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technology for the farmer

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The John Deere 6M: The workhorse your farm needs

p 8

Farmers work together to live in harmony with cheetahs

The role SARO plays in the Zambia harvest season

Zambia breaks records with their largest maize harvest

Stucky Motors Group brings

FAW Trucks

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Remember **why** you farm

Dear ProAgriMedia readers,

When I first entered the agricultural industry three years ago, I honestly did not realise all that it entailed. Today, I still stand amazed by the tremendous impact that agriculture has not only in Africa, but worldwide.

When the ProAgri team attend agricultural days or expos one of the first questions I get is ... "And how was it?" But you can't always describe in words how amazing this industry is.

We all know that the latest technology can make your head spin. But the one thing that stands out the most is the pure passion of the farming community.

Whether you stop to chat with a small-scale chicken farmer or visit an international brand – the people who carry this industry have an unmatched love for their work.

Often we only hear about the countless challenges farmers face daily to remain sustainable and profitable. But we sometimes forget, however, why we do it and how exceptionally privileged we are to be part of this industry, and the unstoppable drive that pushes this industry forward.

During my time at ProAgri, I have met some of the most extraordinary people and seen places in Africa that the average person will never experience. I have learned from those who showed me the true meaning of perseverance, and met farmers who taught me the invaluable worth of a single drop of water.

Agriculture is different. It is passion that keeps the wheels turning. So, when you truly lose heart, I want to ask you to remember this: millions of people who have food to eat today thanks to your contribution.

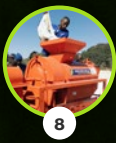
Here at ProAgri, it is a privilege for us to tell the stories of the people in our industry – because after all, farmers listen to farmers. As you read this, I want to invite you to share your story with us. Send me an email so that together we can remind your neighbour about the beautiful and hopeful side of our agriculture.

ProAgri regards!

Natasha Pretorius

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In an effort to expand the FAW footprint in South Africa, Stucky Motors Group has opened a customer-centred dealership in Kingsmead in KwaZulu-Natal. The dealership also introduces FAW's latest corporate identity to the market, creating a more contemporary customer environment and providing a physical representation of the brand's evolving retail presence. Read more about this in this month's issue.



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Stucky Motors Group brings FAW Trucks closer to KZN customers with new Kingsmead dealership

Article supplied

For businesses that depend on trucks, accessibility is about far more than finding a showroom. It means getting the right vehicle, the right advice, the right parts and the right support when business cannot afford to stand still.

That is the thinking behind Stucky Motors Group's latest expansion of its FAW Trucks footprint in KwaZulu-Natal, bringing the brand closer to Durban's business community with the opening of a new retail-focused dealership in Kingsmead.

The new dealership adds another important link to Stucky Motors' growing FAW network in the region. The Group opened its first KwaZulu-Natal FAW dealership in Newcastle in 2023, followed by Mbombela, Pietermaritzburg, Durban, Harrismith and Eswatini. The expansion to Kingsmead forms part of a broader FAW Trucks dealer network that has now grown to 40 outlets nationally, giving customers across the country greater access to vehicles, parts and after-sales support.

The move comes at an important time for KwaZulu-Natal, where Durban's port, logistics infrastructure, commercial activity and extensive road network make the province a critical hub for the movement of goods. For urban businesses, owner-drivers, SMEs and fleet operators, having commercial vehicle expertise and support within easy reach can make a tangible difference to the way they operate.

A dealership designed for the city

The new FAW Trucks Kingsmead dealership is significant for another reason: it is one of FAW Trucks Southern Africa's first dedicated retail-focused sites, developed specifically with the urban and SME customer in mind.

Located at 125 Prince Alfred Street, North Beach, Durban, directly opposite the Durban ICC, the dealership puts FAW Trucks in the heart of a busy commercial environment. Its highly visible location is designed to make the brand easier to access for customers who operate in and around the city – from small businesses and owner-drivers to established operators requiring reliable transport solutions for daily distribution.

The dealership also introduces FAW's latest corporate identity to the market, creating a more contemporary customer environment and providing a physical representation of the brand's evolving retail presence.



Stucky Motors Group is expanding the FAW footprint in KwaZulu-Natal with a new dealership.



Stucky Motors Group opened a new retail-focused dealership in Kingsmead, Durban.

But the focus goes beyond what customers see when they walk through the doors. Kingsmead is designed as a specialised retail outlet, and the facility is supported by Stucky Motors' established service and workshop network across KwaZulu-Natal, ensuring customers have access to the technical expertise, maintenance support and after-sales assistance needed to keep their businesses moving.

A truck for every kind of work

The dealership will stock FAW Trucks' complete Freight Carrier range up to the JK6 22.260FL, giving Durban's business community access to a broad selection of commercial vehicles suited to different operating requirements.

At the lighter end of the range, the FAW 4.110FL is suited to urban and last-mile delivery operations, making it particularly relevant to SMEs moving goods within the city. The FAW 6.130FL moves into light commercial applications, including municipal and service work, while the FAW 8.140FL is positioned for distribution and regional transport.

For more demanding logistics operations, the FAW 15.180FL provides a medium-duty solution, while the JK6 Freight Carrier range extends into higher-payload and fleet applications.



Stucky Motors Group's team in front of a few select FAW trucks.



Taking FAW Trucks to the market

The Kingsmead opening follows closely on Stucky Motors' participation in the Shongweni Motor Show, held in Hillcrest from 31 July to 2 August 2026. The event provided another opportunity to take FAW Trucks directly to the market, with the brand showcased in the "Heavy Lifters" category.

For Stucky Motors, the event was about more than putting trucks on display. It created an opportunity for enthusiasts, owner-drivers, SMEs and businesses operating across KwaZulu-Natal to engage directly with the FAW brand, explore its growing commercial vehicle range and connect with the people behind the products.

Together, the Shongweni Motor Show and Kingsmead dealership demonstrate a broader approach to customer engagement: taking the brand to where customers are, while ensuring permanent support infrastructure is nearby when they are ready to do business.

Growing with KwaZulu-Natal

Stucky Motors' expanding presence in KwaZulu-Natal reflects a long-term commitment to the region and its commercial vehicle customers. With 60 years of experience behind the Group, its growing FAW footprint gives businesses across the province greater access to local sales expertise, parts and after-sales support.

The journey from Pietermaritzburg and Harrismith to Newcastle and now Durban also reflects the market's changing needs. As businesses across KwaZulu-Natal continue to move goods between cities, industrial centres and the ports, proximity to dependable commercial vehicle support becomes increasingly important. For FAW Trucks, this is precisely where the strength of its authorised distributor network comes into play.

"A strong commercial vehicle brand is not built on vehicles alone. It is built around the customer and the support infrastructure that keeps those vehicles working," says Mr Xin Huang, COO of FAW Trucks Southern Africa.

"That is why expanding our presence in a market as important as KwaZulu-Natal matters. Stucky Motors understands this market, understands the businesses that operate in it and is investing in putting FAW Trucks closer to those customers.

"From the Shongweni Motor Show to the new Kingsmead dealership, this is about making it easier for customers to access the vehicles, people, parts and support they need to keep their businesses moving."

The latest expansion strengthens Stucky Motors' position within FAW Trucks' authorised distributor network while giving Durban's commercial vehicle market a more accessible point of contact.

For customers, the message is straightforward: FAW Trucks is not simply expanding its footprint in KwaZulu-Natal – it is moving closer to the businesses that depend on it.

To learn more, visit the FAW website at <https://www.faw.co.za/>

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Put the John Deere 6M to work today:

Make your first payment in 2028



Every season brings a new opportunity. An opportunity to plant with confidence, work more efficiently and move your farming business forward. But making the right investment at the right time often depends on finding a financing solution that works as hard as your equipment.

That is why John Deere Financial has introduced a financing offer designed with farmers in mind. You can put a new John Deere 6M to work today, and your first annual payment is only due in 2028. It means you can invest in your operation now and allow your tractor to start delivering value long before your first repayment.

Built to keep you moving

Every farm is different, but one thing remains the same: when conditions are right, every hour counts. Whether you are preparing land, planting, spraying, baling or transporting loads, you need equipment you can rely on from sunrise to sunset.

The John Deere 6M Series has been engineered for exactly that. Combining dependable performance, operator comfort and the versatility to handle a wide range of daily tasks, the 6M is built to meet the demands of modern farming.

Available in models ranging from 110 to 195 hp (81 to 143 kW), the 6M delivers the power needed for diverse farming operations. With hydraulic flow of up to 114 litres per minute, rear lift capacity of up to 8 500 kg, available Precision Agriculture technology and optional front loader compatibility, it is designed to tackle demanding jobs with confidence and efficiency.

It is a tractor built not only for today's workload, but for the seasons ahead.

Financing that fits the way farmers work

Agriculture does not follow a monthly calendar. Rainfall, harvests, markets and seasons determine cash flow. That is why financing should work with your business, not against it.

With this John Deere Financial offer, qualifying customers can put a new 6M to work immediately while delaying their first annual payment until 2028. The package includes four annual repayments over five years, helping repayments align more naturally with the realities of farming. Customers can also benefit from a VAT refund after four months, while deposits remain subject to credit approval.

This is a financing solution designed to give your investment time to start working for you before repayments begin.

Invest in the season ahead

A tractor is more than yet another machine on the farm. It is a partner through every season, helping you make the most of every opportunity the land presents. The right tractor increases productivity, supports your operation when timing matters most and gives you the confidence to take on the work ahead.

The John Deere 6M has earned a stellar reputation due to its dependable performance across a wide range of farming applications. Paired with financing that recognises the realities of agriculture, it gives producers the confidence to invest today while planning for tomorrow.

Make your move today

Opportunities do not wait, and neither should your business. If you have been considering upgrading your fleet or adding another reliable machine to your operation, now is the time to make it happen.

The John Deere 6M promotion is available until 9 October 2026, subject to terms and conditions. Speak to your nearest John Deere Financial Financing Specialist to discuss the solution best suited to your operation and start your application.

Put the John Deere 6M to work today. Give your business the power to perform now, with the flexibility to pay later.

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Reducing losses, raising yields:

SARO's role in Zambia's harvest season

by Misheck Mukupa, Digital Marketing Officer at SARO

As Zambia enters the peak harvesting season, efficient post-harvest handling has become increasingly important for farmers seeking to reduce losses, improve productivity, and maximise profits. Responding to this growing need, SARO Agro Industrial Ltd continues to provide practical and reliable mechanisation solutions through its range of multi-crop threshers and maize shellers designed for small-scale, emergent, and commercial farmers.

With over 14 branches across Zambia and a strong reputation in agricultural mechanisation, SARO remains committed to helping farmers transition from labour-intensive harvesting methods to faster, more efficient processing systems.

Maize shellers for faster harvest processing

Traditionally, shelling maize manually can be time-consuming, physically demanding, and often results in grain losses and reduced product quality. SARO's range of maize shellers offers farmers a solution that significantly improves harvesting efficiency while saving both time and labour costs.

Among the solutions available is the Mini Maize Sheller Model YF-60E, designed specifically for small-scale farmers. Compact and easy to operate, the machine efficiently removes maize kernels from cobs while improving processing speed and reducing grain damage. Powered either by a 154F petrol engine or a 1,3HP electric motor, the sheller delivers a processing capacity of up to 600 kilograms per hour, making it ideal for farmers

seeking affordable mechanisation during harvest season.

For larger farming operations, SARO supplies the Maize Sheller Model 5TY-900, engineered to streamline maize processing with precision and speed. Powered by a 13.2HP diesel engine, the machine has a processing capacity of 2 000 kilograms per hour, providing farmers with a faster and more efficient shelling solution for high-volume production.

Multi-crop threshers for diverse farming operations

Recognising the increasing need for versatile equipment, SARO also supplies the highly efficient Amar Multi-Crop Thresher Tractor-Powered Model, designed to handle multiple crops including maize, soybean, wheat, rice, sorghum, pulses, chickpeas, kidney beans, oats, lentils and barley.

Powered by a minimum 35HP tractor, the machine delivers maize output capacities ranging between 3 000 to 4 000 kilograms per hour, while soybean processing ranges from 300 to 500 kilograms per hour. Its multi-crop capability makes it a valuable investment for diversified farming operations looking to improve efficiency across several crop types.

For farmers without tractor access, SARO offers the Amar Multi-Crop Thresher Engine Model, coupled with a 10HP diesel engine. The machine processes maize at a capacity of approximately 1 500 kilograms per hour, while soybean output ranges between 150 to 300 kilograms per hour.



The machine provides an efficient and flexible threshing solution suitable for medium-scale farming operations.

Maize Dehusker Cum Sheller for high-capacity operations

Another standout solution in SARO's harvesting equipment range is the Amar Maize Dehusker Cum Sheller (Tsunami Tractor Model), specifically designed to simplify the shelling process by eliminating the need to manually remove maize husks before threshing.

Equipped with a cleaning fan for cleaner grain output, the machine delivers an impressive output capacity of 4 500 to 5 000 kilograms per hour and operates using a 540 PTO RPM tractor system. The machine significantly reduces labour requirements while increasing harvesting efficiency during peak season.



Specialised seed processing solutions

SARO also supplies the Amar Maize Sheller Tractor Model, specifically designed for maize seed processing. Unlike conventional shellers, the machine is engineered to ensure gentle shelling that preserves seed quality and germination potential.

The machine delivers an output capacity of 1 200 to 1 500 kilograms per hour and operates using a 20–40HP tractor with 540 RPM PTO power. Featuring a 36-inch drum size, the sheller is ideal for seed producers and certified seed multiplication programmes.

Supporting Zambia's agricultural growth

Mechanisation is not only about increasing speed but also about reducing post-harvest losses, improving grain quality, and strengthening food security. As climate pressures and rising production costs continue to affect the agricultural sector, efficient harvesting and post-harvest equipment are becoming essential tools for modern farming operations. SARO's continued investment in agricultural machinery and farmer support services reflects its broader mission of empowering Zambia's agricultural sector through practical, durable, and accessible mechanisation solutions.

Beyond machinery supply, SARO continues to distinguish itself through strong after-sales service, technical support, and the availability of genuine spare parts across its nationwide branch network.

This harvest season, SARO's threshers and shellers are helping farmers across Zambia process crops faster, reduce losses, and move efficiently from field to market, reinforcing the company's long-standing commitment to quality and service.

Visit the SARO website at
www.sarozambia.com

to learn more about
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Amar Maize Sheller Tractor Model being used at a farm in Mkushi.



Mini Maize Sheller.





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More than just feed
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by Given Minziwe Majula,
Financial Manager, Tiger Animal Feeds and Tiger Chicks

Tiger Animal Feeds and Tiger Chicks showcase excellence in execution at 20 Keys Conference

Astral Foods' Zambian operations, Tiger Animal Feeds and Tiger Chicks, were represented at the recent Astral 20 Keys Conference, held under the theme "Excellence in Execution".

The conference brought together teams from across the Group to share their Continuous Improvement journeys, exchange ideas and celebrate initiatives that are delivering measurable improvements across the business.

For the Zambian operations, it was an opportunity to share a story shaped not only by investment in technology and systems, but by our people, our culture and our commitment to continuously finding better ways of working.

Unlocking the engines of excellence

Under the presentation "Unlocking the Engines of Excellence", the Zambia team shared how the 20 Keys principles have supported the transformation of Tiger Animal Feeds and Tiger Chicks through three interconnected areas: People, Process and Technology.

The journey has included the commissioning of Tiger Animal Feeds' automated feed mill in 2024, developing the skills required for a changing operating environment, standardising processes and work instructions, improving inventory visibility and accountability, and eliminating waste through digitalisation. The presentation also highlighted how Continuous Improvement has extended beyond the production floor. Teams across finance, production and other functions have worked together to improve processes, strengthen controls and create greater alignment across the business.

This journey has reinforced a simple but important lesson for the Zambia team: Technology creates opportunity. People deliver excellence.

The conference was particularly meaningful as Tiger Animal Feeds celebrates 30 years in Zambia, marking three decades of growth, investment and contribution to Zambia's agricultural sector. Tiger Chicks is also approaching its own 20-year milestone in the coming years.

Tiger Chicks recognised for excellence in cost improvement initiative

A highlight of the conference was the recognition of Tiger Chicks with the award for Best Cost Improvement Initiative. The winning initiative focused on improving production performance across the breeder and hatchery operation.

The Tiger Chicks team analysed the factors limiting performance and identified bottlenecks across people, methods, machinery and materials. This allowed the team to implement targeted operational improvements aimed at strengthening breeder performance, fertility and hatchability while reducing egg rejects. The results were significant.

Cumulative chicks per hen housed improved by approximately 57%, while egg rejects reduced by 55%. Fertility improved by 4.4 percentage points and hatchability by 5.9 percentage points.

The team continues to identify opportunities for further improvement, demonstrating one of the principles at the heart of the 20 Keys journey: Continuous Improvement is an ongoing process of understanding performance gaps, identifying root causes and finding better ways of working.

The award represents more than the results achieved. It recognises the commitment of the Tiger Chicks team, whose collaboration, problem-solving skills and willingness to challenge existing ways of working translated improvement opportunities into measurable results.

Excellence driven by people

The recognition of Tiger Chicks, together with the opportunity to share Zambia's broader transformation journey, made the conference a special occasion for Astral Foods' Zambian operations.

It also provided an opportunity to share more of the Zambian experience and culture with colleagues from across the Group and demonstrate how our people have embraced the 20 Keys principles to drive change within our businesses.

As Tiger Animal Feeds celebrates 30 years in Zambia and Tiger Chicks

moves towards its own 20-year milestone, the focus remains firmly on developing our people, strengthening our processes, embracing technology and continuously raising the standard. For Astral Foods' Zambian operations, Excellence in Execution is not about one major project or one moment of success. It is about our people making better decisions, challenging the way we work and delivering small improvements every day.

Technology creates opportunity. People deliver excellence.



Given Minziwe Majula, Financial Manager at Tiger Animal Feeds and Tiger Chicks.

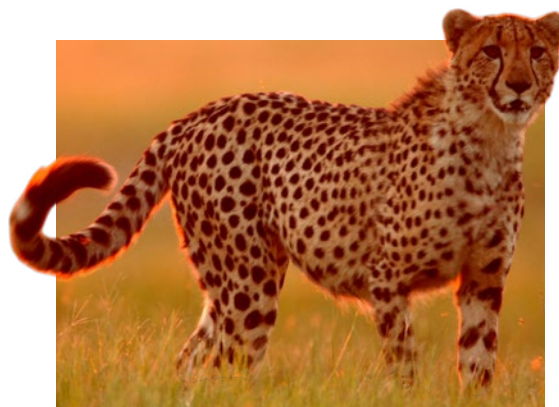


For more information about the conference and Tiger Chicks' award, please contact Given Minziwe Majula at (+260)96-677-1229 or send an email to Given.Majula@Tigerfeeds.com.zm

Cheetah Conservation Botswana

paves the way for harmony between livestock farmers and critically endangered spotted cats

by Martie Bester



For Cheetah Conservation Botswana (CCB), protecting the cheetah begins not in a fenced reserve, but on the farms where people and predators share the same landscape.

This extraordinary organisation aims to preserve the nation's cheetah population through scientific research, community outreach, and environmental education by working with rural communities to promote coexistence with Botswana's rich diversity of carnivore species.

"Founded in 2004 by Rebecca Klein, Ann-Marie Compton and Dr Kyle Good, CCB has been working alongside the Botswana Government since its inception, helping to facilitate coexistence between rural communities and carnivore species," comments Jane Horgan, researcher, Farming for Conservation (FFC) supervisor and PhD candidate at CCB.

"With a focus on empowering locals to mitigate human-wildlife conflicts and a passion for practical and effective programmes, CCB has been able to help thousands of Batswana live peacefully with wildlife," Horgan says.

CCB is headquartered in Botswana's capital, Gaborone, and operates two field camps in the wildlife-rich Ghanzi District, at Bere and Ghanzi. The field camps house the organisation's various departments, whose teams work directly with communities across Botswana's western Kalahari.

The FFC and Human-Wildlife Coexistence (HWC) departments translate findings from the Scientific Research department's work into practical interventions that benefit farming communities, such as developing conservation-friendly husbandry practices, rangeland management, horseback patrols, and training and providing livestock guarding dogs (LDGs) as non-lethal carnivore deterrents, says Horgan.

"Through mobile and resident farmers' workshops, the FFC department facilitates peer-to-peer learning platforms to strengthen collective resilience.

"The Communities for Conservation (C4C) department provides support for livelihood diversification initiatives, including early childhood development education, veld product harvesting and trade and craft production. This department enables community members to build security beyond livestock- and wildlife-based economies."

Alarming decline in cheetah numbers

"Botswana sits at the centre of the world's largest connected cheetah population, the one that spans Southern Africa from Angola and Namibia to Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique," says Horgan. "Within Botswana and Namibia alone, we hold half of the world's cheetahs.

"At least that was the case until recently. In June, experts from Southern Africa submitted new evidence showing a >50% decline in cheetah numbers in Southern Africa over the last 15 years. Botswana's estimate has fallen to under 1 000 individuals for the first time since records began."

Horgan says this unprecedented decline has prompted calls to uplist the Southern African subspecies of cheetah to Endangered for the first time. It is currently listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

"Sadly, this trend seems to be mirrored in other countries in East and northern Africa as well, though we are awaiting official figures from the rest of their African range," comments Horgan, highlighting the concern about these dwindling numbers.

The drivers of these declines vary from place to place. However, they are generally a combination of human-wildlife conflict (HWC), habitat loss caused by human settlement and overgrazing, habitat fragmentation due to roads and fences, declines in prey species (largely as a result of poaching and exacerbated by climate change), and the illegal wildlife trade. The latter is more prevalent in East Africa, but also occurs in Southern Africa, primarily involving the illegal pet trade, says Horgan.



Focused research ... and a national cheetah census

"In light of these recent findings, CCB is focusing our research efforts on uncovering what could be causing the declines in Botswana. Several local and international post-graduate students are currently investigating prey declines, competing carnivore populations and behaviours, conflict levels and the impacts of roads and fences on cheetahs in Botswana," emphasises Horgan.

She says this work is continuing alongside intensified efforts to monitor cheetah populations more regularly across the country. CCB is carrying out this work in collaboration with the Botswana Government's Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) and other research NGOs in Botswana.

"We need cheaper and easier ways to count cheetahs, and that's something we are currently investigating. Once we can solidify the most effective method to measure cheetah densities, we are hoping to work with DWNP to initiate a national cheetah census, which would be run every three to five years."

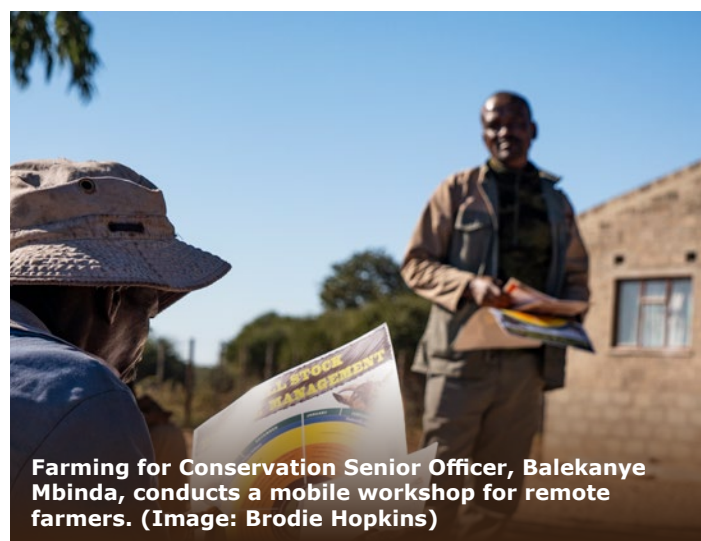
This would allow the team to monitor the health of cheetah populations, helping to determine whether particular interventions are successfully reversing declines and identifying where additional resources need to be mobilised for conservation efforts.

"At present, we are seeing declines in conflict levels with cheetahs where we carry out our initiatives, which is encouraging," says Horgan. "We are seeing more farmers incorporating sustainable farming practices, including predator-friendly farm management, and there is a huge uptake of the use of livestock guarding dogs (LGDs).

"But our resources are limited, and we need to find ways in which to scale up our interventions to help across more areas."



Patrollers take stock of returned cattle. (Image: Brodie Hopkins)



Farming for Conservation Senior Officer, Balekanye Mbinda, conducts a mobile workshop for remote farmers. (Image: Brodie Hopkins)

Protecting herds, preserving wildlife

Livelihoods are closely tied to conflict because when people are more successful and financially secure, they are better able to absorb the loss of one or two livestock without resorting to extreme measures, such as lethal control, says Horgan.

"When someone is struggling financially, they are more likely to respond with lethal action after only one loss. That is why CCB tends to see spikes in conflict when there are climate shocks or issues in the beef market, such as foot-and-mouth disease.

"At CCB, we are aware that cheetahs are not the priority for many farmers, so there's no point in us walking into a farm and just asking farmers not to shoot cheetahs. Where is the incentive?

"But at the end of the day, we really want the same thing: we want cheetahs not to kill livestock because then the farmers won't feel the need to go out and shoot the cheetahs (or other carnivores). So we work together with the farmers to reduce their livestock's vulnerability to predation."

According to Horgan, livestock are more likely to be killed by carnivores if they are weak, injured, sick, small (i.e. newborn calves), or wandering by themselves far from the rest of the herd or far from the homestead. Livestock may also be particularly vulnerable at night, when nocturnal predators such as lions and leopards are active.

"We use these vulnerabilities to drive the methods we use to reduce livestock vulnerability. For example, if livestock are more likely to be predated on when they are sick, how can we help farmers improve their herd health?

"We do training on livestock diseases, how to identify them and how to vaccinate their animals, and we develop and print an easy-to-understand vaccination calendar that we distribute to farmers, and we circulate articles in local farmers' magazines about how to prevent disease in your livestock."

Similarly, weak animals are more vulnerable, and they can become weak if they are malnourished, so the team focuses on "improved grazing, running training on how to make your own nutrient blocks and supplement feeds and how resting your grazing can help improve the sustainability of your grazing lands".

All these factors, such as herd health, improved grazing and reducing livestock vulnerability, mean you have healthier animals that are more likely to reproduce and are more likely to be fatter and healthier when it comes to slaughtering, says Horgan.

"Not to mention the increased herd numbers because you are no longer losing animals to carnivores. All in all, the benefits from predator-friendly farming far outweigh the costs."

For more information and/or enquiries, send an email to info@cheetahconservationbotswana.org or Connie Modise, Farming for Conservation Coordinator, at cmodise@cheetahconservationbotswana.org. Additionally, follow CCB on Facebook and Instagram. *This is part one of a three-article series on the invaluable work of Cheetah Conservation Botswana.*

Drones

in African agriculture today:

Where the rotors are turning

by Martie Bester

From citrus orchards in the Western Cape to smallholder maize fields further north, agricultural drones are moving from novelty to necessity across Africa. But where are they flying, what are they doing, and how are the continent's unique farming conditions shaping the technology in ways that South African growers rarely have to consider?

Agricultural drone survey.
(Image: Monique Heydenrych)

Where drones are earning their keep

Ask 10 people what an agricultural drone does and most will say 'spraying', "says Ken Treloar, a worldwide expert in the intersection of plant science, farm management and technology. "That is true, but it is only the most visible and possibly the most popular answer right now."

He says across Africa, drones are doing at least five distinct jobs, often on the same farm:

- **Crop scouting and health mapping:** Flying multispectral or RGB sensors over a field or orchard to flag stress before it is visible from the ground.
- **Precision spraying:** Applying crop protection products or foliar nutrition in tighter, more targeted passes than a boom sprayer or knapsack allows.
- **Tree and plant census work:** Counting stands in an orchard or block, useful anywhere establishment records are patchy (which is more common than most people admit).
- **Livestock and land monitoring:** Checking fence lines, water points and herd movement across large, often communal, grazing areas.
- **Yield estimation and harvest planning:** Giving pack-houses and buyers an earlier, more accurate read on what is coming.

South African growers, particularly in perennial crops such as table grapes, citrus and avocados, have led the way in drone-based scouting and crop health mapping. Across much of the rest of Africa, by contrast, spraying and livestock census work tend to dominate, reflecting fundamentally different farm structures and production realities rather than a weaker appetite for technology.

Productivity gains, and where they come from

"The productivity case for drones is not really about the drone," Ken says. "It's about the decision the data allows a farmer to make earlier or more precisely than before.

"A block that would have been scouted on foot once a fortnight can be flown weekly. A disease outbreak that would have been spotted once it reached a significant portion of the block is caught while it's still a handful of trees. Inputs that would have gone down uniformly across a field can instead be applied where they are actually needed."

According to Ken, that translates into three broad gains wherever it is done properly.



Image: Josh Ogden

**Labour use is optimised:**

Redirected from routine walking and scouting to targeted inspections and actual problem solving.

**Input savings:**

Less water, less chemical, less fertiliser wasted on ground that did not need it.

**Faster response times**

between a problem appearing and a farmer acting on it.

"None of this is unique to Africa," he adds. "What is unique is the scale at which some of these gains matter. On a small-holder plot of one or two hectares, a 15% saving is a bigger absolute number at scale, while for a smallholder that same percentage matters just as much because it's coming off a much thinner margin."

"Both ends of the spectrum benefit, just differently, rather than implying one benefits more than the other."

Conditions South Africa does not fully prepare you for

Ken has written before about macadamia orchards and citrus blocks, where the infrastructure, such as power, connectivity, formal land tenure, established supply chains, is largely a given. "Travel further into the continent and several of those assumptions fall away, and the technology has had to adapt accordingly."



Precision spraying. (Source: stockcake.com)

Land fragmentation

Across much of Africa, farming is dominated by smallholder plots, often just a few hectares or less, where land tenure can be far less secure or clearly defined than it is for South Africa's commercial farmers, says Ken.

"A drone that needs a large, clearly defined block to justify its cost struggles here. What works instead is a service model, an operator flying multiple small farms in a single day, aggregating data or spray runs across a community rather than each farmer owning a machine."

Power and connectivity

"Charging a battery, downloading flight data, running analysis software, all of it assumes reliable electricity and a data connection that many rural areas simply do not have," Ken emphasises.

He highlights that across Africa, the drone platforms gaining traction are those built for the realities on the ground: working offline, syncing when a connection becomes available, and drawing power from the sun where the grid does not reach.

Crop mix

It is easy to overlook this aspect, he says. "South African drone use has grown up around high-value export perennials, where the cost of a missed disease outbreak or an underperforming block is high and easy to justify against."

"Much of the rest of the continent is growing staple crops, maize, cassava, sorghum, at a different price point entirely, alongside valuable but different export crops like cotton, tea and coffee."

According to Ken, none of this means the technology is any less effective further north. Instead, it has evolved to be more flexible, more service-based and far more forgiving of imperfect infrastructure than the systems first developed for commercial farms in the Western Cape, Limpopo and Mpumalanga.

Regulation is catching up, unevenly

One more factor shapes where drones can fly, and it has little to do with farming: the rules governing airspace.

Ken says South Africa's regulatory framework for commercial drone operations, while not without its frustrations, is relatively mature and well understood by the industry that has developed around it. Cross a border, however, and that certainty can quickly disappear.

"Import duties on drone hardware vary sharply from country to country and can add a meaningful percentage to the landed cost of a platform before it has flown a single hectare."

"Licensing regimes range from straightforward to genuinely difficult to navigate, and a company or operator hoping to work across two or three countries can find themselves managing two or three entirely separate approval processes, each with its own timeline and paperwork.

"This matters for the pace of adoption in a way that rarely makes it into the more optimistic coverage of 'drones in Africa'. The technology itself is largely ready," he says.

In many countries, the regulatory frameworks are still catching up, according to Ken. "More than any technical limitation, it is this gap that can prevent promising technology from reaching the farmers who could benefit from it.

"That is the landscape," adds Ken. "Where drones are flying, what they are doing, and why the conditions shaping their use differ from farm to farm and country to country.

"What this does not yet answer is the more interesting question: how farmers themselves have responded to all of this, what has genuinely impressed me on my own travels and where the real barriers still sit."



Drones monitoring cattle. (Source: stockcake.com)

Read the second part of this article on drones in African agriculture today in ProAgri's October 2026 issue.



ZAMBIA

has its *largest maize harvest* on record

by Wandile Sihlobo

Zambia has had an exceptional maize production season. The country is expecting its largest maize crop on record, which will provide an essential cushion ahead of the challenging production season in the upcoming 2026-27 summer.

Over the past few months, I have seen various optimistic statements from the country's Ministry of Agriculture. But the picture became clearer when the U.S. Department of Agriculture released its World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates report, prominently featuring Zambia, with 2025-26 maize production estimated at 4,9 million tonnes.

This expected ample maize harvest is up 28% from the previous season and is the largest maize harvest on record. The ample harvest is due to an expansion in the area planted to 2,0 million hectares, up 17% from the 2024-25 season, and higher yields, driven by favourable La Niña rains.

This large maize harvest far exceeds Zambia's annual maize needs of 2,8 million tonnes. The country will have around 2,0 million tonnes of maize surplus for export or to boost carryover stocks into next year.

Importantly, Zambia's record maize harvest will help ensure that the country has a better start to the likely drier season in 2026-27, without already facing a maize supply deficit.

From a regional perspective, Zambia and South Africa will likely be the key countries to support those with large deficits.

South Africa also had a record maize harvest in the 2025-26 season, estimated at 17,4 million tonnes, against the annual needs of 12,0 million tonnes. The excellent rains and decent plantings were also the key catalyst behind South Africa's large maize harvest.



Zambia will be a key supplier of maize to Zimbabwe and other Southern African countries in need. This will build on the supplies that we already see from South Africa to the Southern African region.

WORLD CLASS

VETERINARY ACADEMIC HOSPITAL

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA IS COMPLETING ITS FINAL PHASE

by Martie Bester

The University of Namibia's (UNAM) Veterinary Academic Hospital (VAH) represents the transition from Namibia largely relying on established government and private veterinary services to training veterinarians locally and providing a dedicated university-based clinical teaching facility.

"The VAH was established in terms of the Veterinary and Veterinary Paraprofessions Act of 2013, which stipulates that a university that offers a veterinary degree must have a fully equipped and registered academic hospital attached to it," says Dr Anna Marais, Associate Dean of the VAH.

"It is also an essential part of the clinical training of our students, who must meet a specified caseload in all species. It is unique because it is the first of its type in Namibia."

Completion of valuable resource now in its final stage

Now, UNAM is seeking about N\$30 million to complete the final phase of the hospital.

"The small animal hospital was built in phases," says Marais. "The final phase will be the completion of the surgical section comprising theatres (student theatre, orthopaedic theatre, soft tissue theatre), wards, a laundry room, a sterilising room, as well as a hydrotherapy and an intensive care unit), which will make the small animal hospital complete."

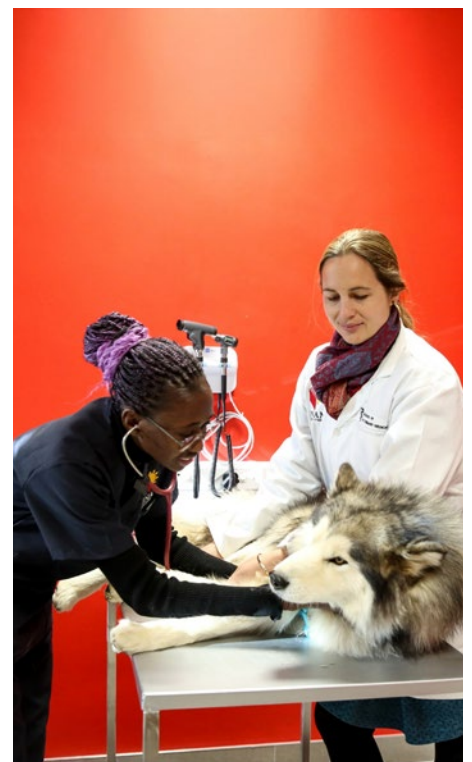
She adds that the auditorium will be used for lectures and continuing professional development initiatives for both UNAM staff and other veterinary professionals in Namibia.

Marais says that UNAM has two registered hospitals, one for large animals on Neudamm farm and one on the main campus.

At the VAH's Open Day on 7 August, the small animal hospital and the recent addition of a medical wing comprising an isolation ward and a medical ward with associated procedure rooms were showcased.

"We are immensely proud of this unit because it offers state-of-the-art services and facilities," says Marais.

She emphasises that funding veterinary medicine education is a critical investment because it is also an investment in public health, as it promotes zoonotic disease control. "Veterinary professionals also act as the first line of defence in pandemic prevention," Marais adds.



The hospital has five consultation rooms where senior students consult patients under the supervision of registered veterinarians.

Indispensable nature of veterinary service and care

Speaking at the Open Day, Finance Minister Ericah Shafudah said that investing in veterinary medicine extends beyond education. She described it as a strategic investment in public health, agriculture and the economy.

Echoing Marais' sentiments, she added that veterinarians play a vital role in controlling zoonotic diseases, preventing pandemics, ensuring food safety and protecting Namibia's livestock export industry,

"Their knowledge and decisions will affect farmers, families, businesses and industries far beyond the boundaries of this campus," the Minister stated.

"We are proud of the progress that has been made thus far.

"However, an institution of this nature is developed over time. Its infrastructure must grow, its technology must remain current, and its teaching, research and clinical capacities must continue to grow and improve," Shafudah said.



The student theatre has five surgical tables and anaesthetic machines, where students gain proficiency in surgery and anaesthesiology.



The team of Dr Anna Marais (centre), the hospital pharmacist, and some of the UNAM veterinary postgraduate students.

Funding will be put to excellent use

Marais says the hospital has been funded by the African Development Bank and the Namibian Government and that funding will continue to the university as part of its allocation from the government. Private companies and partner institutions also regularly donate equipment items.

"The university will go out to tender this year still, and we expect completion within the next two years," says Marais. "We base our design on the expectations of the Namibian Veterinary Council and follow guidelines of the World Organisation of Animal Health.

"The university is determined to provide a state-of-the-art facility which can be used not only by Namibia but by other partner universities in the SADC region for clinical training."

Students are equipped with an unsurpassed skill set

According to Marais, students receive practical training first on models in a clinical skills laboratory before working on live animals. The laboratory allows students to practise procedures such as taking blood samples, listening to heart and lung sounds and performing surgical techniques.

"We have models for students to practice procedures such as venipuncture, intubation, catheterisation and auscultation. Namibian legislation requires additional training and competence for vets working with wildlife requiring the use of highly scheduled drugs.

"Our Veterinary Council has accredited the wildlife clinical studies modules as compliant with these requirements, and therefore our graduates are eligible for registration with this additional professional category. To this end, our wildlife training covers chemical immobilisation and physical capture of game during field attachments.

Marais says the degree is accredited by Botswana, South Africa and Namibia. At a recent audit conducted by the Namibian Veterinary Council and the South African Veterinary Council, the skills laboratory was hailed as an accolade.

"UNAM is very proud of and supportive of the hospital. The top management and the team of clinicians, nurses and paraprofessionals working at the hospital are dedicated and competent. Without this teamwork, we would not have been able to achieve what we have," says Marais.

The hospital has recorded 14 439 patients, including more than 10 000 dogs, approximately 1 300 cats, as well as birds, cattle, horses, sheep and pigs.

For more information and funding opportunities, please contact Dr Anna Marais at amarais@unam.na or (+264)81-160-6647.

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