

SANBI'S Grasslands Biodiversity red meat industry initiative (2009-2010)

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The South African Biodiversity Institution (SANBI) is responsible for managing the Grasslands Programme. This programme involves a strategic approach to developing biodiversity in agriculture, forestry, coal mining and urban areas.

The Red Meat Industry initiative is a major part of the agricultural biodiversity programme. This is because the Grasslands biome covers 29% of South Africa's land surface and this biome is primarily used by livestock farmers utilizing the grass for production. Thus it will be initiatives within the livestock, or red meat sector that will result in achieving the major goal of the Grasslands programme.

This goal has been defined as: "The biodiversity and associated ecosystem services of the grasslands biome are sustained and secured for the benefit of current and future generations".

Investigations into the red meat value chain over the past few years have resulted in the development of an Implementation Plan for achieving this Grasslands goal.

Initially it was felt that a "certified" diversification programme, applied to all sectors of the red meat value chain, could result in a higher price being paid by the consumer for the final product. This increased price being an incentive to primary producers to preserve and develop their grasslands in a sustainable manner. The investigations over the past few years have indicated that only a small percentage of the consumers would be prepared to pay higher prices for these "biodiverse" products and that any

increase in value that this would put into the value chain would not filter back to the primary producer.

In the implementation plan it has been made clear that, rather than introducing a certification programme, far better results would be achieved by dealing directly with producers and giving them the direction required to preserve and develop their grasslands. In this process biological production will increase and so will financial returns. In which case, improved profits will be the incentive to continue with and further develop improved veld management techniques. Nevertheless, participants will be acknowledged for their positive participation by way of certification of their operations (rather than certification of their products).

In the implementation strategy three regions have been identified to develop pilot projects. These are:

Harrismith

Farmers belonging to the Eeram Farmers' Association in the Harrismith district of the Free State, who are primarily beef and sheep producers. In addition a target of 30% of the participants will be emerging commercial farmers in the same district. The Blokhuis Feedlot and abattoir (part of the Midland Group) will represent the off-farm value chain components.

Vryheid

Farmers in the Vryheid district of KwaZulu Natal, who are primarily beef and sheep producers supplying Vryheid Meat Masters (who represent the off-farm components of the value chain). In addition a target of 30% of the participants will be emerging commercial farmers in the area.

Colenso

Game farmers in the Ladysmith-Colenso district of KZN. This project will be focused on the existing game production and marketing initiative of Mr.G Horner, but the expansion of the pilot project will assess the feasibility of developing a co-operative game abattoir that will service the slaughter and venison processing requirements of a range of game producers in the grassland areas of KZN and the eastern Free State.

The participants in these pilot projects will be serviced by a private specialist consultant and local extension officers who will combine on-farm visits with study groups. The primary objective will be to assist in developing management plans covering all aspects of the relevant production processes leading to improved veld management, livestock productivity and farm profits.

The SANBI programme covers a period of five years. This first year will result in the initiation of the projects and will involve:

- Discussions with the Department of Agriculture, Extension officers involvement.
- Bringing participants on-board.
- Setting up study groups.
- Veld evaluation on farms.
- Presenting acknowledged standards for each sector of the red meat value chain.
- Establishing present standards in use by producers.
- Developing management plans on farm (20 point Manuals).
- Hold study group meetings.
- Organize farm visits.

COMMENTS

- Participation in the pilot projects by producers is voluntary and a memorandum of agreement will be provided to ensure that participants understand what is involved in the project.
- The successful implementation of the projects must be gauged through an audit programme of acknowledged standards. As there is voluntary participation the audit process must also be of a voluntary nature and ideally conducted by the participants themselves with the assistance of the consultant and extension service.
- A detailed implementation plan has been completed and will be available to participants when confirmed by the Agricultural Coordinator of the Grassland Programme, Mr. Tsumbedzo Madalhothe.
- Dr. Alastair Paterson will be the consultant responsible for the implementation of the project and will be working directly with the Extension service and reporting to Mr. Madalhothe. 📄