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# Livestock development in the rangelands: Is there a way forward for resource constrained communities and individuals?

Synthesis of sessions held at the 42<sup>nd</sup> GSSA Conference, Grahamstown, July 2007

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## Background

The technical, cultural and resource constraints facing emerging farmers in South Africa is enormous. Otherwise well-intended land settlement schemes, such as SLAG (Settlement Land Acquisition Grants), have largely failed to produce successful commercial agricultural enterprises due to problems of limited technical background, poor animal and land management and the large number of non-active beneficiaries expecting to reap benefits from the holdings. While LRAD (Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development) is arguably having greater success, there is, currently a continuing problem of lack of tenure, lack of knowledge and lack of resources for beneficiaries to move forward. One of the more successful programs seems to have been the farmer Share-Equity scheme. Many smaller projects designed to assist

emerging farmers, including a number of overseas aid projects, have had little lasting effect due to poor framing of the emerging farm context, inappropriate technical interventions and/or lack of on-going support from the relevant tiers of government.

The Rangelands: People, Places and Policy sessions at the recent GSSA conference attempted to address these issues with an aim to seeking out positive options to improve the prospective success of emerging farmers making the transition to commercial status. Most of the session presentations identified problems and constraints, while a lesser number did offer some suggestions for overcoming them. These presentations were followed by a discussion session that sought to find a way forward.

The following is a summary of the presentations and the ensuing discussions. It should be noted that these discussions were limited in

scope to the extent that there were no emerging farmers present at the forum to give their viewpoint.

## Problems

There have been many attempts at intervention, most aimed at improving some dimension of veld management or animal production. However the success rate of these interventions has generally been low; for which a number of reasons were identified:

- in communal areas, there are numerous and conflicting objectives for the use of the rangeland. A survey in the Eastern Cape revealed 23% of farmers used the communal area for grazing, 16% for collection of dung, 17% for timber, 19% for medicinal plants, and 25% for firewood. Others use it for cropping or collecting thatching material.
- most farmers do not herd or kraal their cattle, which can then present a problem for those with crops.
- over 50% of farmers lack knowledge of rangeland management and over 80% do not link resource degradation to high grazing pressure, burning or bush encroachment.
- many farmers have a poor knowledge of animal management (both animal health and herd management), and no knowledge of veld carrying capacity.
- there are no restrictions on use or access to communal areas, however, fences are not a solution, as they interfere with the free movement of people and animals around the communal area.
- there is a lack of institutional arrangements to enforce farmers rights.
- in communal areas, over 70% of farmers have less than 8 animals. This reduces their flexibility to manage, buy and sell, and limits their support from government. Most government support goes to those with large herds. Farmers prefer to keep their cattle and sell smaller animals, such as goats.
- most farmers are over 60 years of age and are reluctant to risk any major change in their circumstances. They avoid risk by keeping a few cattle as a form of savings, for milk, for ceremonial purposes, or for ploughing, and rely on government welfare. Hence, they may not be interested in becoming commercial farmers.
- fire can be good for plants but threatens people, their homes and their livelihoods.
- a lack of suitable land for grazing can be a problem for individual farmers as well as communal farmers. They have a shortage of winter feed, but commercial practices may not be suitable.
- most emerging individual farmers have no secure tenure to

their land as yet, which deters them from making any capital improvements, even if they had the resources.

- most lack the resources to take the first step towards commercialization, even if they want to.
- Often, access to markets is limited, and many farmers distrust the marketing system.
- Government policies have overlooked farmer's motives for keeping cattle.

### **Towards solutions**

In the ensuing discussion session there were three clear messages that were continually reinforced:

- The need for a participatory approach; farmers/community had to be involved right from the outset of any project,
- The need for an integrated approach; any intervention strategy had to look at the whole system (social, economics, environment, infrastructure, services), and
- The need for on-going support; projects need to train local extension personnel so that after any project finishes, they can provide follow up support.

It is quite apparent that while most emerging farmers, both communal and individual, lack the necessary knowledge and skills to operate commercial enterprises, a good many either do not really want to be commercial farmers, or have limited realistic understanding of what is

actually required to operate in that sphere. Hence, intervention aimed at improving animal or veld condition will be of little interest to them, and unlikely to gain their support. In reality, current research agendas relevant to emerging farmers are heavily influenced by government and agency agendas. It is critical that the community identifies any problem that these agendas are meant to be addressing. However, due to lack of knowledge or real interest on the part of emerging farmers, they may not be aware there is a problem i.e. they don't know what they don't know. Hence, care needs to be taken in determining the community needs.

Farmers who do want to be commercial, or at least partially so, may be able to grow forage crops and store it for the dry season to help alleviate the winter feed shortage. This will keep their animals in better condition and reduce the pressure on the veld, but requires a major intervention, in the form of cropping. Alternatively, farmers could be trained to make better use of the existing resources rather than introducing some whole new strategy. However, to do this, may require government policies and will require better mechanisms for enforcing any regulations or local rules. In communal areas, the small herds need to be managed as part of a big herd. For individual farmers, use needs to be made of successful farmers to act as role models.

For those farmers who really do not want to be commercial, one pos-

sible way to alleviate the pressure on veld resources may be to provide alternative ways for them to make or save money, so they don't have to keep more cattle than can safely be accommodated. For this group, there is an urgent need to create new opportunities and enhance their capacity to act independently. Here, an integrated approach that looks at the whole community is most important. Maybe what they need is not more animals or more feed or better veld or animal management, but rather a better road so they get their animals to market, or to get to an alternate source of employment. In that case, they need to build appropriate alliances with other institutions, rather than the Department of Agriculture.

Despite the high failure rate of past projects, there have been successes, and these need to be documented, and made more readily available so they can be used as a framework for future projects. However, any framework needs to be flexible to adapt to the different circumstances and varying conditions. Where they have worked, there has usually been a complete community involvement, and a strong sense of ownership of the activities. Existing scientific data needs to be placed into a more user friendly format, and combined with local knowledge and common sense to provide good extension material for both farmers and

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extension officers. This information should cover a wide range of topics such as animal and veld management, bush control, use of fire, economic management, etc. and should provide a step-wise process for resource constrained farmers to progress.

It is also clear that, to ensure any long-term benefit, government policy makers also need to be involved. One way to influence policy-makers may be through some appropriate application of economics. For any given strategy, analyses showing the economic, environmental and social benefits to the particular small holder and subsistence farming system, as well as to government, could possibly help influence policy. There is a need for innovation in ways for people to invest in and develop private control of certain resources in community areas. Again, government policy could help.

Co-ordination in addressing the different requirements within any community will always present a challenge. Nevertheless it needs to be done. Co-operation between different government agencies, different projects within agencies, and different local and overseas aid projects, is essential. Perhaps the range and forage working group and the ARC could play a pivotal role in this.

## Conclusion

Not only do emerging farmers lack sufficient land and finances, most have little technical knowledge of animal and veld management. Compounding these difficulties, communal farmers have the long recognized problem of sharing resources, conflicting objectives, and the complexity of communal management, while for many individual farmers; land tenure is an added problem.

Clearly, any attempt to improve the livelihood of emerging farmers will involve an integrated approach between the farmers and scientific, extension and social expertise, and government policy makers. Any intervention strategy will need to take into account resource constraints, risk management, and the social and economic objectives of the individual or group concerned. There needs to be a step-wise process to improve their well being, which generates resources that can be used to improve their well being further, and so on, in an incremental manner. Above all, the emphasis should not just be on improving veld condition or increasing beef or crop production, but must include developing sustainable livelihoods.



## The 2007 Peter Edwards Award

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The Peter Edwards Trophy is awarded at the annual GSSA Congress to a land-user in the province in which the Congress is held. This prestigious award is presented in recognition of sound application of the principles of range and forage science and conservation. The aim of the award is to recognise top land-users in different areas of southern Africa and thereby encourage the wise use of natural resources. The award is named in memory of Peter Edwards, a pasture scientist who was born in Stutterheim in the Eastern Cape. The trophy was first awarded in 1981 when the GSSA congress was hosted in the Eastern Cape and since then, many outstanding livestock farmers and game ranchers have been added to the list of recipients.

The 2007 adjudication was done during late June, which is the driest and most challenging time of the year and we found this to be a good time to visually appraise the farms and see how farmers were managing. Our panel consisted of Tony Palmer (ARC, Livestock Business Division), Pieter Conradie (Döhne Agricultural Research Station) and