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Permaculture: Getting the most out of your farm

Colleen Janse van Rensburg

Permaculture is not new, being a holistic, integrated system where natural energies are utilised in a sustainable way. David Holmgren and Bill Mollison coined the phrase in 1978 and since then, permaculture has been practiced by permaculturists, environmentalists, organic farmers, urban activists, and indigenous people, often without even realising it.

However, with ever increasing feed prices and other production costs, farmers are looking for new sustainable ways of farming to increase productivity while decreasing costs, and permaculture fits right in as a modern farming method, to do just that.

Permaculture is defined as the design of land use systems that are sustainable and environmentally sound. The term permaculture is a contraction of the words “Permanent Agriculture”. It is an ethical approach to designing land use and community systems that will provide food, shelter, energy and other essentials for human survival. It strives for a harmonious integration of human habitation, microclimate, plants, animals, soil, and water into stable and productive communities. Permaculture focuses on three main ethics:

1. Care of the earth
2. Care of people
3. Fair share

These ethics form the foundation for permaculture design, and are at the centre of the permaculture philosophy - working with, rather than against nature.

Since every farm is different, permaculture designs are site-specific and designed according to the landscape of the farm. By carefully observing the natural patterns of the landscape, optimal methods for integrating water

catchment, human dwellings and energy systems with tree crops, edible perennial plants and animals can be discerned.

On a livestock farm, the animals can be used as part of a creative plan for soil rehabilitation and reforestation. Nature always opts for balance and in an overgrazed pasture the land will degenerate, and animals will be susceptible to intestinal parasites. The application of permaculture techniques includes dividing up the land into grazing cells and by using the slope of the land. Manure from grazing animals washes into swales, spreading the nutrients across the property. Food forests developed below the swales take up nutrients for the production of food and biomass.

Using a multitude of animal species in a leader-follower type grazing system can further enhance the nutrient content and restoration of the pasture. An example is moving chickens onto pasture after grazing by cattle. The chickens deposit a different diversity of nutrients and can clear the pasture of unwanted pests and unfavourable weeds.

By incorporating permaculture techniques, a farm can maintain a healthy landscape that benefits people and animals, saving on feed and medical costs for animals while increasing sustainability and productivity.



Colleen Janse van Rensburg

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Tips and tools for advisors

The Power of Social media

Portia Phahlane

The term Social Media should not be mistaken by stakeholders and participants in agriculture as just something used for social interaction only. We should rather take the social part to mean that “society” uses this medium to communicate - to communicate for the benefit of society. Social Media has brought power to the “fingertips of the farmer”, so to speak. Social media is a powerful platform that allows immediate dissemination of important emerging issues and sharing of information among producers and consumers. Through social media providers like Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, and others, farmers can:

- Build relationships with fellow farmers and potential clients;
- Learn from each other's challenges and experiences;
- Get expert advice from specialists;
- Market their produce and services;
- Connect with input suppliers; markets and value-adding services and suppliers.

The power of social media has grown immensely in a very short period it has changed the topography of personal communication and continues to provide new opportunities and facilitate communication.

Getting to know the ESO Provincial Top Users

We applaud our provincial Top Users while the parade continues, and in June we travelled to Mpumalanga (the province of the rising sun), where we spoke to Lucas Shabangu - ESO Provincial Top User for June 2016.

Lucas, is in his eleventh year with the Mpumalanga Department of Agriculture (DARDLEA), and works in the Thembisile Hani local municipality, Nkangala District. He heads the MESP (Masibuyele Esibayeni Programme) under Ms. NS Masoka - Nkangala District Director and Mr. NS Poto - Agricultural Municipal Manager, where he specialises in Livestock/Animal production.

Lucas was born and grew up in Kwamhlanga, ±70 km north-east of Pretoria. He calls Kwamhlanga his spiritual home - a place inhabited by people from all over the country, with the majority of them Ndebele, farming with livestock and crops - from subsistence and smallholder, to commercial producers, mostly on communal and state land (Land Reform).

Our top user advises 17 registered co-operatives that includes more than 500 farmers. A personal highlight was advising and assisting farmers in the establishment of a large-scale broiler production enterprise with environmentally controlled houses with 40 000 chickens each.

Lucas describes ESO as an internet source with information on all farming categories with quick answers to most questions asked by farmers. It helps to find solutions quickly to provide farmers with relevant answers. When visiting a farm, ESO provides him with information of the farm - coordinates, vegetation types, grazing capacity - through the Regional Data Module (Infrastructure and Environment). ESO also helps him to locate a range of agricultural suppliers and products that farmers use for either marketing purposes or to acquire inputs like feed, etc. He also finds the calculators very handy when doing calculations for area sizes, distances, temperatures, etc., while the system helps him to advise farmers on the grazing potential of farms, temperatures, and rainfall information - during a single visit to a farm!



Lucas Shabangu

National ESO Top User

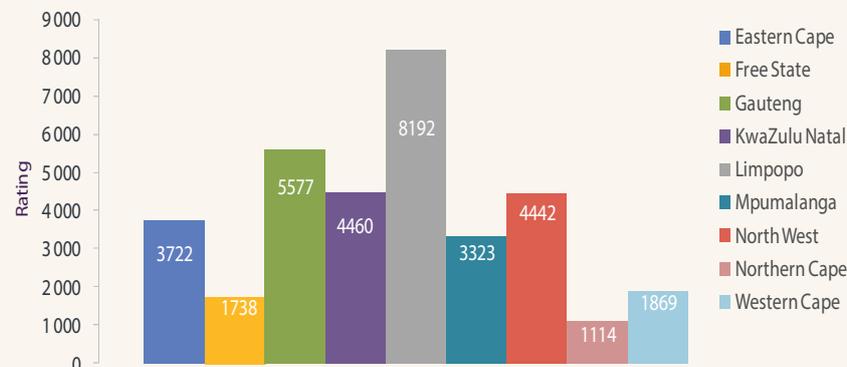
Congratulations to **Louis Khomola** the ESO National Top User for June 2016.

Monthly national ESO users receive the following prizes: First time National ESO User 2016: **4 Gig USB memory stick**, second time National ESO User 2016: **Digital Camera**, third time National ESO User 2016: **Nokia Lumia 520**, fourth time National ESO User 2016: **Samsung Galaxy Tab**.

EXTENSION SUITE ONLINE® UTILISATION: June 2016

Extension Suite Online®(ESO) utilisation is determined through monitoring user utilisation in the nine provinces and by attaching values to Visits, Pages Visited and Duration of Visits; a rating is calculated to establish the ESO National Top User of the Month.

ESO PROVINCIAL TOP USER GRAPH



ESO PROVINCIAL TOP USERS

Province	Name
Eastern Cape	Sindile Magoda
Free State	Moshodi Marumo
Gauteng	Sizwe Nzuza
KwaZulu Natal	Dumisani Nzama
Limpopo	Louis Khomola
Mpumalanga	Lucas Shabangu
North West	Mompoti Gabanakgosi
Northern Cape	Jacobus Sedrick Visser
Western Cape	Ayanda saki



CLIMATE WATCH

Issue #6

June kicked off with cold weather across the country with a cold front that brought rain to large parts of the summer rainfall region from the end of May. An intense cold front reached the Western Cape on 9 June causing temperatures in the interior to drop to new lows during that weekend with snowfall on the high lying regions of the Eastern Cape and the Drakensberg. This was the 3rd and strongest cold front of the season and many parts of Gauteng experienced their lowest temperatures for this winter...

Read the full article on the **Manstrat AIS website**.

www.manstrat.co.za - Climate Watch

TIPS:

Mind-sets

Deon Erasmus

In our endeavours towards a more sustainable agricultural future, the biggest change that needs to occur, is our mind-set. We have to recognize that we are dealing with a living system and that everything we do, has an impact on that system.

So many new technologies are available today to help determine the viability of our farms that older farmers and young emerging farmers can all benefit.

Drone technology has evolved dramatically over the last few years to become one of the best tools to determine where your fields are lacking. GPS and

Satellite technology have created mobile solutions for farmers to find solutions to their problems. Innovations in Solar systems has led to solutions in the storage of produce, training in agricultural practices and new tools to improve food security.

New technology such as weather apps on mobile phones provide farmers with access to up-to-date reliable weather forecasts and alerts. Having 7-day forecasts and details available on game-changing events - like hailstorms - can assist farmers greatly and increase their productivity and save money in the long run.

Farming has become so much more and as farmers, we need to realize that technology is there to help us improve and become better farmers.

Do you have any technology related questions? Send them to newsletter@esuite.co.za, with your name, province and the question and we will answer them in a following newsletter edition.



Editor:
Thembeke Zengele

Publishers:
Manstrat Agricultural Intelligence Solutions (Pty) Ltd.

Correspondence:
newsletter@esuite.co.za | +27 12 460 2499



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