

# Revitalizing Planted Pastures in South Africa

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**T**here is concern amongst members of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa (GSSA) about the future of Planted Pastures in South Africa. During the council meeting, in January 2010 at Kimberly, it was decided to start a campaign to revitalize this discipline by encouraging research, publications and training and most importantly mentoring of young scientists and specialists. Since then a Strategic Plan was drafted and is as follows.

## Draft Strategic Plan

After reviewing the membership list of the GSSA, and as far as possible grouping the Grassland Scientists (who have some specialization in planted pastures) from the list, a few conclusions and/or deductions were made.

The conclusions drawn from this exercise and after communicating with specialists in the field, consequently recognized a few factors that has contributed to the dwindling numbers of planted pasture specialists, academics and/or researchers in the country, which then ultimately supports the importance of revitalizing the planted pastures component of the Grassland Society.

These conclusions have also in the recent years been supported by the fact that the Department of Education, regards Pasture Science as one of the most scarce agricultural skills in the country and requires significant inputs to address this issue.

Of the 487 members, approximately 18 % (+/- 87 members) of the members have some expertise in planted pastures, and of these members 9 % of them are academics at tertiary institutions training under- and post graduate students and 3.33 % of these members excluding the academics that do research as well, are researchers and the remaining 88% of people with planted pasture expertise are either government officials, self-employed, parastatal or in industry (seed companies etc.). The factors that contribute to the shortage of effective planted pasture research and training in South Africa are as follows:

1. In government institutions and research institutions, there are many vacant positions, run down infrastructure, insufficient running capital and significant red tape and most importantly, the absence of mentors. Inter-provincial Planted Pasture working groups, with remaining specialists can be an opportunity to address this challenge.

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2. There is lack of vision with in Departments to prioritize research, and this can be an avenue that the GSSA can help guide government of important research opportunities

3. There are significant changes in agriculture with serious financial implications, and new technologies and developments in this field are required. Shortage of Plant Breeders – Need to encourage/attract students in the Genetic Sciences to become more involved in Planted Pastures

4. The dairy industry of South Africa, which is primarily located in the coastal areas, is entirely dependant on planted pastures, and this discipline is mainly supported by animal scientists. It is therefore, imperative that the dairy industry is approached to support the campaign.

5. Insufficient marketing of the importance of the discipline – this can be addressed by having popular articles endorsed by the GSSA.

6. More involvement of stakeholders (meat, wool, fertilizer & seed industries), through financial support (bursaries) and internships, in the training of young scientist.

7. More short courses endorsed by the GSSA.

8. The shortage of academics in the discipline, resulting in the loss of Planted Pasture education at tertiary level. Of all the larger universities, there are probably 4 left that actually offer more than one Planted Pasture course, and not even to mention a research programme in Planted Pastures.

“Pasture Science is one of the most scarce agricultural skills in the country and requires significant inputs to address this issue.”

### **Relevant Contacts**

The GSSA membership list has been scrutinized to establish relevant contacts in the following categories.

### **Potential Mentors**

Currently a number of mentors have been identified, but have not yet been contacted to establish their availability.

### **Funding Opportunities**

The following institutions listed are to be contacted for support: NRF, Industry (Seed Companies, Fertilizer Companies etc.), MPO, RPO, Protein Research Foundation (Legume production), EU funding (EP7 Framework) – Innovative Research Funding etc.

### **Creating links with Industry**

Various links are to be made with industry

- to sponsor bursaries and where possible be followed by internships,
- involve and invite associated societies such as RPO, MPO, Wool growers Association, SANSOR and SANCID to attend congress and/or have them publish in Grassroots , and reach an agreement for GSSA to publish or be represented at their events.

## The Popular Agricultural Press

Media releases in popular agricultural magazines and newsletters are planned to highlight the status quo of the Planted Pasture Science discipline, thus the importance of planted pastures, scientists and specialists in the agricultural sector of Southern Africa.

At the initiation of this campaign, and the drafting of the strategic plan, it was proposed that an open letter be sent to all listed persons the GSSA has record of with some expertise in Planted Pastures. Below is the open letter, and it would be appreciated if any person who has not yet received such a letter and would like to participate in this campaign, please send us their details so that we can make contact with them.

### Open Letter to Pasture Scientists

To all Planted Pastures Specialists in SA

#### Planted Pastures in South Africa: The way forward?

For quite a few years there is concern amongst GSSA members about the future of Planted Pastures in SA. The number of publications in this field is declining in our journal and it seems as if the Planted Pasture Scientists are on the “red list”. During the last GSSA council meeting, Prof. Chris Dannhauser and Dr. Wayne Truter were tasked to “revitalize” the Planted Pasture component of the GSSA. The plan of action at this stage is to:

- List all the experienced Grassland and Pasture scientists in SA, who are specifically involved in Planted Pastures. Even those who are retired, because they can make valuable contributions.
- Form a National Working Group on Planted Pastures to facilitate this campaign.
- Encourage people on the list of specialists to consider publishing within the next year. This can be a publications based on historical or new data. It can be a full scientific publication for our Journal or a popular article for our Grassroots bulletin.
- Establish reasons for the decline (or “retrogression”) of specialists and/ or interest in this field of specialization and consequently find solutions for the problem.

A request to all the Planted Pasture scientists who received this notice: Are you willing to participate in this action? If yes, in what way possible? Please indicate (with a  $\checkmark$  or x) in the table below: Any further suggestions for this campaign will be much appreciated. Please send us updated contact details and comments and suggestions.

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Action	Y	N
Are you willing to participate by phone?		
Are you willing to participate by e-mail?		
Are you willing to participate by fax?		
Are you willing to participate by post?		
Are you willing to serve on the Working Group?		
Will you consider a publication?		
AJRS Journal?		
Grassroots?		
Can you help as a mentor for younger scientists?		
Please let us know of any other person who can contribute	Names please	