

The South African Soil Surveyors Organisation



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Introduction

The South African Soil Surveyors Organisation (SASSO) was founded in 2001 with 18 members, and has grown to its current 42 in four years. The members represent 20 institutions including co-operatives, fertilizer companies, institutes of the Agricultural Research Council, staff of the Provincial Departments of Agriculture and tertiary institutions.

SASSO serves the land evaluation industry where soil plays a dominant role. Land evaluation is the process whereby land is graded for its suitability for a specific use. Most of the members of SASSO are in the business of evaluating land for its suitability to produce cash crops under dryland and irrigation agriculture, but evaluation of land for urban development and environmental impact assessments are also in line. There is a huge growth in awareness of the role of soil in the environment,

resulting in the related field of work expanding rapidly.

Mission

SASSO is a non-profit organization whose mission is to uplift the people involved in the land evaluation industry by equipping them with up-to-date knowledge and skills. Aspects that are addressed include:

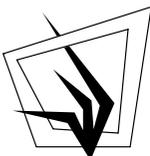
- Identification of relevant soil properties.
- Classification (naming) of soils to improve communication.
- Interpretation of soil data.
- Application of models (simple and advanced) estimating the suitability of soils for crop production.
- Creation of an open forum for the discussion of relevant issues.
- Registration and accreditation of soil surveyors to create and uphold standards in the industry.
- Advancement of the image of land evaluation experts and the role they play in optimizing land use.

Significance

The members of SASSO make a significant contribution to the crop production industry. It is estimated that the benefit is more than R400 m per year. SASSO creates a forum for open discussion. This process resulted in a culture where everybody comes to learn and all come to contribute.

Workshops

SASSO meets once every quarter for a two-day workshop, held in various places around the country. Since the organization started, the workshops have grown steadily so that every workshop had a record attendance. The last workshop, at Douglas in the Northern Cape, focused on the unique challenges facing crop farmers irrigating soils in an arid environment. The workshops are aimed at facilitating communication between practitioners by visiting soil profiles, classifying them, and discussing the management implications of that soil type for a particular land use. Some lively debate occurs around the soil pits, but this belies the friendly atmosphere of the workshops. People interested in SASSO activities can visit the website at www.sasso.co.za.



The GSSA Website: Members Only Page

Glen Barnes is currently upgrading the website so that it will become a lot more interactive for the Society members, and dynamic in terms of the information it contains. However, in its current state, it certainly has a lot to offer.

Currently, Society members are able to login to the Members Page of the website and search the expertise database or the membership database. The latter search is a useful tool for finding contact details of other members with whom you may wish to communicate.

The expertise database lists those members who have expert knowledge in a wide variety of fields, including communal range management, fynbos, game management, savanna, problem plant management and veld rehabilitation. It also lists the various categories into which the members of the Society fall, e.g. academic, consulting, farmer, etc.. Unfortunately the expertise database is not fully utilised at present, and updates from all the members will be requested early in 2006. Please take a moment to complete these updates and enhance the value of the website for all.

If you would like to be ahead of the game and update your expertise portfolio and check your details at the same time then: login, go the Members Page, type your surname in the search box, click on Notify Us, update all details, and submit.

By this point, many of you will be wondering how to login! Please send an email requesting the login information to admin@gssa.co.za, and I shall happily let you in on this secret. Currently all members login in the same way, using the same username and password. Glen will be implementing a more secure and unique method once the upgrading of the website is completed.