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## MANAGING A FARMING ENTERPRISE

Xolile Dlhamini and Patricia Majova

With the start of a new year, some farmers find themselves in the middle of their farming season while for others it's only the beginning of one. Sometimes one may wonder why some farmers survive difficulties like crop failures while the same difficulties force others to give up? The simple reason is often that some farmers manage their farms better than others.

It is important for farmers to properly manage their farming enterprises in order to get the highest returns from their scarce production resources. Extension Officers (EO's) can use information on **Extension Suite Online (ESO)** to assist farmers in managing their farm enterprises to support their decisions on the following:

**Production management** involves deciding on the correct amount of inputs to be used in production at the lowest possible cost. Farmers need to decide how much to plant in a given area, correct farming methods, where and when to buy production inputs or to sell produce? EO's can use the **Production Information**

module on the side bar and **Regional Data** information tab in **ESO** to assist farmers in answering these questions.

**Financial Management** entails keeping records for crop/livestock expenditure and income, on a monthly basis. This helps the farmer to see whether the farm or enterprise is making profit or loss. If the farm is making loss, the farmer has to determine the reasons why, and how to prevent them. In order to make a profit of course, income must exceed expenditure, if not; then s/he is farming at a loss. Should a farm yield a profit, the next decision is whether to save the profits or to reinvest them in the business. "Operating a farm enterprise without keeping records is like driving a tractor without a steering wheel". EO's can use enterprise budgets in the **Economics** information module in **ESO** to advise farmers on how to calculate an enterprise's profit or loss.

In **Marketing Management**, farmers must first do market research before planting the planned product. Farmers usually experience difficulties in deciding when or where to sell farm products and how to price them. EO's can use the **Market Prices** under **Economics** and **Regional Data**



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information tabs on **ESO** to assist farmers in finding information about local markets and market prices for their produce.

**Credit Management:** Farmers usually lack enough cash to finance the production of their enterprises. In such situations, farmers can apply for short term production loans from financial institutions or government agencies. Farmers must be aware that borrowed loans need to be repaid **with** interest at the end of the production season and must therefore borrow as little money as possible because paying interest on the loan is often costly. EO's can advise farmers to pay cash when buying production inputs like seeds and fertilizers.

After discussing the important role of managing a farm enterprise, it should be clear that farm management is critical to successful farming and this article will hopefully indicate that good farm management practices increase the chances of yielding high profits while poor farm management practices may lead to losses.



### TIPS AND TOOLS FOR ADVISORS

Matsunke Malefane

#### Harvesting and Post Harvesting

- Harvest during the **coolest times** of the day
- Keep **harvested products** and loaded vehicles in the **shade**
- During transport, **cover loaded vehicles** with tarpaulins to minimize heating and sun injury
- **Grade, sort and pack** with **extreme care** in a **cool environment** if possible
- **Maintain** proper storage and transit temperatures
- **Transport** or ship **as soon as possible**
- **Maintain proper display temperatures** in retail stores

(For more information go to: ESO > Vegetables > Production maintenance > Harvesting)

All of us know that our personal information needs to be updated from time to time and this article serves as a reminder to ESO users to ensure that their details on the ESO website is updated for 2014. Users can update information when they sign into their ESO accounts.

To access one's information, click on either the **Admin** or **Profile** icons situated on the Toolbar in the top left-hand corner of the page and then click on **"Edit profile"** in the sidebar under the Access Management menu item. On the **"My Profile"** page, users can update personal information such as their names, phone and fax numbers, addresses



and email addresses. To save any changes, click on **Update, and voilà!** Users can also change their passwords by clicking Security Details under the Edit profile menu item.

For the system to accept changes one must ensure that all the essential fields, marked with a red asterisk, have been completed correctly.

For any other updating issues or if a user is not able to edit their email address contact the ESO support centre (call 0860 eso eso (376 376) or email [support@esuite.co.za](mailto:support@esuite.co.za)).

## MONTHLY NATIONAL ESO USER: DECEMBER 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: **Nokia Lumia 520**, fourth time National ESO User 2013: **Samsung Galaxy Tab**.

Congratulations to **Ms Ndifelani Ivy Tshivhathi (Limpopo Department of Agriculture)**, who is a 1<sup>st</sup> time ESO National User for **December 2013**. Ms Tshivhathi will receive an ESO value pack that includes a Certificate, USB memory stick and a pen.



*Ms Ndifelani Ivy Tshivhathi*

Many South Africans view December as a holiday month and rightly so, as the weather and everything else makes for holidaying and chilling out. But the realm of agriculture does not offer a "holiday period" and many agricultural advisors and farmers alike need to work over this period. One such advisor is our ESO national top user for December 2013, Ms Ndifelani Ivy Tshivhathi from the Limpopo Department of Agriculture with an outstanding ESO rating score of 6,418, and even more so, for this generally unproductive period.

groups. One of her current projects includes advising a group of crop farmers in the establishment of a nursery and a cooperative in which she says ESO is very handy with assisting in the decision making processes.

Ivy is passionate about assisting farmers and started using ESO more extensively in 2013 when she realised that the system offered relevant information that was available at all times on a wide range of subjects. She is currently studying for a Master's degree in Agriculture and also uses ESO for research assistance with certain assignments. We wish Ivy a prosperous 2014 and best of luck with her studies.

Ivy is from Venda and works in the Mopani District Municipality in Greater Letaba. She has been with the department for 6 years, with Mr Mabelo as her immediate superior, where she advises 35 individual farmers and 6

## ESO UTILISATION OVERVIEW FOR 2013

*Piet van Zyl*

The old adage, "records are made to be broken", could have been coined with ESO utilisation and its users in mind because that is exactly what has been happening since the inception of ESO during 2010. A quick look at user statistics over the past four years tells a story that both surprises and elates:

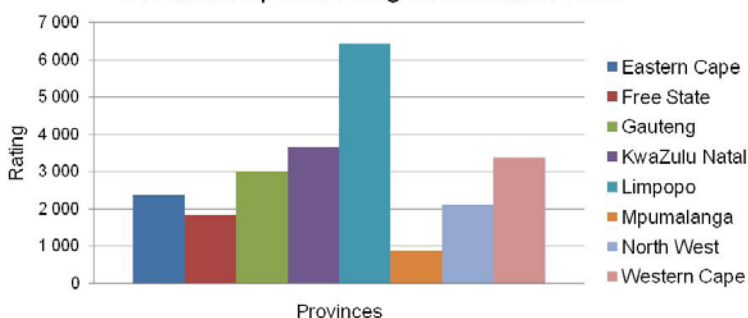
	2010*	2011	2012	2013
<b>Registered Users</b>	247	2,555	3,053	4,171
<b>Visits</b>	189	10,255	12,684	21,274
<b>Pages Visited</b>	1,056	71,163	729,271	1,410,338
<b>Duration (Hrs.)</b>	25	2,022	3,836	3,995
<b>Data transferred (Mb)</b>	10,294	23,776	28,507	75,384

The data tells of an amazing journey over 40 months and how this system had become an integral part of agriculture in South Africa in general, and extension services in particular.

Looking at the total utilisation figures above gives one a clear signal of the immense growth started in 2010 and rising dramatically to 2013.

Well done to everyone involved including users, managers and support personnel. We can improve on this in 2014! Let's encourage our colleagues to activate their accounts and to use South Africa's premier agricultural decision support system to its fullest. It really works!

### Provincial top user rating for December 2013



### Top users in each province: December 2013

Eastern Cape	Sondlo Nokwanda
Free State	Griffith Hadebe
Gauteng	Vhuthu Gavhi
KwaZulu Natal	Gugu Thusi
<b>Limpopo</b>	<b>Ivy Ndifelani Tshivhathi</b>
Mpumalanga	Zanele Lusibane
North West	Mompati Gabanakgosi
Western Cape	Riaan Nowers