

## New Agronomist

We are pleased to announce that Dr John Lapham joined Manstrat in July 2009 to bolster capacity in our Agronomy and Horticultural Section. He holds a PhD from the Reading University (U.K.) and has more than 30 years experience in the agricultural field within the wider SADC.

His specialisation field is crop protection (spanning aspects such as pest, disease and weed control; integrated pest management and the application of pesticides). He further has extensive agronomic experience and expertise on all aspects of production of various horticultural, floricultural and other crops. He also has considerable experience in the agri-business field (both as industry consultant and as a business owner) with particular expertise in the export of floricultural and horticultural produce.

### QUESTION OF THE MONTH

From an environmental perspective – Is it possible to develop “green” software.



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## Version 1.8 – The Foundation of Intelligence.

It is with the release of version 1.8 that Extension Suite Online has reached maturity in its current form. This popular online application now sports comprehensive sections on animal and plant production, covers most commodities produced in southern Africa, links properly to economic models and has a Geographic Information System focused specifically on the needs and requirements of Agricultural Extensionists. In essence, the foundation has been created for the inclusion of intuitive intelligence in the system.

Extension Suite Online (ESO) now consists of comprehensive database driven sections on animal and plant production. These sections have been improved to the extent where it can be used to link animal and plant production information to geographical information providing intelligent solutions to the farmer.

The market information and economic models have been linked to each other and also to the production components providing increased accuracy during the determination of gross margins for enterprises as well as to project windows of opportunity and future trends in commodity pricing, supply and demand.

The time has come to develop Version 2, an internet application that can provide intuitive intelligent solutions to agriculture in southern Africa.

Whilst version 1.8 provides a plethora of

information to Extensionists and farmers alike, it is still expected of the user to browse through a vast quantity of information to find solutions to agricultural challenges.

It is envisaged that Version 2 will utilize the databases of version 1 and by means of an intelligent GIS provide solutions based on the exact geographic location of the user. As an example, as soon as the user accesses the application it will tell the user exactly where he/she is, provide accurate information on the farm where he/she is visiting, identify the soil types, availability of water, predict the rainfall and temperature patterns and then make recommendations in terms of the type of production systems that can be supported by the environment. It will be able to make recommendations in terms of markets that can be accessed, windows of opportunity at these markets, contact detail of market agents and transport services.

Users will be able to access accurate information about support services, agricultural and economic infrastructure in the area.

Together with its integrated problem solvers, the Manstrat Data and Support Centre as well as external experts, it is believed that Extension Suite Online – Version 2 will become a truly intelligent decision support system for Extensionists throughout Africa, all because of the excellent foundation that has been created in version 1.



## Revamping the Animal Production Section.

### Johan provides an overview on the strategies followed to improve the Animal Husbandry Section

Animal Production has historically played an important role in South African Agriculture. With the country's challenging climatic production conditions and limited natural resources, Livestock Production has always been a relative smaller risk-borne agricultural practice compared to other sectors, i.e. Agronomy and should therefore receive due attention.

Through millennia, pastoral livestock production has formed the basis of small-scale-, subsistence- and emerging agriculture, and a part of the survival of certain African ethnic groups can be attributed to the successful raising of specifically cattle, sheep and goats. For them, livestock production has not only been an agricultural activity, but also an inherent part of their culture.

With the above in mind, a considerable amount of resources and time has been invested to improve the Animal Production Module in terms of quantity and quality of information given, as well

as the layout and presentation thereof. This should assist Extension Officers even more in their efforts to support their clients.

One of the major drivers in revamping the livestock section was to make it more production (production system) and management orientated (rather than breed orientated) Simply because the major constraints in livestock production reside under production- and management aspects, rather than breed choices.

There was also a need to sub-divide the different livestock sectors from the initial main categories (cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and chickens) into production-driven categories. This included commodities like milk (goats), fibre (goats), wool (sheep), chicken breeders and hatcheries, as well as other smaller livestock production sectors (rabbits and fish), even though practiced on a very small scale in the sub-commercial sector.

A major constraint in profitable

livestock production is endemic diseases and other health related issues. This necessitated a total revamp of the health and diseases section to include all the important and notifiable livestock diseases and a complete new section covering nutritional imbalances of livestock.

Basic information includes a description, symptoms, prevention and general treatment of the conditions.

Under the economic section, support is provided in the form of market info and basic processing and packaging techniques. This section also provides basic information on different joint venture business models, formats and approaches towards facilitating and assisting small scale and emerging farmers to overcome some of the challenges and constraints that they experience on an individual basis.

The different sections of the Animal Production section is further supported by comprehensive lists of relevant and printable documents (tools, tips and extension guides) to assist the Extension Officer.

## Developing an ESO for SADC

Following the good progress made in rolling out ESO to the various provinces in South Africa, it is opportune to now consider further needs and opportunities within the wider SADC region.

Whilst individual and informal meetings with stakeholders in some of the other SADC countries suggested an equally urgent need for an Agricultural Decision Support System (such as ESO), this demand was formally confirmed by officials of the SADC Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources (FANR) Directorate at a meeting held on 4 August 2009 at the SADC offices in Gaborone. Manstrat was invited to demonstrate ESO to senior staff members of the FANR Directorate and the feedback received was very positive. In this regard the meeting concluded that means and resources for implementation of such a decision support system within the wider SADC should be investigated and that further consultation with Manstrat regarding the possible implementation of ESO will follow in due course.

## Manstrat

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## Technology Tips

### Q: What should I do when I forgot my password?

A: If you have registered before, both your login and password should be stored under your personal profile in the users database. If you forget your password, simply click the [Forget Password](#) link which will take you to a page where you will have to provide your e-mail address. This should be the address registered in the system and not any address that you may have.



In addition to the one registered as your login. Your e-mail address will be checked by the system and if it is found, you will be asked a security question. (You would have chosen both question and answer during registration.) When you provide the correct answer, your password will be e-mailed to you immediately. You should contact your administrator immediately if you suspect that another person may be using your username and password.