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Conserving water on the farm

Colleen Janse van Rensburg

Water availability, an important issue in South Africa for most of its recent history, is back in the spotlight, mostly due to experiencing one of our worst droughts in decades during the past year. Recent rains in the summer rainfall regions have brought welcome relief, and dam levels have improved drastically. However, in the winter rainfall areas, strict water restrictions are in force - with total dam capacities estimated to be around 30%.

Comparing our average annual rainfall of 450 mm to the global average of 860 mm, it is no surprise that South Africa is described as a semi-arid country, with droughts being the norm, rather than the exception. Although droughts that occur due to the El Nino effects are more severe and noticeable, periodic dry seasons are experienced every year from April to September in summer rainfall regions and October to March in winter rainfall regions. The far west of South Africa is an arid region that is dependent on isolated thunderstorms for rain.

Agriculture is the biggest consumer of water in our country, almost 60%, and while many farms have their own water supply, they are certainly not exempt from conserving water. With a growing population, the demand for water is increasing, and since most of the growth occurs in urban areas, the availability of water will be prioritised in the cities, leaving less for agriculture.

Although much of the 60% of water used for agriculture is for irrigation purposes, livestock farmers understand how much water animals consume daily. As farmers cannot afford to save water by limiting the amount provided to animals to drink, they can conserve water through:

- Fixing leaks - leaking pipes or dripping taps contribute to significant daily farm -water losses;
- Installing floats with a shut-off - to prevent overflowing of water troughs;
- Restricting animal access into water troughs or farm dams - animals

contaminate water making it undrinkable, and wasted;

- Culling unproductive animals - unproductive animals use up valuable feeds and water;
- Farming with indigenous/adapted breeds - larger exotic breeds require more inputs, e.g. cooler systems. They also require additional feeds often sourced from irrigated pastures or croplands; and
- Managing the veld - overgrazing leads to desertification and higher amounts of soil-runoffs.

In the past, producers focused on high productivity which saw the intensification of many livestock systems using larger, more improved imported animal breeds. There was little regard for the environment but over the years the focus has shifted to farming more sustainably. Based on current water usage it is estimated that by 2025 water demand will exceed availability of usable fresh water resources. Farmers will thus need to find ways to conserve water and change farming systems to be more sustainable.



Colleen Janse van Rensburg

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Tips and tools for advisors

Transporting fresh produce

Portia Phahlane

Transport between harvest areas and point of sale/use, is a most crucial aspect in fresh produce post-harvest handling. For these commodities to attain the highest possible price levels in the market, it should be at its summit of quality, appearance and nutritional value. To assist producers in this regard, consider the following when transporting fresh produce:

- Vehicles should be clean, pest free, and suitable for the transport of fresh produce;
- Vehicles should be well ventilated
- Careful loading and unloading of produce to prevent any damage;
- Produce should be properly packaged and placed to allow proper circulation of air;
- Maintain proper temperatures for both quality and safety of fresh produce;
- Fresh produce should not be transported in vehicles that are used to carry animals.

National ESO Top User

Portia Phahlane

The Limpopo Department of Agriculture has produced another ESO National Top User, and this time around it Ms Morongwe Salome Mahasha - Agricultural advisor from the Greater Tzaneen Local Municipality, Mopani District.

Morongwe was born and raised in Bolobedu South (Ga-Modjadji) in Tzaneen, in the area ruled by the Rain Queens since the 16th century and where currently a large rural population is practising commercial and subsistence tropical and subtropical agriculture. The area is blessed with high annual rainfall and fertile soil. According to her, 40% of South Africa's avocados, 40% of our mangoes and 20% of the country's bananas are produced here.

Our top user, a crop production advisor, has been working for the department for two years and four months. Her managers are Mss Mangena and Mss Zwane. Her duties include the provision of technical advice to smallholder and commercial farmers producing various types of vegetables, tropical fruits, subtropical fruits and citrus. She also coordinates the Female Entrepreneur Awards and Women Forum within the Department at municipal level. Her clients include:

- 53 individual farmers,
- One community group with about 120 beneficiaries,
- Three cooperatives, each with at least five members, and
- Two farmers' associations including Limpopo Women in Agriculture (LIWARD).

The commercial farmers that she works with posed a challenge as they were, in her opinion, experienced and knowledgeable - always testing and challenging her skills levels and knowledge by demanding answers to difficult questions - affecting her confidence. She started using ESO for research which helped her to regain her confidence as she was able to solve problems with renewed confidence.

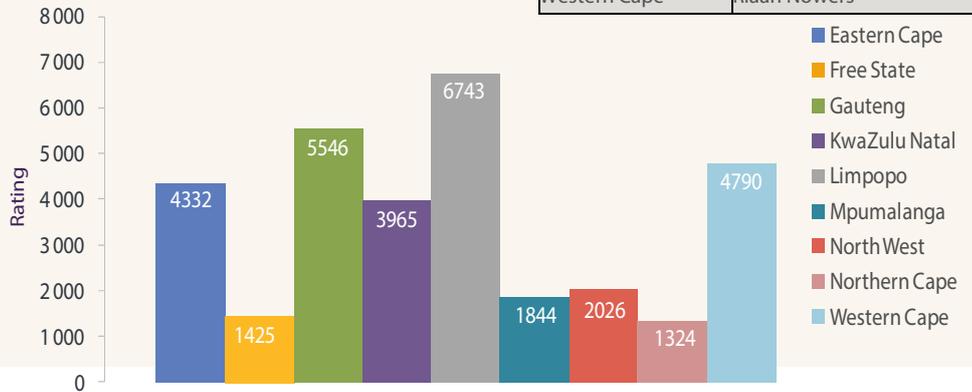
Morongwe gave us a practical example by explaining that by using ESO, she assisted a group of demoralised smallholder farmers in her area to increase their production with the little that they had, through improved farming methods, and by cutting costs. Printing and distributing ESO material to them helped them when she was not there in person. Her farmers now enjoy improved production, and she says it's all thanks to ESO! We at Manstrat could add that they also would not have been able to improve their situation if it wasn't for extension practitioners like Morongwe.

For her, ESO gets to the essence directly, helping the user to solve agricultural related problems in a couple of minutes, as long as you know where to look for what.

EXTENSION SUITE ONLINE® UTILISATION: March 2017

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	Montshi Moeleso
Gauteng	Sizwe Nzuza
KwaZulu Natal	Dumisani Nzama
Limpopo	Morongwe Salome Mahasha
Mpumalanga	Sthembiso Mbuyane
North West	Tlou Harrison Chokoe
Northern Cape	Nomonde Esther Morris
Western Cape	Riaan Nowers

CLIMATE WATCH

Issue #14

Weather news during February 2017 was dominated by the arrival of Tropical Cyclone Dineo, the first cyclone to make landfall over southern Africa since cyclone Eline in February 2000. The tropical depression was developing in the Mozambique channel while gaining strength during the week of 6 February 2017 and then started moving southwards through the Mozambique channel. Read more...



Read the full article on the Manstrat AIS website.

www.manstrat.co.za - Climate Watch

ESO TIPS:

Saving data in android mobile phones using backups

Mary Mavengere

So much valuable information is stored on our Smartphones today that knowledge about available backup options - Titanium, Cm and Super, for Android - for phone content protection, is important to Smartphone users:

Titanium Backup:

The most prominent features of Titanium backup are its multiple backups per app, freeze apps, synchronising with Google Drive and backup encryption.

Cm Backup:

For Cm usage creating an account is required, giving users 5 GB of free cloud storage, and boasts backup and restoring pictures and user dictionaries.

Super Backup:

The Super application is a popular choice, and free to use. Users can easily backup call logs, SMS's, their Calendar, Contacts and Bookmarks.

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

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