doing well, up to this point it has depended on different species in the genus, and one hopes that enterprising smallholders



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retaining walls etc. It requires no supplemental irrigation in all but the driest areas of South Africa, and is entirely sterile, so cannot set seed and can thus be considered non-invasive.

It also can tolerate the cold encountered in most areas of the country.

The usable part of the plant is its "heart" or core. If suckers are consistently removed this 'pina' can weigh up to 200kg and produce enough 'aguamiel', or "honeywater", to produce three to five bottles of tequila. If the plants are allowed to clump, rotation is faster, but the pina are much smaller.

An important part of producing quality agave hearts is to cut off the flower spike, which emerges after five to eight years, a few months before harvest. This allows sugar levels to reach very high levels.

Plants are propagated from suckers and bulbils formed on a mature flower spike.

This plant is clonal, and it is important to buy from a verified source as the species and cultivar is very important. It is still rare in cultivation in South Africa.

A huge potential market exists for both the final products of this plant (tequila), but also properly processed and dried mature agave heart, which currently is imported at high prices per kilogram for

brewing purposes.

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tequila plant, Agave tequilana var 'Azul'. It's easy to see where it gets its name "Blue Agave".

For more information on this, or other orphan crops, please contact Jason Sampson at jason.sampson@up.ac.za. 🌿



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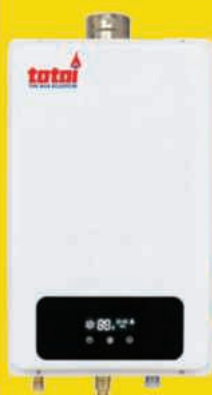
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Rabbits as a high-value protein source

While depression and financial distress were the fate of many people during the Covid lockdown, one sector at least experienced an unexpected boom, and that's the home-grown meat rabbit sector.

Chairman of the Gauteng Rabbit Breeders' Association (GRBA) Gavin Grgurin ascribes this growth to the fact that the lockdown brought about feelings of isolation and "inward-lookingness" for many who, as a result, started to examine ways to become more self-sufficient.

And, of course, financial distress for many meant that ways and means of reducing family expenditure on, for example, food were more actively pursued.

He points out that the cost of setting up a rabbitry, with properly-sized and constructed cages, an automatic watering system, feeders etc has meant that interest and uptake in home meat production set-ups has tended to be among higher-income families, with lower income families sticking to poultry as the set-up costs are lower.

Grgurin says rabbits are ideal for the production of meat, and can readily be housed in a suburban

setting as they are, unlike poultry, silent so won't disturb one's neighbours.

Also, studies have shown that, if done properly, a small rabbitry produces high-quality animal protein more efficiently than any other livestock, including poultry.

He calculates that a family of four will enjoy sufficient protein for their diet with only 24 breeding animals.

These will be four sets of one buck and five does, established on a twelve-week production cycle.

Good quality does will give birth, says Grgurin, to an average of six kits per cycle, thus each set of rabbits can produce 30 young per cycle.

Using good quality animals, housing them properly and feeding them well, should result in a dressed carcass of 1,4 to 1,5kg at



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twelve to 14 weeks.

But choice of the breeding stock is vital and, obviously, the larger breeds are popular for meat production. These include the indigenous Phendulas, as well as New Zealand Whites, Reds and Californians.

Rabbit Housing

Good rabbit housing is vital if the animals are to thrive. Ideally this should be under cover, draught free but with excellent ventilation. Construction materials should be suitably robust and the common practice of making cages out of chicken mesh should be avoided as this material is too thin and will injure the animals' feet, not to mention the fact that they may readily chew through it.

Thus, weldmesh, galvanised after welding, should be used. Two sizes are recommended, namely 25 x 12,5 x 2mm for the floor and 25 x 25 x 1.6mm for the sides and roof. For large breeds the minimum recommended cage size is 900 x 700 x 500mm (giving a floor area of 0.63m²).

There should be a support underneath the flooring of the cage to minimise movement of the floor.

In addition to the cage itself, a nest box measuring 450mm x 300mm and with the floor covered in

bedding hay fine enough for the doe to make a comfortable nest should be introduced to her cage, 25 days after mating.

Faeces and urine should fall through the floor into a disposal channel. Therefore, in a multi-tier cage set-up there should be a gap between each tier of cages, and between the bottom tier and the



New Zealand Red.

floor, in which a slightly sloped waste disposal channel should be fitted, draining into some form of removable receptacle.

This provides a wonderful benefit for anybody who combines their rabbitry with home-grown vegetables and fruit: rabbit manure is one of the most nutritious of all animal manures and will do wonders in any garden.

Or, in large enough quantities, can be sold to other gardeners at a handsome profit.

Each cage must have an adequate supply of fresh drinking water, offered to the animals through a nipple drinker system.

A rabbit's diet is broad, and should comprise commercial rabbit pellets, as well as green feed such as fresh grass, carrots, apples, cucumber and leafy vegetables (with the exception of cabbage), and an ad-lib supply of fodder, preferably in the form of good-quality Teff or Eragrostis.

Apart from his role as chairman of the GRBA, Grgurin is himself a leading breeder and judge, as well as a manufacturer of cages.

For more information visit grba.org.za or call Grgurin on 081 765 0469. 🌱



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Cooking rabbit meat for every palate

Diners are often reluctant to try rabbit dishes when confronted by them on a menu, perhaps in the mistaken belief that the flavour will be too “exotic” or “gamey” for their palates.

They thus do themselves a disservice, as cooked rabbit meat has a very similar colour, texture and flavour to similarly-cooked chicken.

In many cases, in fact, it is only the fact that the shape of rabbit pieces cooked “on the bone” bear no resemblance to chicken pieces that one would know the difference.



Rabbit can be roasted or stewed for hearty winter meals.

What can one do with rabbit meat?

Just about everything one can do with chicken, from flame grilling and roasting to delicious casseroles and stews.

In South Africa rabbit is popular among rural dwellers who have long caught and cooked wild rabbits and their close relatives, hares.

And now, with the growth in commercial meat rabbit production, domestic rabbits are increasingly being bred for meat by low income households.

Among urban populations, however, rabbit still remains an under-utilised source of animal protein. It is not commonly found in supermarkets, for example, and is only available from specialist butchers if they feel there is demand from their customers.

Thus, despite interest in the keeping of meat rabbits being on the increase among those seeking to become more self-sufficient, rabbit meat is sought and enjoyed by European continentals such as the German, Austrian and French communities in South Africa, as well as by the Chinese.

Rabbit dishes are therefore more likely to be found on the menus of French and Continental-style restaurants, or those serving Chinese food. 🌿

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Know the regulations if you want to keep rabbits

With domestic rabbits having been reclassified as agricultural livestock (rather than pets) the Gauteng Rabbit Breeders' Association (GRBA) has undertaken a lengthy series of consultations with the SA Bureau of Standards (SABS) and the National Council of the Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NSPCA) to draw up a mutually-acceptable set of guidelines for the keeping and breeding of rabbits in commercial and agricultural settings. Among the items covered in the latest version of the

GRBA draft guidelines are specifications on cage sizes and construction material for small, medium and large breeds, and recommendations on optimum breeding cycles, housing requirements, feeding, welfare and transportation.

The GRBA hopes that the guidelines being discussed will, when adopted, become law, which will give animal welfare authorities more "teeth" when dealing with unscrupulous breeders.

For more information email Gavin Grgurin, GRBA chairman at fromthefarm@telkomsa.net. 🌱

IN THE GARDEN

Practicing climate-smart crop production

Whether you are growing vegetables for subsistence or commercial purposes, climate change and variable weather will have an impact on your yield. Because of this a smallholder must choose his or her vegetable varieties carefully, taking into account changing weather patterns, rainfall and soil quality. The concept of climate smart agriculture extends to crop production.

Despite good rains last summer for a large portion of the country, South Africa remains classified as an arid country, ranking in the top 30 driest in the world. In addition to water scarcity, experts are also concerned about the country's declining water quality as a result of pollution, industry, mining, wetland destruction and energy consumption.

So, when choosing what vegetables you are going to plant on your smallholding, drought resistant plants should be high on your list. Drought-tolerant crops have a deeper root system, allowing them to adapt to both heat and low water availability. Some options also grow quicker than other crops, allowing you to

harvest sooner and therefore requiring less irrigation. There are also some options of drought-tolerant strains of normal plants.

Water usage

If you live in a dry area, or the weather service has predicted a dry season for your area, consider planting seedlings instead of seeds. This speeds up growing, and minimizes the time in which your plants need to be irrigated. If your irrigation system is anything other than a watering can (drip irrigation, hosepipe, micro-jet or spray irrigation etc), anything you can do to reduce your reliance on this system will of course also save you money in the form of your electricity bill. A system that requires pumps to work can become very costly very quickly.

For added water retention to combat drought, use mulch on your crops. This helps prevent run-off and evaporation, leaving more time for your plants to absorb the water and therefore needing you to use less water. Organic mulch should be applied around

Continued on page 17

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Mulching with wood chips.

drought-tolerant vegetables at a depth of 5-7cm. Straw mulch is an excellent choice for vegetable gardens. It decomposes over time, releasing organic material and

nutrients into the soil as a result. Wood shavings/sawdust, grass cuttings or even newspaper can be used. Mulch should not be used in wet areas or low-lying areas as too much moisture can lead to problems such as root rot. The old wives tale of using discarded polypropylene feed sacks (or maize-meal bags) should not be trusted. These plastic bags will cause a pollution problem down the line.

the elimination of pests and weeds will also play a role in ensuring you are farming in a climate-smart way. First, additives you might need to use in your soil can create far-reaching effects. A healthy soil, rich in organic matter will not only benefit your crops, but also assist in water retention and therefore mean you will need less frequent watering or irrigation. Using compost will go a long way to help you achieve a climate-smart soil.

Cover crops will also assist in limiting, and in some cases completely eradicating, the growth of weeds. Recommended cover crops include oats, velvet beans, cowpeas, forage sorghum, dry beans, soya beans, clover, chickpeas, buckwheat, barley, wheat, lupines, lucerne, teff, ryegrass, and vetch. Before you choose a cover crop, you must take into account the existing ecology of your soil, the growth patterns of your crops (are you growing vines, plants with long stalks, root vegetables etc) and climate factors such as frost. You must also make sure that your cover crop will not compete for nutrients and water with your vegetables.

Soil health

The way in which you manage your soil health, and

Alternative growing methods

Crop yield for small-scale producers ~ those growing

Continued on page 19

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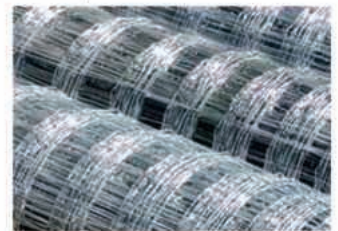
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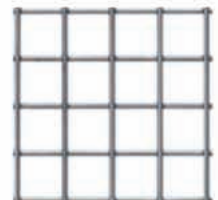
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IN THE GARDEN



Bag growing. Images: ARC

for their own kitchens and maybe some friends, neighbours or staff members ~ can be increased by growing vertically. This will reduce run-off and maximize what you can get out of a limited amount of soil. Popular vertical growing methods include bags (such as old feed sacks) in which holes are cut and your seedlings or seeds planted. This means your vegetables are contained in a much smaller area, water used trickles down to a number of plants at once and you will get maximum use out of a small amount of soil. A vertical garden can also be watered by hand with a watering can, meaning no electricity is needed.

The Dept of Agriculture has compiled a list of drought-tolerant crops. These are indigenous or indigenised crops that, as demonstrated in our ongoing series on indigenous orphan crops (page 11), are largely underutilized.

Pearl millet, for example, is already popular among subsistence farmers who keep livestock. It grows in a wide variety of soils and arid or semi-arid conditions. It has a higher oil content than maize, and is less susceptible to pests than more common grains such as maize or wheat. Taro (or amadumbe) produces edible leaves and corms. It is high in carbohydrates and protein. It is most commonly found in KwaZulu Natal and the Eastern Cape. Sweet potato is an important root crop that can be grown year-round in South Africa's tropical and subtropical regions. The plant is drought tolerant once established so it can also be grown in dry regions. It is also a simple plant to grow because the vines and roots can be easily stored or propagated, making it easily shareable between neighbours, or for the following growing season. Some other crops to consider are Swiss chard (despite the fact that Swiss chard has a similar appearance to spinach, it produces much broader leaves with thicker stems), cowpeas, pigeon peas, amaranth and bambara ground nuts. 🌱



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TRACTORS

How to choose a tractor for your plot

With the highveld ploughing and planting season just about upon us, eager new smallholders may be thinking of buying a tractor for their plots.

Their question will be “do I buy a new, or used, tractor?” And “what make should I look for?”

The real question that needs answering, however, is not strictly about the tractor, but is, in fact, “how much work will the tractor actually do?”

The point is that many smallholders are no more than weekend farmers, holding down weekday jobs totally unrelated to farming,

Therefore, the tractor will only work at weekends and over holidays. But tractor work, such as ploughing, planting, cutting, raking and baling are tasks that are completed only once, or at most twice, each year.

Thus, assuming one's plot has the space and fields for both cultivation and fodder growth (rather than only one or the other), and that one wishes to achieve all the tasks listed above, and that the size of the lands concerned means that each task will take two days' work to complete, one's tractor will actually work for only ten days a year.

And that assumes one's tractor comes with the set of different implements necessary to complete the tasks efficiently.

Ten days of work a year hardly warrants great expenditure on a fancy, expensive state-of-the-art machine, does it?

On the other hand, one can be sure that, along with the implements men-

tioned, one will acquire others, notably a farm trailer, and possibly some static PTO-driven items such as a concrete mixer, or a chipper, meaning that the tractor will actually work more.



Smartly refurbished Massey-Ferguson 135 is at least 47 years old.

So with the realisation that, if one is a weekend farmer on a smallholding, this activity will limit one's usage of a tractor, one can make a more informed decision as to what to buy: new or used?

The advantage of buying a new tractor will be that the machine will likely have some kind of guarantee, and possibly a service plan. It will also likely be more fuel efficient, and technologically advanced, than an older machine.

Nevertheless, care needs to be taken when selecting the make of tractor, and the cheapest in one's power range may not be the best bet in the medium to long run.

For example, over the last 20-odd years, tractor brands have come and gone in South Africa. Stud, Foton, Jinma, Indotrak, Farmtrac ~ and others ~ are a small sample of the brands that appeared, some with great fanfare, and which, after a few years, faded away. Some, such as the Stud models, were simply rebranded Chinese machines (Studs were two-wheel, single-cylinder walk-behinds), while others such as Foton, Jinma and Farmtrac were brands that were, or are, well-known in other



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countries but which simply never achieved the critical mass in South African sales necessary to support the brands long-term.

Lately, too, tractor brands hitherto unknown in South Africa have made their appearance, including Tafe from India, and various Eastern European brands, although there is also a strong showing still of new Chinese brands. It remains to be seen whether, like the brands mentioned earlier, sales of these models achieve the critical mass necessary to support a dealer and parts network in the long-term.

Also, it does not necessarily follow that replacement parts for well-known "traditional" models will fit on lookalike Chinese or Indian successors.



Working Ferguson Vaaljapie, still going strong at 60+ years.

Thus, regardless of whether you buy new or used, it makes sense to rather stick to the well-known makes which have been around for decades such as Landini, Massey-Ferguson, John Deere or New Holland for example.

But for most smallholders, budget constraints will mean that one's purchase might be based on price rather than power, modernity or driver comfort. Thus, if one is looking in the used tractor market one of the questions worth asking and answering is "how used is the machine?" Clearly a "fixer-upper" or a "restorer's dream" may be had for only a few thousand rand, covered in dust and with flat, perished tyres in some farmer's shed.

But the hours of work necessary to source replacement parts and put them all together may make the project more expensive than buying an already-restored machine.

If one decides to buy an already-restored machine one needs to take care that the tractor has, in fact, been properly overhauled, and not just merely repainted and re-decaled.

One should thus stick to dealing with companies which have long track records in the used-tractor industry, and good reputations. 🌿



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Grasses: What's in a name?

If you keep grazing livestock on your smallholding you will doubtless have looked at the grass growing in your paddocks and marvelled at the variety of species under your feet.

You may, even, have identified some of them, or had their identity pointed out to you by a more experienced farmer or botanist.

In the process you will most likely have been given one of the more common, or "traditional" names for the grass, rather than the scientific name:

Smutsfinger for *Digitaria eriantha*, or teff for

Eragrostis tef, or weeping lovegrass or simply *eragrostis* for *Eragrostis curvula*, for example.

Indeed, many of the more common grass species one encounters in the veld have multiple names, in all South Africa's languages.

A good example is *Cynodon dactylon*, commonly known in English as couch grass, which has no fewer than 68 common names!

To try to bring some clarity to this confusing subject, grass and grassland expert Frits van Oudtshoorn has compiled a list of common names for 528 of the estimated 950 grasses found in southern Africa.



Common finger grass.
Image: Fritz Van Oudtshoorn

The list, which he describes as incomplete and thus a work-in-progress, is presented first in scientific name order and then in common name order.

It is available from a link in Vol 22 No 2 of *Grassroots*, the publication of the Grassland Society of South Africa.

The link is <https://grassland.org.za/publications/grassroots/common-names-of-south-african-grasses-in-grassroots-b.pdf>. 🌱



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Know your serious livestock ailments

With the current spate of outbreaks of very serious livestock diseases such as African Swine Fever, Foot & Mouth Disease, Newcastle disease and the annual battle against African Horse Sickness, livestock owners of any size or type need to be aware of which ailments are given special status in government regulations and which require certain actions to be taken by, firstly, the livestock owner, but then also by a private veterinarian, and also the local State Veterinarian.

The reason is that certain diseases require government control as they affect individual animal owners and also pose serious risks to other farmers or consumers of animal products.

Some diseases may even, through their negative impact on trade, compromise the agricultural sector as a whole. Recent outbreaks of African Swine Fever and Foot & Mouth Disease are cases in point, where certain countries put embargoes on the importation of South African meat products.

There are therefore, two categories of serious animal diseases, namely controlled diseases and notifiable diseases, which are usually classified as such by

whether they comply with some of the risk factors below.

These are:

☐ Zoonosis: The disease is transmissible to and able to cause disease in humans.

☐ Rapid spread: The disease is highly transmissible and has the potential for rapid spread, independent of the actual movement of diseased animals and irrespective of farm boundaries.

☐ Collective control: The disease is more effectively managed by collective control strategies than by the efforts of an individual animal owner.

☐ Threat to industry: The disease poses a potential serious threat to the performance of the agricultural industry if the current epidemiological and geographic distribution status in South Africa changes.

☐ Trade sensitive: The disease can be regarded as a highly trade-sensitive issue and poses a potential serious threat to South Africa's international trading status.

Finally, as a further precaution any animal disease or infectious agent that is not known to occur in South Africa is considered both notifiable and controlled.

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Livestock diseases that are currently accorded both controlled and notifiable status are:

African horse sickness (AHS)
African Swine Fever (ASF)
Anthrax
Aujeszky's disease
Bacterial Kidney Disease (in fish)
Bovine Contagious Pleuropneumonia (CBPP)
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE)
Brucellosis (in all animal species)
Classical Swine Fever (CSF)
Contagious Equine Metritis (CEM)
Contagious Haemopoeitic Necrosis (in fish)
Contagious Pancreatic Necrosis (in fish)
Corridor or Buffalo disease (Theileriosis)
Dourine
East Coast Fever
Equine Infectious Anaemia (EIA)
Equine Influenza (EI)
Equine Viral Arteritis (EVA)
Foot-and-mouth Disease (FMD)
Glanders
Haemorrhagic Septicaemia (in fish)
John's disease (in sheep, cattle and goats)

Koi Herpes Virus
Nagana (Trypanosomiasis)
Newcastle disease
Notifiable Avian Influenza (NAI)
Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS)
Psittacosis
Rabies
Rinderpest
Salmonella Enteritidis
Salmonella Gallinarum (Fowl typhoid)
Salmonella Pullorum (Bacillary white diarrhoea)
Scrapie
Sheep scab
Skin conditions in sheep
Swine vesicular disease
Tuberculosis

Notifiable diseases include:

Bluetongue
Lumpy Skin Disease
Rift Valley Fever

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STATISTICS

Survey gives govt the results it wanted

With the focus of the government since the dawn of the democratic era having been on the development of a burgeoning smallholder farmer sector, how big, actually, has this sector become? That was the major driver behind a survey, started in 2019 and completed to report-stage last year, to quantify, by a host of criteria such as province, gender and age, the demographics of the agricultural sector generally, with the focus on new smallholders.

Results of the survey have been broken down into individual provincial reports, as well as consolidated into an overall national Producer/Farmer Report (PFR).

ANIMAL HEALTH

Strangles

Swine Erysipelas.

Owners or managers of livestock have certain obligations and duties to perform if they suspect their charges are infected with a controlled or notifiable disease.

Samples taken from animals suspected of a controlled disease must be sent, by the private vet or owner or manager of the farm, to a department-approved laboratory.

The laboratory must report all positive and follow-up results to the private vet or owner, and to the responsible state veterinarian of the area.

If the responsible state veterinarian cannot be located, the results may be sent to the office of the provincial Director of Agriculture, who will then contact the responsible state veterinarian for the area. If a private veterinarian is involved, it is his or her responsibility to also contact the state veterinarian of

The objectives of the PFR are:

- ☐ To have a basis from which the performance of the agricultural sector as it involves smallholder farmers can be measured;
- ☐ To develop indicators in line with the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) and the National Development Plan (NDP), among others, to help identify progress in achieving government outcomes;
- ☐ To accurately identify smallholder farmers in terms of their geographical distribution and agricultural activities;
- ☐ To establish an up-to-date frame of reference for conducting agricultural sector surveys in the country;
- ☐ To enable the tracking of agricultural support

the area to ensure that the outbreak has been reported.

To help with the management of any suspected outbreak of controlled or notifiable animal disease the owner should provide an accurate history of what has happened and what clinical signs are seen, as well as providing any applicable test results.

The owner, private veterinarian and state veterinarian should stay in contact until the problem is resolved, in the best interest of all.

It is important, too, to keep records of all communications.

Further steps to take should include the Isolation of all suspected or diseased animals from healthy or susceptible animals immediately to prevent further potential spread of disease.

And, as a general rule, farmers should practice good biosecurity management principles (secure fences, disinfection of potentially infected areas, handling diseased and healthy animals completely separately, etc.) 🌿

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impact on beneficiaries and the development of strategies;

☐ To enable better communication with producers to overcome challenges relating to agricultural production; and,

☐ To account for beneficiaries in agriculture who are entitled to support services.

While the traditional definition of a smallholder is likely to be based around the size of the land owned or worked by the farmer or resident, this is clearly problematic in the overall South African context, where a smallholder in a particularly fertile region may only have, say, half a hectare of land, whereas somebody in a very arid or infertile environment may need 20 or more hectares to produce sustainably. Thus, the government's definition, insofar as this survey is concerned, eschews anything to do with property size and is described as "A producer or entity that produces (at primary, secondary and tertiary level) for household consumption and markets, therefore farming is consciously undertaken in order to meet the needs of the household and derive a source of income.

"These are usually the new entrants aspiring to produce for the market at a profit with a maximum annual turnover ranging from R50 001 to R1 million per annum."

During the year-long data collection phase (which was interrupted by the Covid pandemic) results were collected from a sample of 95 501 farmers.

While this may be statistically significant, and large enough to provide suitable figures for estimation and calculation, it is clearly nothing like a census of the agricultural sector in totality. Moreover, the data collection methodology appears skewed to collect data largely from the newly-established smallholder sector, rather than from all smallholders.

Nevertheless, a picture of proportionality can be obtained, even if the data is skewed to provide the

result the government was hoping for.

So, of the sample of 95 501, the overwhelming majority of respondents or surveyees were classified as smallholder farmers (59 282) and household or subsistence farmers (23 512), with only 178 classified as large-scale or mega farmers. The survey was very much focused on the "non-white" sectors, with only 429 white respondents. Farming, the survey showed, is very much the preserve of older folk, with nearly 86% of respondents being over the age of 36, and a significant proportion of those being older than 60. The split between dedicated crop and livestock farmers is some 40+% each, with livestock farmers outnumbering crop farmers by a small margin. Mixed-use farming was practiced by only 11,3% of respondents. Probably to be expected, too, was the finding that more than 60% of respondents are male. The Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal were the two most populous provinces for respondees, accounting for more than 60% of smallholder farmers.

Gauteng was the least populated with government-defined smallholders at 2,1%. Indeed apart from the two biggest, no other province cracked the 10 000-mark as far as smallholder farmers were concerned.

The full set of reports can be accessed from <https://www.dalrrd.gov.za/Home/Farmer-Register/PFR-2021>. ❁

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EVENTS

Simmentaler Auction

Join BKB Auctions at the Gauteng North Simmentaler Auction of 30 bulls and 10 cows and heifers.

Date: 27 August 2022

Location: Willem Prinsloo Museum, Rayton. GPS: S25° 46' 43.6" E28° 32' 57.8"

Contact: Rocco van Rooyen 082 799 2776, Moolman Mentz 083 229 2500, Billy Lyons 082 765 5498.

Walkerville Agricultural Show

Traditional country fair featuring not only commercial agricultural inputs, but arts and crafts, traditional home-prepared foodstuffs and cosmetics, as well as plants, seeds, clothing, small furnishings, and nicknacks. Livestock of various species are also to be seen, including extensive poultry and rabbit displays, as well as sheep, goats, alpacas and some cattle. There will be conservation education through an exhibition of wildlife and conservation-related material.

There will also be an extensive food court selling a variety of styles of cooking, as well as the adjoining showground pub. Entertainment for children including pony rides, etc, and a sand arena holds equestrian events, displays and demonstrations of various types.

Date: 3 & 4 September 2022. 09h00-21h00 (Saturday) and 09h00-18h00 (Sunday).

Cost: R50 per car.

Location: Walkerville Showground

Contact: Ivan on 084 590 2312

Solar Power Systems Course

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No formal prerequisites are required to attend this course. This is the first leg of a twin course.

Date: 22 October 2022

Cost: R1 650, until 7 October, thereafter available at full price of R1 950.

Location: Diamond Valley Estate, Pretoria, Gauteng

Contact: 087 231 1644 or email info@kragdag.co.za for more info or to book.

Organic & Natural Products Expo Africa

For growers of organic items, and manufacturers of organic and natural products, the Organic & Natural Expo Africa offers a platform from which to showcase such goods to an important and growing market sector. Exhibitors are still able to apply for a stand. Moreover, because the organisers recognise that many producers of natural products are SMMEs, they have developed budget-conscious exhibition packages, from as low as R9 410 for a fully-equipped indoor stand, or only R3 960 for a 6m² outside stand. Event categories cover Lifestyle, Health, Body & Beauty, Home, Food & Beverage, and Baby & Kids.

Date: 21-23 October 2022.

Cost: R100 per person prepaid or R150 per person at the door.

Location: Wanderers Stadium, Corlett Drive, Johannesburg

Contact: John on 082 895 2832 or john.t@satp.co.za.



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The lyrics of songs

Vocal pop and country music can, if one so desires, be further broken down into various sub-categories generally according to the themes of their lyrics.

And within those sub-categories one can make further sub-categories. Take love songs, for example. Some are happy, with lyrics that focus on the happy state that can exist between two people in a strong, loving relationship. Others are sad, focusing on breakups, infidelity, betrayal and heartache.

And there are many, many subject categories, into which songs can be classified according to just about any subject under the sun.

There are songs about cars (for example, the Beach Boys' "Little Deuce Coupe"), trucks (Willie Nelson's "On The Road Again"), food ("Waterblommetjies van die Boland", which could also be classified as a song about a place), or war ("Little Drummer Boy"), to name but a few examples.

Undoubtedly one of the biggest categories of song lyrics is about trains. In fact, train songs could make a whole genre of music on their own.

I am a self-confessed lover of country and folk music, and also a lover of all things locomotive. Indeed, I derive no pleasure and some heartache when I see how that once-great transport institution (and, it must be said, provider of sheltered employment to poor whites), the South African Railways & Harbours, has fallen apart, with its present-day successor, Transnet, not helped in any way by having been the scene of massive looting and its political head being none other than South African funnyman Fikile Mbalula.

From having been one of the world's leading railway companies, admired and studied by railwaymen from many foreign countries, with powerful steam engines chugging through the countryside and serving even

the remotest of farming communities, it has shrunk in size, efficiency and influence.

For many train-spotters (myself included) there is little allure to be had watching a boxy diesel-electric loco hauling the occasional freight train. Even their horns, when honked, are no way as melodious as the whistle on a steam engine.

But one of the saddest aspects of the current railway network is that, well, it is just about non-existent. Firstly rail lines, particularly smaller branch lines, were abandoned in various cost-cutting exercises, similar to those undertaken on Britain's rail network in the 1950s and 60s.

And more recently even tracks still in use have been destroyed by thieves looking for scrap metal to sell, let alone the high-value copper cable used to feed power to the electric locomotives and to power the signals.

Needless to say, South African train songs are many, in many South African languages ("Shosholoza" to "Trans-Karoo") with the Afrikaans ones, especially, tending to be plaintive love ballads about yearning and reunions.

One such song is entitled "Tussen Treine" which includes the chorus lyrics *"tussen treine, tussen stasies, lê daar basies leë spore."*

Imagine my deep belly laugh when I saw a picture of a tatty Transnet diesel loco lying on its side in the veld, the steel rails over which it was supposed to have rolled being absolutely absent. And the caption to the picture was *"tussen treine, tussen stasies, lê daar basies geen spore."*





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