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THE SASAE 48TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

THE ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL EXTENSIONIST IN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT – CHALLENGE TO CHANGE.

Xolile Dhlamini

Agricultural extension is a key driver of research and an indispensable input for developing, as well as sustaining high productivity within the farming community. Research findings will be meaningless unless farmers have access to it. Extension education is one of the primary means through which the desired transformation can be brought about in increasing farm land productivity. Extension services raise the efficiency levels of agriculture by providing technical advisory services to the different levels of subsistence, smallholder and commercial farmers, by improving farming methods and techniques, increasing productivity, ensuring food security, as well as improving the general standard of living.

The abundance of support and assistance that Extension Officers already receive from the South African government, organisational bodies like SASAE, and private institutions needs to be increased even more as officers need to be motivated and provided with logistical support. Besides being a developer of internet based Agricultural decision support systems such as Extension Suite Online, Manstrat Agricultural Intelligence Solutions (MAIS) is also a full member of the South African Society for Agricultural Extensionists. MAIS plays a prominent role in supporting the Extension fraternity by disseminating agricultural information through Extension Suite Online, SASAE membership, making donations to extension activities and participation in SASAE conferences.

Despite all the support, many challenges persist for Extension officers in the execution and performance of their duties, as there is no success in human development without challenges. Thus the theme **"The role of professional extension in sustainable agricultural development - challenge to change"** was hosted by SASAE in its 48th Annual conference held in George, Western Cape from 9 – 13 June 2014. The conference was

attended amongst others by the Western Cape Government: HOD of Agriculture, the Director of Extension Reform from DAFF, SACNASP, the regional director of the National Institute of Agricultural Technology in Argentina and provincial managers for Extension from the nine provinces.

In addressing the challenges to change, the conference presented various scientific papers and posters as well as discussions centred on professionalism, climate change and food security, land reform and agricultural development. Considering the theme of the conference and the fact that it was held during the Youth Month, there was active participation of young scientists in the presentations. In addition, one of the areas of discussion entailed the social environment as a challenge facing Extension practitioners in ICT application. Aligning this discussion topic, with the fact that government urges youth to go into farming as a lucrative venture; extension officers have a challenge to make this appealing by using modern information communication technology in empowering youth with agricultural skills. In conclusion, one cannot overemphasise the role of active participation of public and private partnership in developing the extension fraternity. The efforts of Manstrat (AIS) in the active participation and support of the Extension fraternity provides a good example of public and private partnership. **"Together we can."**



Xolile Dhlamini

ESO WALLPAPERS

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Liven up your computer's desktop with an ESO wallpaper. Download wallpapers directly from the ESO newsletter e-mail or on the ESO media website: media.esuite.co.za



Tips and tools for advisors

Jeanne-Louise Bekker with acknowledgement to Sabelo Ngqeleni (O.R Tambo Region - Eastern Cape)

Six ways to improve communication:

Leadership, management and practitioners in general, should have an action plan to improve communication.

- Performing a needs analysis is vital and will determine appropriate technologies to be used by all parties in their respective environments.
- Plan a correct mix of communication tools.
- Develop a high level of confidence with farmers and credibility within the communities.
- Ensure that "gate-keepers" are respected – both informal and formal leaders are critical in transferring messages.
- Demonstrative communication is vital in agricultural practice.
- Group sessions allow participants to pay attention while the message is communicated through demonstrations.

TOP NATIONAL ESO USER:

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 June 2014.



Ms Vonani Stella Mabunda

June marks the fourth consecutive month that Vonani Stella Mabunda has managed to come out as National ESO Top User and she becomes the 4th winner of the ESO and Manstrat AIS grand prize – a Samsung Galaxy Tablet! Congratulations Ms Mabunda!

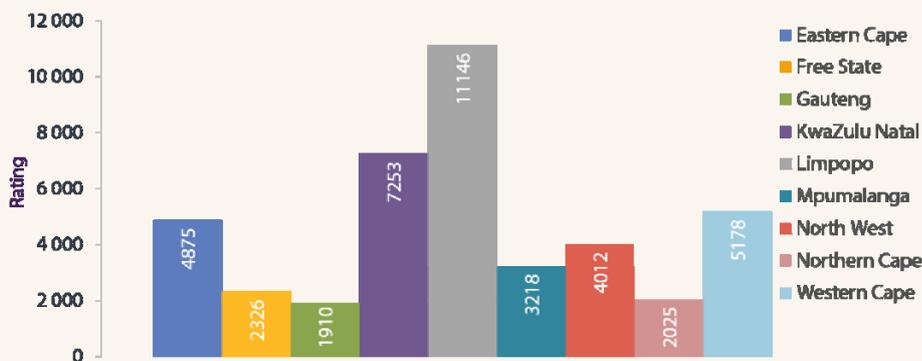
We asked Vonani to share an experience with us from one of her projects where ESO played an important role, and here is what she had to say:

"I make use of Extension Suite Online (ESO) in most of my projects, however there is a specific project, **Tiharihani Vegetable Project**, where I once again realised the benefits of ESO. The project had a problem with poor yield i.e. tuber rot and nematode infestation, even though both the soil suitability and water availability was perfect for effective plant growth. Prior to my utilisation of ESO I tried many attempts to overcome the challenges but without success. The moment I embarked on and implemented the guidelines provided from ESO there was a significant paradigm shift, the project started harvesting good quality sweet potatoes. I advised the project to start planting a suitable cultivar, which performed well without any tuber rot, and it became easy for me as an advisor to develop and to follow a production timetable for the project beneficiaries, directing all activities per stage of production. The ESO guides further helped me to conduct proper monitoring, an activity which could not be executed properly on sweet potato production without having a guideline like the one ESO provided. As I have indicated before, tuber rot was a contributing factor towards poor performance and little did I know that improper irrigation before lifting was a major cause of tuber rot. Due to incorrect diagnosis and information, we even tried several chemicals to fix the problem until I discovered ESO production guides and the correct methods. To be honest my confidence as an advisor has been built up, and the trust farmers have towards me has increased. It is a fact that I owe it all to the ESO program and I recommend that all officials use this rich resource to refresh their academic volume."

ESO UTILISATION: JUNE 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	Sondlo Nokwanda
Free State	Griffith Hadebe
Gauteng	Lesego Phakedi
KwaZulu Natal	Sifiso Mthabela
Limpopo	Vonani Stella
Mpumalanga	Lucas Shabangu
North West	Mompoti Gabanakgosi
Northern Cape	Ogodiseng Alfred
Western Cape	Riaan Nowers

PEST TALK: FEATURED PEST

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

Common cutworm

Scientific Name: *Agrotis segetum*

Popular Name: Common cutworm

Brownish grey larvae found shallowly underground or in shade and have a tendency to curl up when handled. Active during the night, cutting stems of young plants just above or below the soil surface. Seedlings and young plants may be killed.



Common cutworm

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.

ESO DISCUSSIONS Navigating the forum

Thapedi Setshedi

The ESO Discussion Forum offers users an interactive platform that enables them to post topics and have fellow extension officers/colleagues respond. A number of changes were recently made to the Forum's navigation system to allow for a more user friendly experience.

The Discussion Forum's main icon is located on the ESO Home Page, and users can access the platform by clicking on the **Discussions** icon. To view discussion topics in a specific category, a user

clicks on the preferred category to display the list of active discussions. To select a different category, the user can click on the "Back" button found in the top left corner of that page. A user can post a question by clicking on the "add a thread" icon, located at the top right of the page, a user can then also reply to a thread, "like" a thread, or just read through the discussion.

The discussion forum gives all ESO users the opportunity to discuss relevant topics in a real-time environment, and all users are encouraged to participate and communicate with colleagues and peers, and in the process help to make their own province's system more interactive and useful to users.

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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