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THE SASAE 47TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE:

THE ROLE OF EXTENSION SUITE ONLINE IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AND ADVISORY SERVICES, AS THE KEY TO SUSTAINABLE FOOD SECURITY.

Matsunke Malefane

The field of modern Extension encompasses a wide range of communication and learning activities organised for rural people by professionals from different disciplines including agriculture, agricultural marketing, business studies and information technology. Extension personnel have the responsibility of bringing scientific knowledge to farming families and agricultural projects. This is done to improve efficiency of agriculture by providing technical advisory services to the different levels of subsistence, small holder and commercial farmers, at the same time improving farming methods and techniques, increasing productivity, and ensuring food security, hence improving their standards of living and lifting their social and educational standards.

Manstrat Agricultural Intelligence Solutions (MAIS) is a developer of internet based Agricultural decision support systems including Extension Suite Online (ESO). As an Agricultural information provider, Manstrat AIS is a full member of SASAE represented by Matsunke

Malefane on the executive committee of the Central Branch of the Society.

MAIS plays a prominent role in the sharing of knowledge to all SASAE members throughout the country through ESO, and participates in conferences in various capacities. Every year, the Agricultural Extension community at large through SASAE holds a conference that allows members of the society and non-members in all the Extension fraternity to learn, to share knowledge and to network. This year's conference was held in Bloemfontein from 3 – 6 June 2013. Distinguished guests at the conference included the Executive Mayor of the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, the Free State HOD of Agriculture, a representative from the office of the President of the country, the Director of Extension Reform from DAFF, a representative from SACNASP, from FAO and provincial



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managers from the nine provinces.

Extension Suite Online (ESO) is a system which serves as an important linkage and information transfer mechanism between Agricultural Research and Extension, and the farmers that they serve. It facilitates and enhances the transfer of information between these parties by collecting, collating, interpreting and transforming scientific agricultural related data into useful and user friendly formats for use by Extension practitioners and farmers. Most farmers are constantly in search of relevant information to assist them to perform their daily duties relating to decision making in terms of relevant animal or plant production related questions, hence playing a key role in food security and fully responding to the conference theme - *Agricultural Extension and advisory services as the key to sustainable food security.*



TIPS AND TOOLS FOR ADVISORS

Vela Gedze (Western Cape) referenced from Prof TJ Bembridge, 1993

Communication Strategies

Agricultural Advisors have to master the different communication strategies to be applied in practise. Because farmers' levels of experience, knowledge etc. differs, the communication strategy will differ. Measure your communication strategy by:

- Checking current project status.
- Observing farmer's response to new ideas and the project's progress.
- Establishing target groups, rural, elderly, youth, etc.
- Identifying the extension objectives: who is to be influenced; to what effect; to which degree of competency, in what time span, and where?
- Deciding exactly what action you expect target groups to take.
- Deciding how to measure success.

Remembering passwords is becoming an increasingly difficult task, as it is needed for almost everything these days. To overcome this, ensure that part of your password is always familiar to you, e.g. esuite86Francois, **esuite** being the application, **86** my year of birth and **Francois**, well, that is my name!

Should you not be able to remember it, Extension Suite Online (ESO) has a "Forgot password" tool for retrieving forgotten passwords. This tool, "**Forgot Password**" is found at the bottom of the ESO login page (www.esuite.co.za). Click on the link and you will be requested to insert your email address (insert the



email address that you first provided when you registered as an ESO user). Next you will be asked to give the answer to the security question that you selected when you first registered. This ensures that only you will be able to reset your password. The tool will then send your password to the email address that you have provided when you first registered on ESO. Using this password recovery tool is hassle free and available to everyone with an ESO account. If you are unable to get your password from the password recovery tool please feel free to contact our support line, support@esuite.co.za, or phone us at 0860 eso eso (376 376).

MONTHLY NATIONAL ESO USER: JULY 2013

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 National ESO USER of the Month. The monthly national ESO user will receive the

following prizes: First time National ESO User 2013: **4 Gig USB memory stick**, second time National ESO User 2013: **Digital Camera**, third time National ESO User 2013: **Blackberry cell phone**, fourth time National ESO User 2013: **Samsung Galaxy Tab**.

Congratulations to Mr Sindile Magoda (Eastern Cape Department Rural Development and Agrarian Reform), who is the ESO National User a fourth time for July 2013. Mr Magoda will receive a Samsung Galaxy Tablet.

For excellence and sustained effort Sindile Magoda, ESO National Top User for the fourth Consecutive month, will receive a Samsung Galaxy Tablet as a token of appreciation towards his efforts in improving Extension Advisory services in his working environment. We asked Sindile to write a short article on his usage of ESO and his experiences as an extension officer. Here's what he had to say:



Mr Magoda is enjoying horseback riding after inspecting the cattle herd at Indyebo beef farming in Alexandria under Ndlambe Municipality.

"As an animal Scientist I enjoy working with farm animals and as a result always click through the animal section on ESO, even if just for interest sake. The most interesting species to me are pigs and I discovered on ESO that pigs actually love clean spaces and not vice versa, as the saying goes. Besides pigs I also enjoy working with poultry especially layer chickens where you can measure their performance against the norm of producing eggs at least every 2 days.

Every morning when I'm in the office the first thing, when opening my laptop, I always log into ESO and view commodity prices and then check the animal production sections. I usually spend around 2 to 3 hours daily on ESO, depending on the needs of the farmers that I serve. Whilst at a farm I also open ESO when necessary to assist the farmer. The ESO tool has really been a great assistance to me and our clients. I had a poultry farmer whose chickens were dying; we took photos and observed their behaviour, with the help of ESO we discovered that the house was not properly disinfected. As I have mentioned before the Extension Suite Online has come to be a handy and friendly tool for us officers. It is magic when the farmers are being assisted, especially right there on their farm.

I started using the ESO tool for the first time in July 2010 when I was faced with a farmer who had challenges on his farm. His animals were not performing as expected. Whilst clicking through ESO the answers just popped out together with pictures. As a result of the above I can say with confidence that ESO has improved my ability to work with our clients. For example, farmers now call me for assistance to visit them, if I am not immediately sure how to assist them I just open ESO make a few clicks and the answers pop out. At times I am not able to go to the farm, but then I can assist and give the farmer advice over the phone, and the farmers are happy.

UTILISATION OVERVIEW FOR JULY 2013

Portia Maibelo

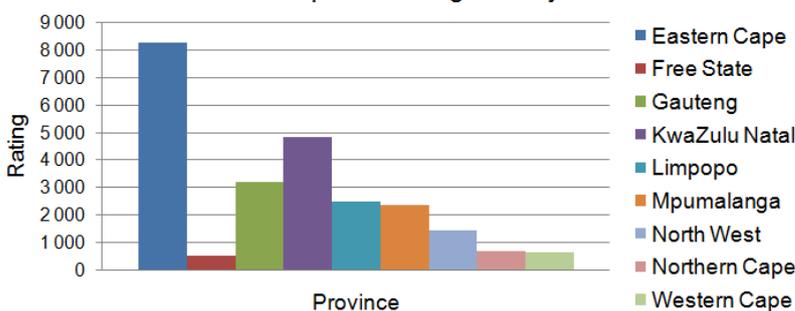
Despite the cold, ESO utilisation grew spectacularly during July, with 140 new users added, and a 4.9% increase in account activations. Users visited the system 1,886 times, viewed 101,937 pages, and spent 308 hours on ESO while downloading 5,247 megabytes of data. The overall utilisation in the first seven months of 2013 already shows major improvements over 2012 utilisation figures.

The positive effects that training has on ESO utilisation are clear. With new hardware available in the province, Manstrat AIS conducted ESO training and re-training in KZN over a three month period, (May to July) with the following results:

- The number of registered officials in the province rose to over a 1,000;
- The province won top position on the national provincial comparative utilisation table; and
- Three users in the province were placed in the National Top 10 Table.

Mr Sindile Magoda the July National Top User will now soon be the proud owner of the new Samsung Galaxy Tablet for being number **one** nationally, four months on the trot. Congratulations Sindile.

Provincial top user rating for July 2013



Top users in each province: July 2013

Province	Top User
Eastern Cape	Sindile Magoda
Free State	Mofokeng Paulus
Gauteng	Lesego Phakedi
KwaZulu Natal	Nkosinathi Cyril Kubheka
Limpopo	Sekgweng Fanny
Mpumalanga	Petunia Magolela
North West	Dikabelo Joseph Mokomele
Northern Cape	George du Preez
Western Cape	Kgadi Senyatsi