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THE IMPACT OF EXTENSION SUITE ONLINE ON EXTENSION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Piet van Zyl

Any company creating software solutions, constantly needs to know whether their products are really making a difference in the lives of their users, and more so in the important fields of agriculture and food security. The impact that a system like Extension Suite Online has had since its inception in June 2010 is measured by studying user patterns and actual utilisation; by comparing information requisition and availability before and after ESO; and by interviewing users to determine to what extent ESO has influenced Extension results and service delivery.

Statistics regarding the utilisation of ESO tell the story of extensive use and application: In four years, the equivalent of almost 9,000 handbooks (The Farming handbook by Barry Smith) of data was downloaded from the system, while officials spent an accumulated 56 working years using the system!

Before ESO, new and established officers alike, struggled continuously to find relevant information and answers to farmer's problems; information that was often dated and not relevant to specific problems at hand; information that was inappropriate for the area and/or climate; or not covering the complete spectrum required. What frustrated extensioners and farmers alike was the time lapse between an expressed need for information and the eventual delivery of an answer, with obvious resulting costs implications (financial and otherwise). Extension Suite Online addressed the frustrations and needs of extension officers and farmers as it offered relevant, concise, accurate, complete, appropriate, updated and timeous information. All of a sudden extensionists could address and solve problems where it existed – right there on the farm, and in real time. In the course of four years a substantial number of officers started to rely on ESO as their primary source of agricultural information, while research showed that those officers who used the system did so substantially and

continuously. Interviews with the top users carried a recurring message of relieve, thankfulness and pride at being able to make a difference in the lives of the officers and farmers. The continuous theme has been that the relationship of trust between Extensionists and farmers had been restored.

"My relationship with the farmers that I serve has improved immensely. The farmer now has confidence in the information I supply to him and I know the information is correct and updated" - Soyisile Ntombela (Western Cape - Department of Agriculture)

"My relationship with clients and farmers has improved, Extension Suite Online has given me confidence in the information that I supply to the farmers" - Lesego Phakedi (Gauteng - Department of Agriculture and Rural Development)

Extension Suite Online has enhanced my relationship with farmers immensely. Due to the load of information that is available, I can help them quickly - Vukile Gaodwana (Eastern Cape - Department of Agriculture and Rural Development)

I have no words to explain the help that Extension Suite Online has provided to me - it is an excellent and very important tool - Mthobisi Jackson (Eastern Cape - Department of Agriculture and Rural Development)



Piet van Zyl

ESO WALLPAPERS

DOWNLOAD YOUR FREE
DESKTOP WALLPAPER TODAY!

Liven up your computer's desktop with an Extension Suite Online 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

Effective decision making tips

Decision making forms part of every Extension Officer's daily activities and each decision made has the power to alter the future of a client's production potential.

To make effective decisions the following should be taken into consideration.

- Identify the problem
- Set goals (Determine the desired outcome)
- Obtain data and relevant information
- Generate different courses of action (alternative solutions)
- Evaluate the different courses of action
- Select and implement the best option
- Conduct a follow-up evaluation

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 Mr Sifiso Mthabela (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and environmental affairs), who is the ESO Top National User for September 2014.



Mr Sifiso Mthabela

The Extension Suite Online top user fraternity was joined in September by a new member, Sifiso Mthabela from KwaZulu Natal Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs, with a rating of 9,003. Congratulations sir!

Sifiso works in the Nquthu municipal area in the UMzinyathi district as an agricultural advisor and has been with the department for the past 2 years. His immediate and district managers are Mr Phendukani Hlatshwayo and Mr Siegfried Hascke. Sifiso explained to us the dynamics of the different groups that he advises. His responsibilities include 6 community garden projects that he serves with technical advice, seeds, fertilisers and training in different crop enterprises.

He is also involved with food security projects, where he distributes seed scoops to ward 3 on a 3 to 6 month cycle during which he also performs a random follow-up on households to check on their progress. He further supplies 6 co-operatives operating on communal land, with technical advice and training for their maize and sugar bean enterprises.

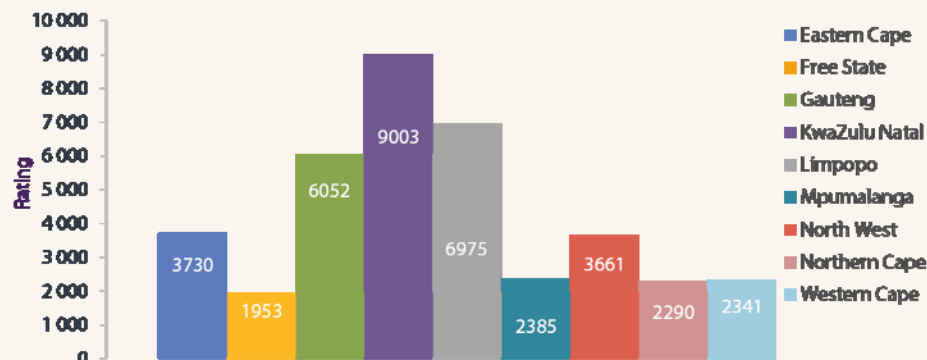
As an agricultural economist, Extension Suite Online has helped him with an overview of plant and poultry production and he also makes use of the economics section of Extension Suite Online to assist him in estimating potential yield and returns for farmers.

Sifiso finally commented that Extension Suite Online is an excellent tool because it combines all agricultural enterprises, even if he has done economics, he can still find information that he needs regarding plant production, chemicals and weed management, as well as marketing.

EXTENSION SUITE ONLINE UTILISATION: SEPTEMBER 2014

Extension Suite Online (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 ESO National Top User of the Month.

ESO PROVINCIAL TOP USER GRAPH



ESO PROVINCIAL TOP USERS

| PROVINCE | NAME |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Eastern Cape | Mzuthule Nobadina |
| Free State | Motsoane Mosiuoa |
| Gauteng | Maritz Maisela Mahlangu |
| KwaZulu Natal | Sifiso Mthabela |
| Limpopo | Ndamulelo Netshifhefhe |
| Mpumalanga | Lucas Shabangu |
| North West | Tlou Harrison Chokoe |
| Northern Cape | Ogodiseng Alfred |
| Western Cape | Tshegohatso Matlhoahela |

PEST TALK: FEATURED PEST

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

Scientific Name: *Sesamia calamistis*
Popular Name: Pink Stalk Borer

The Pink stalk borer lays eggs on either the lower leaf sheaths or on cobs. Young caterpillars burrow directly into the stem or cob. These insects are major pests in winter rainfall regions.



Pink Stalk Borer caterpillars and moth

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 TIPS:

Assist a colleague to register/activate an ESO account.

Thapedi Setshedi

A dam has no value unless the sluices are opened to share the goodness it has in abundance. The same really applies to Extension Suite Online: If the system just exists on the internet without all extension advisors in South Africa not using it to its full potential, it will remain "a dam with closed sluices".

The advantages held by South Africa's premier agricultural decision making tool needs to be spread to fellow colleagues by inviting and assisting them to register on ESO - as the saying goes, "sharing is caring."

Assisting colleagues to become ESO users, instantly enables them to access relevant and appropriate agricultural information. Five-time ESO National Top User Vonani Stella Mabunda says: "I would like to encourage my colleagues who are not yet registered on ESO to do so, as it is a serious program within our department. Everyone, especially new and inexperienced advisors should use ESO as "agricultural information food" to stay "fed" with the help of this technology in getting useful information even while learning and studying."

To assist a colleague with registration and activation, simply contact us at the Extension Suite Online Help Desk (support@esuite.co.za or 0860 376 376), and we will do the rest.

We owe it to our colleagues, farmers and the future of food security in our country to spread the good news. Let us make an effort to help fellow Extension Officers become ESO 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.



Editor:

Jeanne-Louise Bekker

Publishers:

Manstrat Agricultural Intelligence Solutions (Pty) Ltd.

Correspondence:

newsletter@esuite.co.za

Telephone:

+27 12 460 2499

