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HOW TO MANAGE PRODUCTION RISK ON A FARM

Xolile Dlhamini

Farmers are often exposed to a range of risks related to production, marketing, finance and human resources. For example, they don't know whether rainfall will be good over the production season; they don't know the prices they will receive for produce sold or whether crops will be infected by diseases or not. Farmers cannot control these risks and therefore they have to develop ways of managing them. For simplicity, this article will focus on the management of production risks. Extension officers (EO's) can help farmers to improve their risk management skills and help them to recognise and understand their problems as well as assist them in making better farm management decisions.

How do EO's help farmers to deal with these risks and reduce great changes in productivity and profitability?

In order to develop appropriate strategies EO's need to consider them in the context of the **farmer's location**, the **unique goals** of the farmer and the range of **decision making options** open to each individual farmer. For this to occur, EO's will need a good understanding of the farmer and his or her working environment. Similarly, farmers need to understand risk and utilise risk management skills to better anticipate problems and reduce consequences. Production risks arise from uncertainty of factors such as weather, diseases and pests that affect the quantity and quality of farm produce. Farmers need to make decisions on how to reduce the impact of these risks on the yield of produce leading to low income.

Good risk management decisions depend on accurate information which requires reliable data. Sources of information include good farm records; off-farm statistics; information from input suppliers; traders, extension workers;

other farmers; and market price data. This type of information is available on **Extension Suite Online** in the following menu items; **Economics, Infrastructure and Farm Information System**. A combination of the following strategies should be used in managing risk. **Risk reducing inputs** such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation improve the chances of better quality and quantity of farm products and reduce the likelihood of low or unstable yields. **Selecting low risk activities** such as an enterprise that has a lower income potential but carries less risk ensures reliability of yields and therefore providing a safety net in terms of food security. A **flexible farming system** reduces risk by enabling quick or short term changes in production and sales. **Diversification** is another strategy that reduces the impact of risk by spreading risk over several farm enterprises. Extension Officers can access this information on **Extension Suite Online** by clicking on **Plant production, then selecting a crop**, and navigating to the following menus on the side bar; **Production information, Crop protection, Irrigation, Nutrition and Soils**.

After discussing the importance of production risk and the role of EO's in assisting farmers in mitigating risk, it should be clear that production risk management is critical for the success of any farming enterprise.



Xolile Dlhamini

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Tips and tools for advisors

Xolile Dlhamini

Qualities of a good facilitator

- Participants should feel comfortable that their opinions are welcomed and encouraged.
- Create an atmosphere of trust and respect.
- Learn to sense the feelings of individuals or groups by actively listening to the tone and properly understand the meaning of words used.
- Develop the ability to deal with emotional situations respectfully and when required, firmly.
- Willingness to share information with others in the group.
- Know when to end a discussion, manage too much input from some participants, wait to let others finish who make useful contributions etc.

NATIONAL TOP ESO USER: APRIL 2014

The monthly national ESO user will receive the following prizes: First time National ESO User 2014: 4 Gig USB memory stick, second time National ESO User 2014: Digital Camera, third time National ESO User 2014: Nokia Lumia 520, fourth time National ESO User 2014: Samsung Galaxy Tab.

Congratulations to Ms Vonani Stella Mabunda (Limpopo Department of Agriculture), who is the ESO Top National User for April 2014.



Ms Vonani Stella Mabunda

Vonani Stella Mabunda from the Limpopo Department of Agriculture is the Extension Suite Online (ESO) National Top User for April 2014 for the second consecutive month, bringing her top user tally since 2010 to three. Congratulations Vonani!

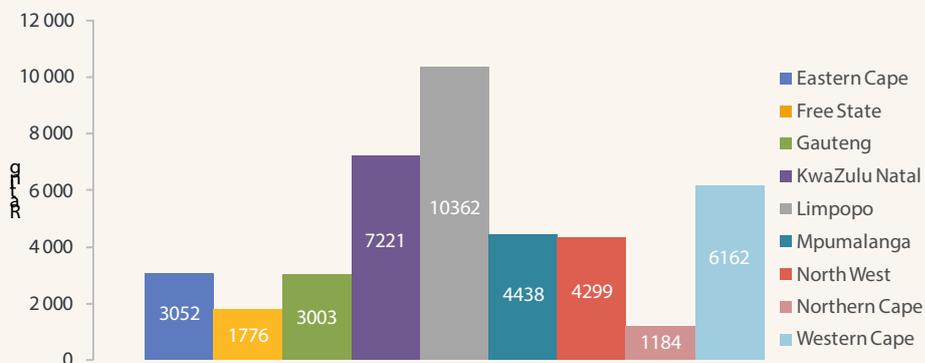
Xolile Dhlamini from Manstrat AIS conducted an interview with Vonani, where she gave us some additional information on her usage of ESO over the past four years. Before going out into the field, Vonani starts her day by doing research on the specific farming activities that she will be working with on that day. She mostly accesses ESO at the office, sometimes on the farm, but will also use her cell phone to look up information on ESO when necessary.

Recently Vonani has used ESO to develop training material for farmers on how to form cooperatives. She has also used ESO recently to assist a farmer from Mpumalanga who asked for information regarding the time to grow green beans in the Limpopo province. Vonani encourages advisors to continue using ESO on a daily basis to increase their utilisation and says that ESO is a tool that empowers EO's to perform their duties in a better way. To become a better extension officer Vonani advises EO's to improve their knowledge about farming and share their experiences with other EO's through the ESO discussion forum!

ESO UTILISATION: APRIL 2014

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.

PROVINCIAL TOP USER GRAPH



PROVINCIAL TOP USERS

PROVINCE	NAME
Eastern Cape	Bakhangele Minyelela
Free State	Moses Moshe Mbongo
Gauteng	Lesego Phakedi
KwaZulu Natal	Sifiso Mthabela
Limpopo	Vonani Stella Mabunda
Mpumalanga	Lucas Shabangu
North West	Mompoti Gabanakgosi
Northern Cape	Ogodiseng Alfred
Western Cape	Riaan Nowers

PARASITE TALK: FEATURED PARASITE

Further information on all featured parasites can be found on ESO.

Blue ticks

Scientific Name: *Boophilus decoloratus*, *B. microplus*

Afrikaans Name: Bloubosluis

This is a one-host tick which moults on the host. Engorged females have a bluish colour with pale yellow streaks or blotches, and small, pale yellow legs. The females are approximately 10 mm long and have an elongated oval shape. Males are small (3 mm long) and pale brown.



Blue tick

Send your pest or disease related questions to newsletter@esuite.co.za with your name, province and the question and we will answer you via ESO's Question and Answer module or in the newsletter.

TIPS FROM ESO TOP NATIONAL USERS

ESO Top National Users

Extension officers from over South Africa have been using Extension Suite Online (ESO) on a daily basis in their efforts to assist clients and disseminate accurate information to farmers. Below are a few quotations and tips from ESO National Top Users describing how they experience ESO:

Let us be informed and improve extension services in South Africa. The only way to be informed is through ESO. You can use it at the comfort of your desk, print material and take it to the farmer. ESO definitely makes your work easier. - *Lesego Phakedi (Gauteng)*

We live in a world of new technology and ESO forms an

important part of the extension officer's world, so browse, search and research on ESO. - *Mthobisi Jackson (Eastern Cape)*

Don't be afraid of the tool because it is useful to you! - *Sindile Magoda (Eastern Cape)*

If you want to be successful in the work that you do, consult Extension Suite Online. - *George du Preez (Northern Cape)*

I'd like other users to visit the discussion panel for tips and advice. One can really learn a lot from that section. - *Vhuthu Gavhi (Gauteng)*

I would encourage all the Extension officers to spend more time on ESO. With ESO one is able to tackle challenging questions from farmers. - *Vonani Stella Mabunda (Limpopo)*

Do you have any technology related questions? Send them to newsletter@esuite.co.za, with your name, province and the question and we will answer them in a following newsletter edition.



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