

EXTENSION SUITE ONLINE "HOME"

Exciting developments led to the introduction of a new tab on the Main Navigation Bar of Extension Suite Online (ESO) titled "Start". The "Start" tab is made up of two already familiar Main Menu Icons namely "Question and Answer" and "Search" and two new Main Menu Icons, "Home" and "Discussions". ESO now opens automatically on the new provincial "Home" page.

The Home Page displays a number of topics that include MARKET PRICES; CROP AND BREED OF THE WEEK; HOT DISCUSSION TOPICS; WHAT'S NEW IN ESO?; OTHER INTERESTING SECTIONS; NATIONAL MONTHLY ESO USER; and EXTENSION SUITE ONLINE ADDITIONAL (The initial ESO introduction page and menu options such as the Departmental Publications and Departmental Links can still be accessed in the Extension Suite Online Additional section at the bottom of the "Home" page).

The new "Discussions" module gives each ESO user the opportunity to share information with other users and create new discussions based on agricultural related topics in a real-time environment. Users can already view a number of interesting discussions when they log in. The value that such a discussion forum adds to agricultural knowledge in general cannot be overestimated. Now professionals in all walks of life can encourage, capacitate and assist each other in their own specialised forums on ESO.

ESO users are encouraged to utilise these new additions to their full potential and to send ESO feedback regarding their user experiences. Feedback can be sent to ESO via the "Send us feedback" button at the top of the Home page, above the 'Welcome' message or directly to support@esuite.co.za.

Johan Hoogenboezem



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QUESTION AND ANSWER MODULE DEVELOPING A KNOWLEDGE BASE

A knowledge base can be defined as a centralised repository for information and knowledge on a particular field, allowing for collection and dissemination of useful and relevant information. In a knowledge base management system, information is collected and organised to be shared, enabling users to utilise and search this knowledge.

The knowledge base of Extension Suite Online for example, consists of production information, related articles, extension guides, geographic information, and pest and disease information. In order to access this knowledge base, interfaces were created in Extension Suite Online to browse or search for information. Where information is not found, or where it is unclear, a user is able to ask a question on the system, which will be answered by a specialist in the relevant field.

Common components found in knowledge bases are Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's), where answers are given to regularly asked questions, thus reducing the continual reposting of basic - and more advanced - questions on a subject. In Extension Suite Online, this was integrated into the "Question and Answer" section. This section enables

users to browse or search for previously answered questions, as well as ask new questions. Because knowledge bases are not static collections of information, but rather dynamic collections of knowledge, questions and answers are added to these repositories continually. Categories are used to provide a user with some guidelines in asking a question, which assists in speeding up the answering process, and also contributes to the quality of the total knowledge base, as these categories are used in the indexing process.

Although the "Question and Answer" section is just one of many components within the knowledge base of Extension Suite Online, it is clear that the system can be strengthened by users taking part and asking questions within the system, improving the sharing of agricultural knowledge towards all ESO users.

It is very important to remember that useful and relevant information can be found under the Questions and Answers section, as this information is based on real questions asked by people in the sector as well as the responses from subject experts.

Vincent Victor



USEFULL TIPS FOR EXTENSIONISTS

Matsunke Malefane and Michèle Cloete

Handling domineering individuals in meetings or groups

- Use the round robin technique to structure group discussions.
- Form a circle, so that everybody can speak and observe everyone else.
- Form smaller groups with individuals that have similar personalities.
- Have ground rules that were developed in consultation with all participants.
- Reinforce the meeting boundaries.
- Limit eye contact with the domineering individual.
- As a last resort, speak to the individual in private while remaining self-assured and calm.

To be able to harness the full potential of the Questions and Answers (Q&A) section in Extension Suite Online a good knowledge on how to navigate within this module is essential. The Q&A module can be accessed by clicking on the new ESO navigation tab, "Start" and then selecting the "Question and Answer" main menu icon. After selection, the following information option items are available in the Q&A sidebar; "View Questions" and "Tasks".

The opening page of the "View questions" item starts with a filter box allowing users to filter through the questions to find a more defined list of questions relating to a required production area. Below this box all the questions asked by users are displayed in a clickable list. By clicking on one of

the listed items the full question and its answer is displayed on a new page. To navigate back to the listed questions a "back" button is provided at the top right-hand corner of this page.

Further, the "Tasks" information option item contains, two sub-items; "Ask a question" and "Answer a question". "Ask a Question" gives ESO users the opportunity to ask a question and then to submit it for an answer. "Answer a question" allows any user to answer a question; the answer will be reviewed by the relevant experts at ESO before being published back into the system.

The Question and Answer module of ESO provides every ESO user with a direct link to an expert.



MONTHLY NATIONAL EXTENSION SUITE ONLINE USER: MAY 2012

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.

Congratulations to, **Pieter Burger**, (Western Cape Department of Agriculture), who is the National ESO User for the month of May 2012. Pieter receives an ESO 4 Gig USB memory stick, pen and certificate.

During June, we had the opportunity to ask Pieter Burger a few questions regarding his usage of ESO:

What is your responsibility at the department?

As an Agricultural Economist at the Western Cape department I draw up Enterprise Budgets and Cash Flows for various agricultural commodities.

How long have you been working for the department?

I have been working for the department since January 2012 – about 6 months to date.

How often do you make use of ESO?

I use ESO as needed, I would say bi-weekly.

What is the impact that ESO has on your relationship with your clients/farmers?

It gives a good starting point for the development of new budgets and enables one to get a broad base of articles under one heading. Off course, one needs to verify it with the producers for their unique circumstances.

Would you recommend ESO to your colleagues?

Yes, ESO has a vast database with a lot of functionality to assist in building a framework for the project you are busy with.



Do you have any tips to other users regarding ESO?

Don't get too hooked up on theory and always double-check the theory with a producer in the area you are planning the project.

What do you use Extension Suite Online for the most?

Retrieving articles related to the enterprises, production information and market prices.

In a few words, how would you describe ESO as an Extension tool?

It is a good offset point for any agricultural enterprise as it provides basic information on all the major fields regarding the production, management, marketing and economics of various agricultural commodities.

MAY ESO UTILISATION OVERVIEW

Looking at ESO national utilisation from April 2010 to February 2012 we found that over a 21 month period, users accessed 704 806 pages of agricultural information from the system.

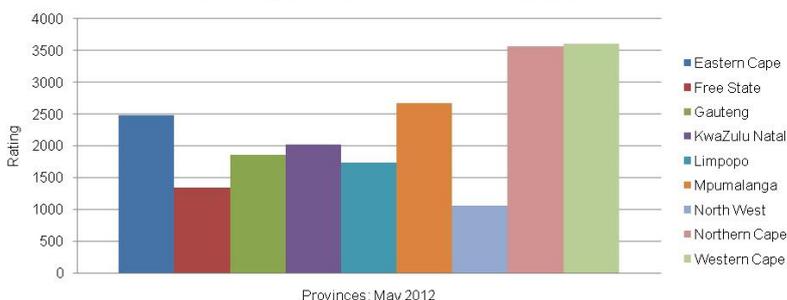
If one takes into consideration that the "Farming Handbook" consists of 431 pages of information and that the hard cover version measures 30 mm in breadth, then the number of pages visited by the provinces represents 1 635 of these books. When stacked they will form a 49 meter 17 storey high tower!

On a national basis 52.5%, or 370 024 pages frequented were from the Plant Production section; 35.4% or 249 501 pages from the Animal Production section; and 12.1% or 85 281 pages from the various Support Functions such as Regional Data, the Knowledge Centre and Farm Information Sections.

This is indeed a large amount of information and shows that those who have 'discovered' ESO are using it extensively. Well done!

Piet van Zyl

PROVINCIAL TOP USER RATING



NAME OF TOP USER IN EACH PROVINCE MAY 2012

PROVINCE	NAME
Eastern Cape	Sindile Magoda
Free State	Gabaiphiwe Gorden Godfrey Kgang
Gauteng	Lesego Phakedi
KwaZulu Natal	Lingani Marageni
Limpopo	Edgar Sebei
Mpumalanga	Jacoline Molalagotla
North West	Aletta Mothupi
Northern Cape	George du Preez
Western Cape	Pieter Burger