ProAgri AFRICA

technology for the farmer

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p 3

Tiger Animal Feeds

Managing hot temperatures in open-sided poultry houses

Does your next meal include insects?

Keeping our eye on Africa

What you need to know about El Niño

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Farming Through Uncertain Times

Dear Reader,

While 2026 is moving towards its end, it seems that challenges in African agriculture continue to put pressure on food security across the continent.

Factors like El Niño conditions are in the back of every farmer's mind at the moment. It has even been reported that due to El Niño conditions, Zimbabwe faces a grain deficit in 2026/27. The good news, however, is that Zimbabwe's sugarcane yield targets are rising by 35%.

El Niño brings warmer and drier weather, as well as unpredictable conditions, leading to water scarcity and crop scorching in certain areas, and torrential rains and floods in others. These conditions make it difficult to properly plan for the crop.

In Namibia, the fight against foot-and-mouth disease continues, and already 127 cases have been reported on 15 farms.

But this does not mean that farmers are entirely facing bad news. As we all know, farmers are resilient, strong, and steadfast. If the past has taught us anything, it is that the farming community stands together to weather any storm or drought.

Farming also does not stop because things get difficult, and new and innovative developments are still taking place all over Africa. In this month's issue, you can take a look at what is happening in farming across Africa with our Africa focus. We also take a closer look at El Niño and what you can expect.

We continue our Rooibos and biofuel series and teach you how to identify cattle. We are also introducing a new series where you will learn about the nutritional value of insects, their benefits, and how you can incorporate them into your next dish.

We hope you enjoy this edition, and our ProAgriMedia thoughts and prayers are with every African farmer.

Greetings,
Natasha Pretorius

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On the cover

Philagro is committed to supporting African farmers with innovative crop protection solutions that boost yields and safeguard livelihoods. The company's expertise helps farmers to achieve healthier, more resilient crops across the continent.



ProAgri

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PHILAGRO

Philagro's winning formula for African agriculture

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As one of the leaders in the drive to transform agriculture in Africa for the greater good, Philagro's philosophy is simple but extremely effective. The company's singular vision and commitment is to add real value to agriculture in Africa by supplying quality agricultural products and providing exceptional service, hence the slogan:

Products that work, from people who care.



Despite the challenges faced today, prospects for Africa's agricultural sector are remarkably positive. According to the "Agriculture Outlook 2018-27" report from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the sector will undergo robust growth, with crop production in sub-Saharan Africa projected to rise 30% over the next decade. Moreover, greater access to innovative technology is expected to support the development and application of smart farming techniques.

A fine example of this technology is Philagro's comprehensive range of proven products that are now available to meet the needs of farmers throughout the region of Southern Africa. Commercial and smallholder farmers now have access to total crop solutions with state-of-the-art herbicides, pesticides, fungicides, miticides, plant growth regulators and animal nutrition. Most of the bio-rationals and animal nutrition distributed by Philagro are very well known in the agricultural world and have earned admiration and respect in the tough world of agricultural remedies.

Philagro has acquired a wide range of registrations against many of the most stubborn pests on important vegetable crops, like the modern active ingredient pyridalyl in SumiPleo®. This product has some outstanding beneficial features that distinguish it from old-fashioned hard chemicals prone to pest resistance.

SumiPleo® is a "blue band" product and is relatively safe regarding mammals and birds, and highly specific to the control of certain insect pests such as *Lepidoptera*, potato tuber moth larvae, diamondback moth larvae, African bollworm larvae, tomato leaf miners and fall armyworm larvae.

It is relatively safe against insect pest enemies such as parasitic and predatory wasps, as well as other beneficial organisms such as earthworms and bees.

In potatoes, SumiPleo® controls potato moth, *Tuta absoluta*, and suppresses the flying leaf miners *Lyriomyza trifolii* and *L. huidobrensis*. In tomatoes, SumiPleo® controls African bollworm, *Tuta absoluta* and suppresses the flying leaf miners *Lyriomyza trifolii* and *L. huidobrensis*, as well as the tomato semi-looper (*Chrysodeixes acuta*).

In various cabbage crops, SumiPleo® as well as FlorBac® effectively control diamondback moth larvae. In lettuce, African bollworm is kept in check with Sumipleo®. In sweetcorn, SumiPleo® controls the dreaded fall army worm (*Spodoptera frugiperda*).

For a more effective environmental approach and intelligent resistance management, SumiPleo® is alternated with Philagro's organic *Bacillus (Bt)* products like DiPel®DF on *Lepidoptera* larvae in most vegetable crops and FlorBac®WG in cabbage crops, specifically against diamondback moth larvae.

SumiPleo® and Bt products boast short withholding periods in vegetable crops, which make them ideal for positioning in a control window shortly before harvesting.

Ultra-reliable Sumimax® is renowned for its ability to control annual broadleaf weeds in groundnuts, soya beans, deciduous fruit, citrus, vines and forestry, and is one of an impressive array of trusted herbicides from Philagro.

Sumi-Alpha 200 EW® contains the highly active synthetic pyrethroid esfenvalerate, which is a contact insecticide for the control of cutworms on all crops, bollworm on cotton, sunflower, maize and sorghum and stalk borers in maize.

Another well-known example of Philagro's comprehensive range is Sumisclex®, a translaminar systemic organic fungicide for the control of diseases on green beans, soya beans, dry beans, peas and onions.



For more information about Philagro products in your area or to find your nearest agent, contact Bennie Buys at (+27) 82-809-5447 or email him at bennie.buys@philagro.co.za.

- *SumiPleo® (Reg.no. L8377, Act 36 / 1947) contains, Pyridalyl dichloropropene-derivative, Caution. (Sumitomo Chemical Company, Japan).*
- *DiPel®DF (Reg.no. L6441, Act 36 / 1947) contains Bacillus thuringiensis var. kurstaki. Caution. (Valent Biosciences, USA).*
- *FlorBac®WG (Reg.no. L5531, Act 36 / 1947) contains Bacillus thuringiensis var. aizawai. Caution. (Valent Biosciences, USA).*
- *Sumimax® WP (Reg no. L6358 Act 36 / 1947) contains Flumioxazin (N-phenylimide). Caution. (Sumitomo Chemical Company, Japan).*
- *Sumi-Alpha® 200 EW (Reg no. L8821, Act 36 / 1947) contains Esfenvalerate. Harmful. (Sumitomo Chemical Company, Japan).*
- *Sumisclex® SC (Reg no. L6377 Act 36 / 1947) contains Procymidone (dicarboximide). (Sumitomo Chemical Company, Japan).*

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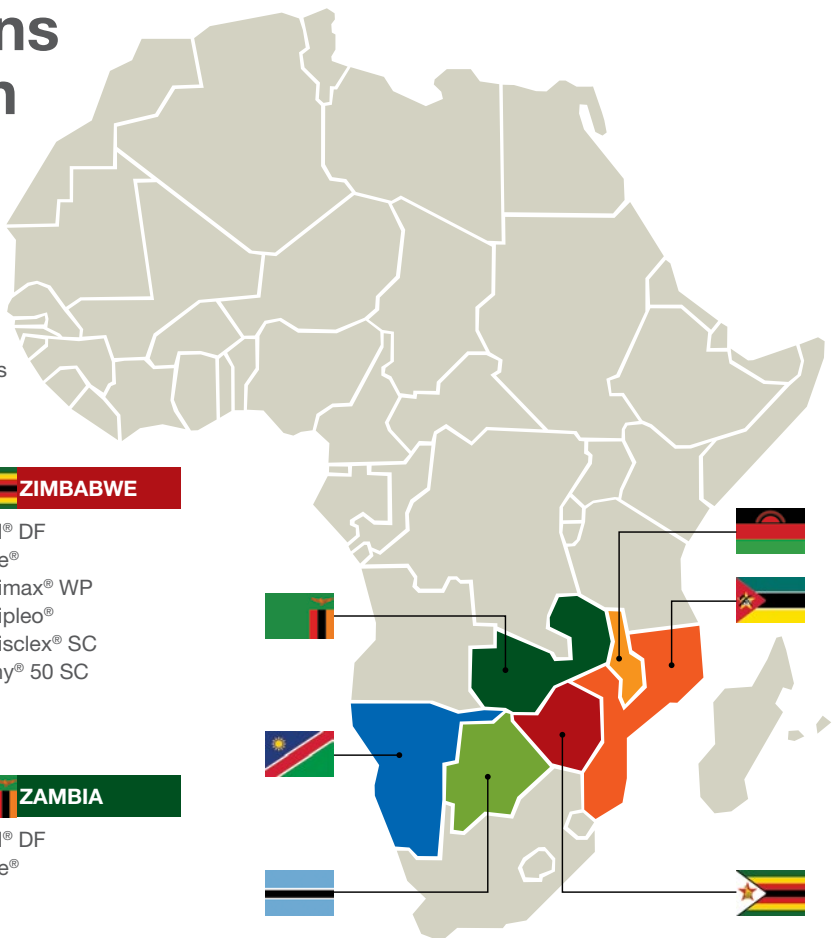
Proven crop solutions for Southern African farmers.

Philagro has a wide range of proven products against the most stubborn weeds, pests and diseases on all the important crops in our region. Many of these products are household names in the world of agriculture.

Philagro's comprehensive range of trusted products are now available to meet the needs of farmers throughout Southern Africa. Now you have access to total crop solutions with state-of-the-art herbicides, pesticides, fungicides, miticides, plant growth regulators and animal feeds.



NAMIBIA

Dipel® DF
Dormex®
Excelero® 10 SL
Goal™ 480 SC
Legend™ 250 SC
Nemesis® 100 EC
Olyset Net
ProGibb® 4%
ProGibb® 40%
ProTone®
Rizolex® WP
Sitofex® 10 EC
Smite®
Sumi-Alpha® 200 EC
Sumi-Alpha® 200 EW
Sumimax® WP
Sumipleo®
Sumisclex® SC
Vectobac® WG
Yamato® 480 SC

BOTSWANA

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FlorBac® DF
Goal™ 480 SC
Nemesis® 100 EC
Rizolex® WP
Smite®
Sumi-Alpha® 200 EW
Sumisclex® SC

MOZAMBIQUE

Dipel® DF
Rizolex® WP
Sunny® 50 SC
Vectobac® WG

MALAWI

Dipel® DF
Smite®

ZIMBABWE

Dipel® DF
Smite®
Sumimax® WP
Sumipleo®
Sumisclex® SC
Sunny® 50 SC

ZAMBIA

Dipel® DF
Smite®

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Product information

INSECTICIDES

Dipel® DF
A water dispersible granule biological insecticide for the control of *Lepidopterous* larvae on numerous crops as indicated. Active ingredient - *Bacillus thuringiensis, var kurstaki*, caution (Reg. No. L6441, Act 36 of 1947 (South Africa), W130297 (Botswana), MW/PCB/2021/R/0737 (Malawi), DSV-1545 (Mozambique), N-AR-0943 (Namibia)). DiPel®DF is the registered trademark of Valent BioSciences™ Corporation, USA.

FlorBac® DF
A water dispersible granule biological insecticide for the control of *Lepidoptera* larvae on crops as indicated. Active ingredient - *Bacillus thuringiensis, var. aizawai*, caution (Reg. No. L5531, Act 36 of 1947 (South Africa), W130272 (Botswana),). Florbac® is the registered trademark of Valent BioSciences™ Corporation, USA.

Nemesis® 100 EC
An emulsifiable concentrate stomach and contact insecticide with insect growth regulant activity for the control of larval/nymphal stages of citrus Red scale (*Aonidiella aurantii*) and Mussel scale (*Cornuaspis beckii*) in citrus,and mango scale (*Aulacaspis tubercularis*) in mangoes and Whiteflies (*Bemesia tabaci* and *Trialeurodes vaporariorum*) in tomatoes. Active ingredient - Pyriproxyfen (phenylether), harmful (Reg. No. L6378, Act 36 of 1947(South Africa), W130334 (Botswana), N-AR 2170 (Namibia)). Nemesis® is the registered trademark of Sumitomo Chemical Company, Tokyo, Japan.

Olyset® Net
Olyset® Net is composed of a resin-based fiber that incorporates a synthetic pyrethroid called permethrin to form a mosquito net for malaria vector control. Active ingredient - permethrin caution (Reg. No. L8411, Act 36 of 1947 (South Africa, N-AR 1055 (Namibia)). Olyset® Net is the registered trademark of Sumitomo Chemical Company, Tokyo, Japan.

Smite®
A suspension concentrate contact acaricide for the control of the egg and immature stages of the Red spider mite (*Tetranychus urticae*) on roses and tomatoes, Red spider mite (*Tetranychus urticae*) and European red mite (*Panonychus ulmi*) on apples and pears and various mites on citrus. Active ingredient - Etoxazole (Diphenyloxazoline derivative), caution (Reg. No. L6011, Act 36 of 1947 (South Africa), W130352 (Botswana), MW/PCB/2021/R/0758 (Malawi), N-AR-1238 (Namibia)). Smite® is the registered trademark of Sumitomo Chemical Company, Tokyo, Japan.

Sumi-Alpha® 200 EC & 200 EW
An emulsifiable concentrate contact insecticide with residual properties for the control of insects in crops as listed. Active ingredient - Esfenvalerate (Pyrethroid), harmful (Sumi-Alpha® 200 EC, Reg. No. L6452 (South Africa), N-AR 1237 (Namibia), (Sumi-Alpha® 200 EW, Reg. No. L8821, Act 36 of 1947 (South Africa), W130730 (Botswana), N-AR 2169 (Namibia)). Sumi-Alpha® is the registered trademark of Sumitomo Chemical Company, Tokyo, Japan.

Sumipleo®
An emulsifiable concentrate contact and stomach insecticide for the control of *Lepidoptera* larvae and Leaf miners on potatoes and tomatoes, Diamond back moth larvae in cruciferous crops, African bollworm larvae in lettuce and Fall armyworm in maize and sweetcorn. Active ingredient - Pyridalyl dichloropropene-derivitive, caution (Reg. No. L8377, Act 36 of 1947 (South Africa), N-AR-1236 (Namibia)). Sumipleo® is the registered trademark of Sumitomo Chemical Company, Tokyo, Japan.

VectoBac® WG
A water dispersible granule biological larvicide for the control of mosquito larvae and fungus gnat larvae. Active ingredient - *Bacillus thuringiensis subsp. israelensis*, caution (Reg. No. L7224, Act 36 of 1947 (South Africa), N-AR 1167 (Namibia), DSV-2520 (Mozambique)). VectoBac® is the registered trademark of Valent BioSciences™ Corporation, USA.

HERBICIDES

Sumimax® WP
A wettable powder herbicide for pre-emergence control of annual broadleaf weeds, as listed, in groundnuts, soya beans, deciduous fruit, citrus and vines (and forestry). Active ingredient - Flumioxazin (N-phenylimide), caution (Reg. No. L6358, Act 36 of 1947 (South Africa), N-AR 1792 (Namibia)). Sumimax® is the registered trademark of Sumitomo Chemical Company, Tokyo, Japan.

Yamato® 480 SC
A suspension concentrate herbicide for pre-emergence control of weeds, as listed, in corn. Can be applied post-emergence of corn. Active ingredient - Pyroxasulfone (Pyrazole), harmful (Reg. No. L10746, Act 36 of 1947 (South Africa), N-AR 2224 (Namibia)). Yamato® is the registered trade mark of Kumiai Chemical Industry Company, Tokyo, Japan.

Goal™ 480 SC
A suspension concentrate herbicide for use in crops, vineyards, orchards and forestry as listed to control a variety of annual broadleaf and grass weeds as listed. Active ingredient - Oxyfluorfen (diphenyl ether), caution (Reg. No. LL8303, Act 36 of 1947 (South Africa), W130817 (Botswana), N-AR 1681 (Namibia)). Goal™ is a registered trademark of the Sumitomo Chemical Company, Japan.

FUNGICIDES

Legend™ 250 SC
A suspension concentrate surface mobile contact fungicide for the control of Powdery mildew (*Oidium tuckeri*) in table and wine grapes, (*Oidium erysiphoides*) in cucurbit crops and (*Oidium mangiferae*) on mangoes. Active ingredient - Quinoxyfen (quinoline), caution (Reg. No. L6840, Act 36 of 1947 (South Africa), N-AR 1055 (Namibia)). Legend™ is the registered trademark of Nissan Chemical Corporation, Tokyo, Japan.

Rizolex® WP
A protective contact action wettable powder fungicide for the control of Rhizoctonia damping off on seedlings of ornamentals, flowering plants, cotton and beans, as listed, as well as the control of *Corticium rolfsii* on chincherinchee bulbs and Rhizoctonia on potatoes. Active ingredient - Tolclofos methyl, caution (Reg. No. L6376, Act 36 of 1947 (South Africa), N-AR 1239 (Namibia), W130344 (Botswana), DSV-1544 (Mozambique)). Rizolex® is the registered trademark of Sumitomo Chemical Company, Tokyo, Japan.

Sumisclex® SC
A translaminar systemic organic fungicide (suspension concentrate) for the control of diseases on crops and turf as listed. Active ingredient - Procymidone (dicarboximide), caution (Reg. No. L6377, Act 36 of 1947 (South Africa), N-AR 0904 (Namibia), W130322 (Botswana)). Sumisclex® is the registered trademark of Sumitomo Chemical Company, Tokyo, Japan.

PLANT GROWTH REGULATORS

Dormex®
A soluble concentrate growth regulant for delayed foliation in apples, apricots, plums, cherries, wine and table grapes, kiwi fruit, as well as advancement of budding in sultana grapes and berries listed. Active ingredient - Cyanamide, harmful (Reg. No. L5740, Act 36 of 1947 (South Africa), N-AR 0902 (Namibia)). Dormex® is a product of Alzchem Trostberg GmbH, Trostberg, Germany.

Excelero® 10 SL
A liquid concentrate plant growth regulator for use on table grapes to accelerate or increase the colouration in berries and bunches. Active ingredient - s-Abscisic Acid, caution (Reg. No. L10170, Act 36 of 1947 (South Africa), N-AR 1991 (Namibia)). Excelero® is the registered trademark of Valent BioSciences™ Corporation, USA.

ProGibb® 4%
A liquid concentrate plant growth regulator for various usages on Grapefruit, Lemons, Oranges, Grapes, Pears, mangoes Hops, Potatoes and Peppers / Peppadews. Active ingredient - Gibberellins (ProGibb® 4%, Reg. No. L5118 (South Africa), N-AR 0941 (Namibia) (ProGibb® 40% Reg. No. L6777, Act 36 of 1947 (South Africa), N-AR 0942 (Namibia)). ProGibb® is the registered trademark of Valent BioSciences™ Corporation, USA.

ProTone®
A liquid concentrate plant growth regulator for use on table grapes to accelerate or increase the colouration in berries and bunches. Active ingredient - s-Abscisic Acid, caution (Reg. No. L8540, Act 36 of 1947 (South AFrica), N-AR 1178 (Namibia)). ProTone® is the registered trademark of Valent BioSciences™ Corporation, USA.

Sitofex® 10 EC
An emulsifiable concentrate plant growth regulator for increasing the fruit size in kiwi fruit as well as for the increase of berry size and the decrease in berry abscission in tablegrape cultivars as indicated. Active ingredient - Forchlorfenuron, harmful (Reg. No. L6339, Act 36 of 1947 (South Africa), N-AR 0903 (Namibia)). Sitofex® is a product of Alzchem Trostberg GmbH, Trostberg, Germany.

Sunny® 50 SC
A suspension concentrate plant growth regulator for vegetative growth control and for the enhancement and improvement of fruit shape in avocados. Active ingredient - Uniconazole, harmful (Reg. No. L5587, Act 36 of 1947 (South Africa), DSV-2430 (Mazambique)). Sunny® is the registered trade mark of Aquamarine (London) Limited.

For more on these products in your area, and how find your nearest agent, contact Bennie Buys at telephone +27 82 809 5447 or email bennie.buys@philagro.co.za.

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PRODUCTS THAT WORK FROM PEOPLE WHO CARE

32 YEARS OF RELATIONSHIPS

FAW TRUCKS CELEBRATES THE NETWORK BEHIND ITS SOUTH AFRICAN SUCCESS

Article supplied

Thirty-two years in business represents far more than longevity. It represents experience gained, relationships built and a deep understanding of the people and industries that drive the economy.

FAW Trucks Southern Africa's growth has never been built on vehicles alone. It has been shaped by more than three decades of listening to customers, understanding the unique demands of the South African market and developing the relationships and support network that keep businesses moving forward.



Relationships and trust take time to build

In the commercial vehicle industry, buying a truck marks the beginning of a long-term business relationship. Reliability, uptime, parts availability and dependable after-sales support all play a role in an operator's ability to keep vehicles productive and businesses profitable. These are relationships that cannot be built overnight.

Since entering the South African market in 1994, FAW Trucks has experienced the country's changing economic and business landscape first-hand. Establishing a Chinese vehicle brand in a developing and increasingly competitive market required more than introducing a range of products. It meant a thorough understanding of local operating conditions, a willingness to listen to transport operators and the ability to adapt to the realities and the evolving demand of a challenging industry.

Over the years, this understanding has enabled FAW to refine its product offering, strengthen its after-sales capabilities and establish a dealer network with the reach and expertise to support customers across the country. The result is a business that has grown and evolved alongside the local transport industry, combining its global heritage and more than three decades of South African market experience.





Becoming part of the South African commercial landscape

FAW's commitment to the local market extends well beyond vehicle sales.

The establishment of its manufacturing facility at Coega in the Eastern Cape in 2014 marked an important milestone in the company's long-term investment in South Africa.

The facility strengthened FAW's local manufacturing capabilities while contributing to employment, skills development and the surrounding community.
It also reinforced the company's ability to combine its global manufacturing expertise with an in-depth undestanding of the very specific demands of the Southern African transport industry.

Today, customers benefit from a range of commercial vehicles developed for regional operating conditions, backed by an established national dealer network and after-sales infrastructure. With more than 36 dealerships providing sales and support capabilities across Southern Africa, FAW has developed a strong presence that brings the brand closer to the businesses it serves.





A customer network built on understanding

A successful customer relationship is built on more than the reliability of the vehicle itself. It also depends on access to parts, technical expertise, responsive dealerships and dependable after-sales service. For fleet operators, these elements are essential to keeping vehicles on the road and protecting the productivity of their businesses.

FAW's growth in the South African market reflects the importance of these relationships. According to Naamsa, the Automotive Business Council, FAW was South Africa's best-selling heavy-duty truck brand in the first quarter of the year.

This achievement provides a clear indication of the confidence customers continue to place in the brand. A truck is a productive business asset, expected to deliver value throughout its working life. Understanding the customer's business, operating environment and changing requirements is therefore essential to providing meaningful support.

This is where FAW's dealer network plays a particularly important role. As the direct link between customers and the wider FAW organisation, dealerships provide regional market knowledge, sales expertise and after-sales support. They also give FAW valuable insight into changing customer requirements, ensuring that the business remains connected to the realities and the demands of operating across Southern Africa.

Customer support does not begin when a truck breaks down. It starts before the purchase is made, with an understanding of the customer's business.



Relationships extend beyond transactions

In an increasingly digital business environment, face-to-face engagement remains an important part of building lasting business relationships. Conversations away from the usual sales and service environment provide opportunities to listen, exchange ideas and gain a better understanding of customers' experiences.

One such example is the annual FAW Corporate Golf Day, which provides a platform of engagement. Held in September, the event brought together current customers, new prospects and extended stakeholder networks for the brand, including customers, dealers, suppliers, business partners, employees and FAW executives.

Beyond the golf itself, the day provided a relaxed setting for personal interaction and open conversation. It gave FAW's leadership and employees an opportunity to engage directly with customers, acknowledge the contribution of its dealer network and business partners, and strengthen relationships that have developed over many years.

It also provided an opportunity to hear directly from customers about their experiences, discuss challenges and explore opportunities for the future. This direct engagement reinforces an important message: customers are supported by more than a vehicle manufacturer. They are part of a wider network of people and businesses working together to achieve shared success.

Building on 32 years of success

As FAW looks ahead to its next phase of growth in Southern Africa, the principles that have shaped its journey remain as relevant as ever. Product quality, an understanding of local market conditions, strong dealer partnerships and reliable customer support will continue to underpin its ambitions.

Sustainable growth is not measured by vehicle sales alone. It is reflected in returning customers, businesses expanding their fleets, and operators whose experiences give them the confidence to recommend the brand to others. This confidence is earned over time through consistent performance and relationships that extend well beyond the initial purchase.

After 32 years, the message remains clear: lasting success in the commercial vehicle industry is built not only on the vehicles that move businesses forward, but on the people and partnerships that keep them moving.





A commitment to lasting relationships

COO of FAW Trucks Southern Africa, Mr Xin Huang, believes the company's progress over the past 32 years is inseparable from the relationships it has developed along the way.

"Thirty-two years in South Africa have taught us that sustainable growth is built on trust, understanding and lasting relationships. We have learnt from our customers, grown alongside our dealers and continually adapted our business to the realities of operating in this market.

"Our progress would not have been possible without the commitment of our customers, employees, dealerships, suppliers and business partners, whose confidence and support have contributed significantly to our journey.

"As we look ahead, we remain committed to strengthening these relationships and ensuring that we continue to understand and support the businesses that place their trust in FAW."

For more information, visit **www.faw.co.za** or contact your nearest FAW dealership.

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MANAGING HOT TEMPERATURES IN OPEN-SIDED POULTRY HOUSES

by Barbara Mulonda Simbaya

Temperature management is a vital factor in broiler farming. Make sure that temperatures are at optimum levels at all times during the brooding and growing stages.

In the hot summer months, farmers must reduce the temperatures to levels that are conducive for the growing birds. If the broilers are kept in open-sided housing, several options are available to lower temperatures in the pen. Farmers can either maximise natural airflow within the pen, use shading techniques or take advantage of the cooling effects of evaporation.



Airflow and ventilation

Curtains covering the side wall openings must be removed completely to allow proper airflow at all times.

Fans can be installed in the pen to keep air circulating at bird level. Use baffle boards to direct incoming air down towards the birds, improving ventilation.



Shading and house orientation

The poultry house should be oriented with its long axis running east to west to avoid the direct midday and afternoon sun beaming straight through the open side walls.

Make sure that the poultry house roof overhangs enough to provide cover from the hot sun. Plant trees or put up shade-cloth shelters around the perimeter of the poultry house to help cool the surrounding air before it enters the building.

Active cooling methods

Use high- or low-pressure misters to reduce temperatures through water evaporation.

Keep drinking water cool and clean at all times by painting the overhead water tanks white to reflect sunlight and flushing drinking water lines regularly to prevent water from heating up.

To conclude, let us look at some good management practices that help minimise the effects of hot weather on broilers. These include some of the best practices:

Feed birds during cooler times of the day, such as early morning and late evening. This will reduce metabolic heat production during digestion.

Reduce stocking density during hot spells to give birds more floor space, allowing them to spread out and release body heat more effectively.

Keep litter dry and loose, as high moisture levels can increase humidity inside the poultry house and worsen heat stress.

For more information, please contact Barbara M Simbaya, Technical Advisor at Tiger Animal Feeds, on +26(0)96-920-2207 or barbara.mulonda@tigerfeeds.com.zm

POWER COMES IN MANY

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Namibia's hidden harvests:

Four remarkable crops thriving in dry landscapes

by Loren Howard

From medicinal roots buried beneath the Kalahari sands to indigenous fruits and date palms flourishing in arid environments, Namibia's lesser-known crops reveal how agriculture can find opportunities in even the harshest landscapes.

Namibia is a country of striking contrasts. Vast deserts, sandy plains and dry savannas dominate much of its landscape, while low and unpredictable rainfall makes conventional crop production challenging.

Yet, despite these harsh conditions, a variety of plants have adapted remarkably well to the country's environment. Some have supported local communities for generations, while others are creating opportunities for agricultural diversification and specialised markets.

Devil's claw, marula, Kalahari melon and date palms each tell a different story. Together, they show that agricultural value is not always measured by harvest size, but also by a plant's ability to survive and thrive in challenging conditions, its practical uses and the economic opportunities it can create.

Devil's claw: Medicinal value beneath the sand

Beneath Namibia's sandy soils grows one of the country's most unusual and valuable indigenous plants.

Devil's claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens* and *Harpagophytum zeyheri*) is a low-growing perennial known for its attractive pink-purple flowers and distinctive hooked fruit. The fruit's curved hooks (claws) give the plant its name, but its commercial value lies beneath the ground.

The plant develops secondary storage tubers containing compounds such as harpagoside, which are used in herbal medicinal preparations. Traditionally, devil's claw has been used to treat digestive complaints and relieve pain. Today, products made from the plant are marketed internationally, particularly in Europe.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Namibia supplies approximately 90% of the global devil's claw market, making it a major international supplier of this specialised medicinal resource.

Unlike conventional crops, devil's claw is primarily wild-harvested. Thousands of rural Namibians depend on collecting, slicing and drying its tubers as a source of income.

However, harvesting must be done carefully to protect the plant. Removing the central taproot can kill it, so sustainable harvesting practices focus on collecting only some of the secondary tubers and replacing the soil after digging. This allows the plant to recover and continue growing.

Devil's claw demonstrates how an indigenous plant can link traditional knowledge, rural livelihoods and international trade without the need for large-scale cultivation.







Marula: More than a traditional drink

For many people, marula is associated with its sweet fruit and traditional beverages. Yet this indigenous African tree offers much more than a refreshing drink.

The marula tree (*Sclerocarya birrea*) grows naturally across parts of southern Africa, including northern Namibia, where it plays an important in rural communities.

Its small, yellow fruits are rich in flavour and can be eaten fresh or processed into juices, jams, fermented beverages and other food products.

However, one of the tree's most valuable products is hidden inside the fruit's hard stone.

Marula kernels contain an oil prized for its moisturising properties and used in skincare products, cosmetics and speciality food applications. Demand for the oil has attracted growing interest from international markets seeking naturally derived ingredients.

In northern Namibia, women have traditionally played a central role in collecting marula fruits, extracting the kernels and processing the oil. Community-based enterprises have helped turn these activities into income-generating opportunities.

The tree is also well suited to dryland agroforestry systems. Once established, it can survive seasonal droughts, while its canopy provides shade and its fruit serves as a food source for both people and wildlife.

Marula demonstrates how value addition can transform a familiar indigenous fruit into a range of marketable products, from beverages and preserves to high-value cosmetic oils.



Kalahari melon: A drought-resistant crop with hidden potential

The Kalahari melon (*Citrullus lanatus*), also known as the tsamma melon, is closely related to the familiar watermelon. However, its value extends far beyond its use as a refreshing fruit.

Naturally adapted to the dry conditions of Southern Africa, this hardy, creeping plant has long been an important food and moisture source for people and animals in the Kalahari.

In Namibia, different local melon varieties are grown for their flesh, seeds and culinary uses. Some are traditionally cultivated alongside pearl millet, making them a valuable addition to small-scale farming systems.

The seeds are particularly versatile. They can be roasted and eaten or processed to produce oil used in cooking and skincare products. Kalahari melon seed oil is rich in unsaturated fatty acids, particularly linoleic acid, which makes it an attractive ingredient for the cosmetics industry.

Research conducted at the University of Namibia has explored the crop's productivity and potential for further improvement.

Its ability to produce under very low rainfall conditions makes it an interesting candidate for agricultural diversification in drought-prone regions.

However, despite its natural adaptation to dry environments, yields are influenced by factors such as rainfall, seed quality and overall growing conditions.

For Namibia's small-scale farmers, the Kalahari melon offers a valuable benefits: a versatile crop that can complement traditional food production while creating opportunities in specialised markets.



Dates: Turning desert landscapes into productive orchards

While devil's claw, marula and Kalahari melon are indigenous resources, date palms represent a different approach to agriculture in Namibia's dry climate.

The date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) is well-adapted to hot, arid environments, making it a promising crop in areas where irrigation water is available.

One of Namibia's best-known examples is the Naute Irrigation Project near Keetmanshoop in the south of the country.

Established in the early 1990s, the project uses water from the Naute Dam to support agricultural production, including date palms and table grapes. The first date palms were planted in 1991.

Date palms are well suited to high temperatures, but commercial farming still depends on a reliable water supply to produce commercially viable yields. Successful production also requires careful management of irrigation, pollination, fertilisation and harvest.

The fruit is valued for its natural sweetness, good storage potential and versatility. Dates can be marketed fresh, dried or processed into products such as syrups and pastes.

Medjool is among the date varieties grown at Naute, demonstrating how specialised fruit farming can contribute to Namibia's irrigated agricultural sector.

However, water availability remains a critical consideration. While date palms can tolerate desert heat, commercial farming must balance potential returns with the responsible use of scarce water resources.

The Naute project demonstrates that Namibia's arid landscapes can support high-value horticulture farming, provided that irrigation infrastructure and water management are carefully planned.



Namibia's agriculture is more diverse than it appears

These four crops demonstrate the remarkable diversity of Namibia's agricultural resources and the opportunities they offer.

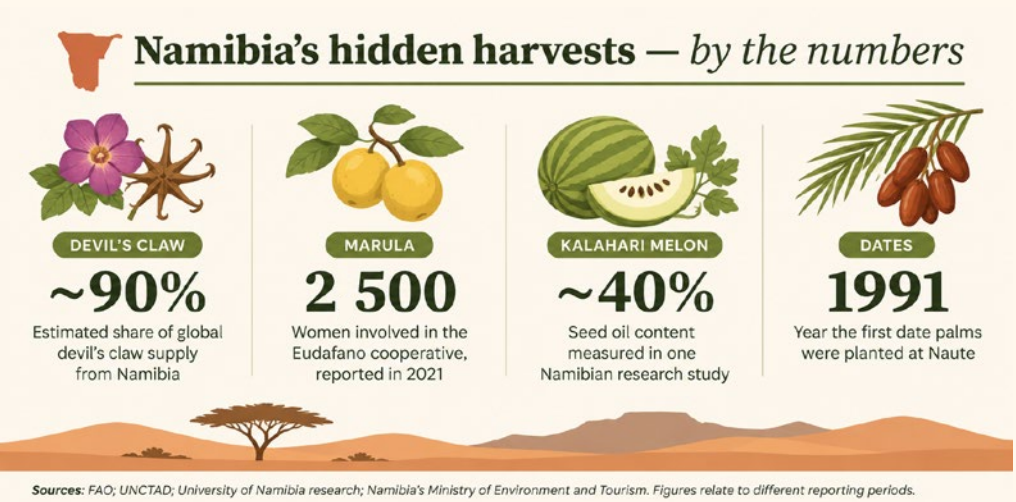
Devil's claw links traditional medicinal knowledge with international herbal markets. Marula transforms an indigenous fruit into valuable food and cosmetic products, while Kalahari melon provides a resilient source of food, seed oil and potential income. Date palms, in turn, demonstrate the potential of irrigated horticulture in dry environments.

Each crop faces different challenges, from sustainable wild harvesting and market access to seed improvement and responsible water use.

Yet they share an important characteristic: each creates opportunities by making use of Namibia's natural conditions, available resources and local knowledge.

As African agriculture continues to respond to climate variability, changing market demands and the need for rural economic development, these lesser-known crops deserve greater attention.

Sometimes, the most promising agricultural opportunities are not found in introducing entirely new crops, but in recognising the potential of plants that have been part of Africa's landscapes for generations.



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Africa in Focus



Agricultural news from across Africa, exploring agricultural developments, innovations and opportunities across our featured African countries.

From digital farmer registration in Kenya to innovative rice farming in Guinea, agriculture across Africa continues to evolve through technology, research and investment. Farmers and agribusinesses across the continent are finding new ways to increase productivity, improve resource management and create opportunities beyond traditional agricultural practices.

In this month's Africa in Focus, we look at developments in six African countries, highlighting the initiatives, innovations and businesses contributing to the future of agriculture in Africa.

Kenya | Bringing millions of farmers into the digital age

Kenya is taking a significant step towards a more connected agricultural sector, with approximately 8,9 million farmers reportedly registered on government agricultural systems as of October.

The initiative forms part of efforts to improve agricultural planning and service delivery through better access to reliable farmer information. A new agricultural data centre is expected to support the management of information on seed and fertiliser distribution, livestock identification, extension services and market access.

By bringing agricultural information together, the government aims to improve how support reaches farmers, particularly smallholders who may previously have faced challenges accessing essential services.

While digital registration alone does not automatically guarantee access to agricultural inputs or markets, the initiative could lay the groundwork for more targeted support and improved decision-making across the sector.

Why it matters: Digital agricultural records could help Kenya allocate resources more efficiently, improve access to agricultural advisory services and create marketing opportunities for small-scale farmers.

Guinea | A rice revolution in the mangroves

Along Guinea's coastline, farmers are showing how improved farming practices can transform one of the country's most distinctive agricultural systems: mangrove rice farming.

In the Boké region, an agricultural development project has reported an increase in rice yields from approximately 1 500 kg to 2 874 kg per hectare, which is an improvement of more than 90%.

The project's second phase supported 65 farmers cultivating approximately 105 ha of mangrove rice fields. Improved rice varieties and better cultivation techniques contributed to the reported yield gains.Mangrove rice farming requires careful water management as coastal fields are affected by tides, salinity and seasonal rainfall. Farmers must carefully regulate the balance between freshwater and seawater to protect their crops and maintain suitable growing conditions.

The results highlight the potential of com-bining local agricultural knowledge with improved farming methods.

Why it matters: Higher rice yields could strengthen local food security and reduce reliance on imported rice. They also demonstrate how specialised farming systems can become more productive without necessarily expanding cultivated land.





Zimbabwe | A sweeter future for sugarcane farming

Zimbabwe's sugar industry is setting ambtious productivity targets under its Sugarcane Industry Development Plan for 2026-2035.

The strategy aims to raise average sugarcane yields from approximately 81 tonnes to 110 tonnes per hectare, an increase of nearly 36%.

Achieving these targets will require improvements in irrigation efficiency, better planting material, mechanisation and modern crop management practices. Small-scale sugarcane growers will also play an important part in strengthening the industry.

Beyond the sugar sector, Zimbabwe is also making progress in climate-smart agricul-ture and wheat farming through develop-ment initiatives supported by the African development Bank.

Together, these efforts reflect a broader focus on improving agricultural productivity while responding to increasingly unpredic-table growing conditions.

Why it matters: Higher yields could strengthen Zimbabwe's sugar industry, create opportunities for irrigation and agricultural machinery suppliers, and enhance the competitiveness of commercial and smallholder farmers.

Malawi | Making smart farming more affordable

Precision agriculture is often associated with expensive equipment and large commercial farms. However, an emerging innovation in Malawi is exploring how small-scale farmers can benefit from similar technology at a more affordable cost.

With support from a University of Malawi initiative, Goodall Salima, a Malawian computer scientist, inventor and agricultural technology innovator, is developing a prototype smart farming system designed for both greenhouse and open-field farming.

The project aims to make data-driven agricultural management more accessible to farmers who may lack the resources to invest in conventional precision farming systems.

This technology has the potential to support more informed decisions about irrigation and crop management. However, its full capabilities, affordability and performance will need to be established through further development and field testing.

The innovation is still at the prototype stage and has yet to be established as a commercially available farming solution.

Why it matters: Locally developed agricultural technology could eventually help small-scale farmers improve resource efficiency and productivity while reducing their reliance on expensive imported systems.





Botswana | Growing beyond traditional agriculture

Although Botswana is best known for its cattle industry, agricultural businesses are increasingly demonstrating the country's potential to diversify into high-value horticultural farming.

One example is Lucerne Fields, based in the Tuli Block, which has established a commercial carrot-growing business associated with the B-Fresh brand.

Through continued investment in farming methods and agricultural infrastructure, the business illustrates how specialised vegetable farming can contribute to a more diversified agricultural economy.

Commercial carrot farming relies on careful soil preparation, dependable irrigation, efficient harvesting and proper handling and packaging to maintain product quality.

Botswana is also exploring diversification within its wildlife economy, including the introduction of digital applications for game-farming permits. These developments highlight different opportunities for agricultural and rural enterprises to expand beyond conventional livestock farming.

Why it matters: Successful horticultural enterprises demonstrate opportunities for investment in irrigation, agricultural machinery, produce handling and fresh-food supply chains in Botswana.



Zambia | Putting irrigation decisions in farmers' hands

Zambia is exploring a new approach to irrigation development that puts farmers at the centre of decisions about agricultural water management.

Through the Irrigated and Sustainable Agriculture for Transformation (ISAT) Project, the government is preparing to pilot a farmer-led irrigation development initiative.

In September 2026, a government notice invited consultants to assist in designing and testing the approach, including the development of a results-based financing framework. The initiative aims to establish irrigation models that could eventually be expanded to benefit more farmers.

Unlike large irrigation schemes that are planned and managed centrally, farmer-led approaches generally give farmers a greater role in selecting, investing in and managing irrigation technologies suited to their circumstances.

The initiative is still in the planning and pilot-development stage, meaning its practical impact has yet to be demonstrated.

Why it matters: Farmer-led irrigation could create opportunities for small-scale farmers to improve water access and create opportunities to invest in irrigation systems suited to their crops, budgets and farming conditions.



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November's agricultural developments AT A GLANCE

8,9m	+90%	110 t/ha	US$5 000	220 ha	New pilot
Farmers registered	Reported rice yield increase	Sugarcane yield target	Prototype project funding	B-Fresh vegetable production	Farmer-led irrigation
KENYA	GUINEA	ZIMBABWE	MALAWI	BOTSWANA	ZAMBIA

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BIOFUELS IN SOUTH AFRICA:

Regulations and local growth opportunities

by Victor Moolman

Biofuel is not an unfamiliar concept to anyone who stays informed about global events. It is fuel produced from various sources with a single goal: to burn cleaner and to reduce dependence on crude oil.

In last month's article, readers gained more insight into biofuels and how South Africa's industry could grow. I recently spoke with Nanda Kishore Chanda, General Manager at Novonesis South Africa, about what has already been done, what still needs to be done, and what is currently being developed for biofuels in South Africa.

"I can proudly say that Novonesis is a market leader in the application of technologies such as ethanol production from grain, whether derived from first-generation feedstocks like sorghum and sugar cane, or even from agricultural waste," he explains.

Let us look at what biofuels and bio-solutions could mean for South Africa and why there is currently so much uncertainty around the country's biofuel development.

Past regulations and their considerable impact on biofuels across the country

By the mid-2000s, South Africa developed a strategy for biofuels and bio-solutions for the first time. The topic was raised during cabinet meetings in 2005, and in December 2007, the first policy framework, the Biofuels Industrial Strategy (BIS), was approved.

This was a strong starting point for South Africa's biofuel targets. The strategy set the local biofuel market in motion and aimed for biofuels to account for approximately 2% of all liquid fuels for road transport, petrol and diesel.

Although it was a strong starting point, the economy and global conditions at the time significantly impacted the strategy. Due to the global food crisis in 2007, maize was specifi-cally excluded as a feedstock for biofuels. The strategy also focused on promoting rural development and expanding economic opportunities.

Nanda says: "In fact, South Africa has had a well-established policy and regulatory frame-work for nearly 20 years. We were one of the countries that already had a policy back then, long before many other countries developed one."

Following the original strategy, mandatory blending regulations were introduced in 2012. As a result, petroleum suppliers had to blend a specified amount of biofuel with conventional fuel: a total of 2% to 5% bioethanol in petrol and a minimum of 5% biodiesel in mineral diesel.

This created a regulated, guaranteed market for local biofuel manufacturers. However, the biggest and most significant change to the biofuel regulations occurred in 2020, when the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy compiled the updated South African Bio-fuels Regulatory Framework (SABRF).



The new framework provided updated definitions for second- and third-generation biofuel technologies. It also established clearer and stronger regulations regarding pricing and cost recovery mechanisms for blenders and developed the national protocol for biofuel feedstocks.

"Work has continuously gone into developing a framework. The challenge has always been its implementation. I think the policy was ahead of its time when we started in 2007, but looking at the current situation, there are countries that have implemented it much better than us. However, legislation is indeed in place," Nanda adds.







What is the future of biofuels in South Africa?

"South Africa consumes approximately 25 billion litres of liquid fuel annually, but our biofuel production is minimal. Although ethanol plants and small biodiesel production facilities already exist, it is nowhere near enough to establish a fully-fledged biofuel industry."

Nanda explains that South Africans are already familiar with biodiesel and that it is used nationwide. Even methane gas, which is generated through biogas production, is not new in South Africa. However, there is still plenty of room for biofuels and other bio-solutions to grow locally.

"South Africa already produces biogas, bioethanol and biodiesel. These fuels are not new. Biogas, for example, can be produced from methane generated on dairy farms or from agricultural waste, while bioethanol can be produced from feedstocks like sorghum and sugar cane, or in other countries from maize and rice," says Nanda. "There are also other alternatives, such as green hydrogen."

One of the most striking features of South Africa's biofuel sector is that production often still takes place on a small scale. Large-scale production has not yet truly taken root. While this challenge must be overcome, biofuels can still experience substantial growth in South Africa with the right resources.

Nanda concludes: "We work alongside role players throughout the biofuel value chain to bring international technology and expertise to South Africa. The question is not whether South Africa can produce biofuels, but how we can make it commercially viable for the benefit of the economy, job creation and the entire value chain."

In the next instalment of "Biofuels in South Africa", we will look at some of the current manufacturers and the challenges they face in the industry.

Visit the Novonesis website at www.novonesis.com/en for more information on South Africa's biofuel technology.

HOW TO IDENTIFY YOUR CATTLE AT A GLANCE

by Victor Moolman

Cattle are among the best-known and most popular farm animals. From Bonsmaras to Holstein-Friesians, most people know what a cow looks like. But how do you easily tell a cow apart from a bull when you take a closer look? Apart from the reproductive organs, these are the easiest ways to distinguish a bull from a cow based on each sex's unique features.

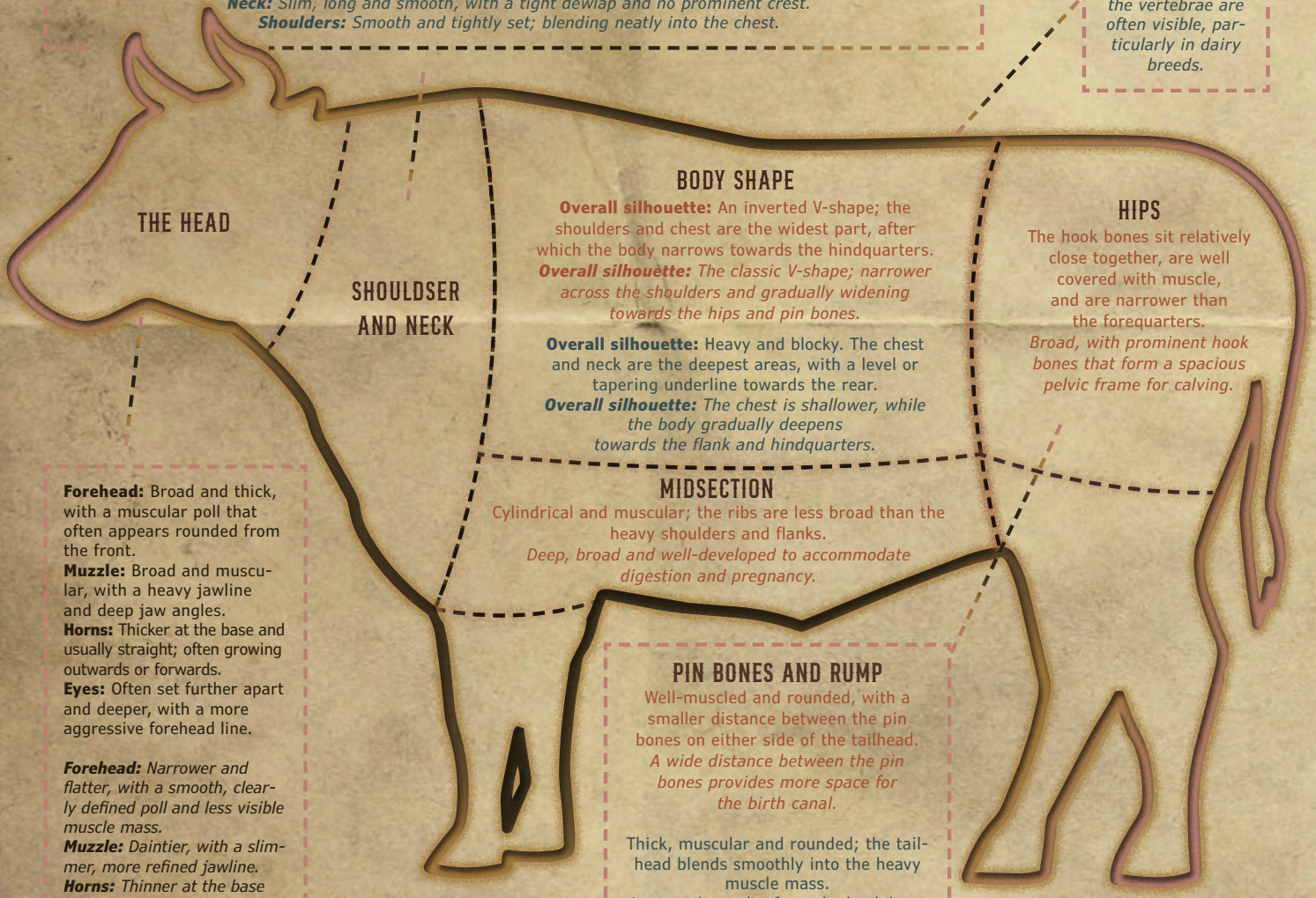
Very broad and heavily muscled; the thick crest juts out on either side of the body.
Smooth, narrow, and neatly formed, with a slimmer neck that lacks a prominent crest.

Neck: A high, thick crest rising above the shoulder line, with a heavy, deep brisket/dewlap.
Shoulders: Very muscular and prominent, with a broad, deep chest projecting forwards.
Neck: *Slim, long and smooth, with a tight dewlap and no prominent crest.*
Shoulders: *Smooth and tightly set; blending neatly into the chest.*

TOPLINE

Broad, with a distinct, thick layer of muscle.
Slimmer, the spine and vertebrae may be more visible.

High, muscular and straight, with a thick layer of muscle over the loin covering the spine.
Flat to prominent; the vertebrae are often visible, particularly in dairy breeds.



THE HEAD

Forehead: Broad and thick, with a muscular poll that often appears rounded from the front.
Muzzle: Broad and muscular, with a heavy jawline and deep jaw angles.
Horns: Thicker at the base and usually straight; often growing outwards or forwards.
Eyes: Often set further apart and deeper, with a more aggressive forehead line.

Forehead: *Narrower and flatter, with a smooth, clearly defined poll and less visible muscle mass.*
Muzzle: *Daintier, with a slimmer, more refined jawline.*
Horns: *Thinner at the base and often longer, more curved and finely shaped.*
Eyes: ***Softer and more*** *prominent, with a kinder, inquisitive expression and a less pronounced forehead structure.*

SHOULDSER AND NECK

BODY SHAPE

Overall silhouette: An inverted V-shape; the shoulders and chest are the widest part, after which the body narrows towards the hindquarters.
Overall silhouette: *The classic V-shape; narrower across the shoulders and gradually widening towards the hips and pin bones.*

Overall silhouette: Heavy and blocky. The chest and neck are the deepest areas, with a level or tapering underline towards the rear.
Overall silhouette: *The chest is shallower, while the body gradually deepens towards the flank and hindquarters.*

HIPS

The hook bones sit relatively close together, are well covered with muscle, and are narrower than the forequarters.
Broad, with prominent hook bones that form a spacious pelvic frame for calving.

MIDSECTION

Cylindrical and muscular; the ribs are less broad than the heavy shoulders and flanks.
Deep, broad and well-developed to accommodate digestion and pregnancy.

PIN BONES AND RUMP

Well-muscled and rounded, with a smaller distance between the pin bones on either side of the tailhead.
A wide distance between the pin bones provides more space for the birth canal.

Thick, muscular and rounded; the tailhead blends smoothly into the heavy muscle mass.
Long and angular from the hook bone to the pin bone, with a prominent tailhead.

HOW TO READ THE GRAPH

Bull Aa Cow *Aa* Top View Side View

SUPER El Niño

could hit Southern Africa's bean harvests hard: How to protect farmers

By Moses Chitete, Agricultural Economist and Research Fellow at the Centre for Agricultural Research and Development, Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Malawi

Grain legumes, also known as pulses, are an important source of calories and income for rural households and small farmers globally. Beans, especially dry beans, are the most traded and consumed grain legume crop in southern Africa. They are the primary staple and the second-most significant source of dietary protein for people in the region. They are also sensitive to water stress and high temperatures.

Agricultural researcher Moses Chitete was part of a team of researchers who reviewed 62 studies on legumes in the Southern African Development Community. They found that extreme climate shocks have cut legume harvests by up to 78% in the past and could do so again. We spoke to him about the risks and what governments must do to protect farmers.



Southern Africa's smallholder bean farmers need specific support to make it through the Super El Niño. (Photo: Luiana Antonio/Wikimedia Commons)

How do climate shocks affect farmers and food supplies?

Climate shocks include droughts, floods, extreme heat and unpredictable rainfall. These affect legume crops across southern Africa. My research aimed to find out how farmers and food supplies can become better protected from climate disasters or shocks. I found that climate shocks can cut legume harvests by up to 78%.

Losing this much of the legume harvest because of climate disasters is a serious threat to the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in southern Africa. Drought, extreme heat or erratic rainfall reduces agricultural production, leaving households with less food and less produce to sell. This can also increase food prices and reduce the availability of affordable sources of protein.

Repeated climate shocks can deepen poverty. They can also make it harder for farming families who are already not very well off to recover before the next season.

A "super" El Niño is an informal term used by scientists and meteorologists to describe a rare, exceptionally strong El Niño event. The World Meteorological Organisation says this year's Super El Niño is expected to last from September 2026 into early 2027.

> Climate shocks can cut legume harvests by up to **78%.**

Legumes are particularly sensitive to water stress and high temperatures during critical stages such as flowering, pod formation and grain filling. The super El Niño could bring on another severe drought accompanied by high temperatures. In this case, legume farmers could face substantial production losses.

Farmers should not wait until drought conditions become severe to find ways of recovering. They can prepare by planting early-maturing and drought-tolerant legume varieties. Coming up with ways to conserve soil moisture and diversifying the crops they plant so that not all fail are other ways to prepare for the super El Niño. Farmers should harvest and store water and follow seasonal climate advice to adjust planting dates and when they use other agricultural inputs.

Governments and agricultural institutions need to strengthen early-warning systems and communicate forecasts in ways that farmers can use. This could be delivering information through extension workers, radio stations, community platforms, cooperatives, agro-dealers, and other channels easily accessible to farmers.

Farmers must get timely access to drought-tolerant crop varieties, appropriate planting advice and information on when and where to plant.

Legumes are 'climate smart', so why wouldn't they survive?

Legumes are said to be climate smart because some, especially cowpeas and pigeon peas, tolerate dry conditions slightly more than many cereal crops.

But simply labelling legumes climate-smart does not necessarily mean they can survive an El Niño. As with any other crop, farmers need access to newer technologies if they are to survive climate disasters. This can include getting affordable access to improved and drought-tolerant seed, irrigation and water-harvesting technologies, extension services and reliable weather information.



Farmers harvesting beans. (Photo: Emmanuel Ssekaggo, Wikimedia Commons)



Farmers also need access to credit and crop insurance so that one failed season does not push them into long-term poverty. Better storage and functioning markets are equally important because farmers need to protect the value of what they produce.

Most importantly, these interventions need to be locally appropriate. The climate risks facing a farmer in a dry area of southern Malawi, for example, may differ considerably from those facing a farmer in a higher-rainfall area.

What don't we know about how climate change will affect legumes – and where are the biggest research gaps?

We still do not have enough evidence about how all the different legume species and varieties will perform when drought, heat and changing rainfall patterns combine to cause a climate shock. Much of the existing research also focuses on how one disaster affects legumes and not how legumes cope with several disasters at once.

There are also important geographical gaps. Evidence from one location cannot simply be applied to another because soils, rainfall patterns, farming systems, access to irrigation, markets and farmer resources differ. We need more long-term, location-specific research that compares crops, varieties and management practices under real farming conditions.

We also need to understand the economic side of adaptation: which technologies farmers can actually afford, which interventions provide the greatest returns and which policies help the poorest farmers adopt them.



What are the top three things governments should do now to protect the legume farmers?

My review found that agricultural and climate policies are not doing enough to tackle the problems of damaged soil, water shortages, limited irrigation, changing pest outbreaks, poor access to quality seed and unpredictable markets.

First, governments must invest in climate-resilient production systems. This means supporting the development and distribution of types of legumes that are tolerant to drought and heat. It also means improving water management and strengthening agricultural extension services.

Second, climate information and early action must be prioritised by governments. Farmers need timely, reliable and locally relevant weather forecasts, together with practical advice on planting dates, varieties and farm management. Early warnings are most useful when they are linked to early support.

Third, reduce the financial risk faced by farmers. Governments should improve access to affordable credit, crop insurance, input support and reliable markets. Climate adaptation cannot succeed if farmers have technologies available but cannot afford to use them. Climate finance should fund farmers to beat the risks that farmers and agriculture academics are already expecting. Funds for drought resilient seed, weather information services, insurance and water management are needed.

Development finance should finance longer-term investments in irrigation, seed systems, storage, extension and market infrastructure that strengthen farmers' resilience beyond the El Niño season.

Protecting legume farmers from climate change requires moving beyond the idea that farmers should simply adapt on their own. Governments, researchers, extension systems, financial institutions and markets all have a role in making adaptation possible.

This article first appeared on The Conversation. Read the full article **here**.

IT'S A BUG'S WORLD

By Martie Bester

Most people regard insects as pesky critters, but small children often eat these creepy crawlies much to their mothers' horror. Although kids mostly gnaw on insects out of curiosity, a whopping 2,5 billion people, many of whom live in Africa, eat insects daily.

A smorgasbord of crunchy and chewy delights

Insects are the most abundant multicellular organisms on the planet and are thought to account for 70% of all species. Insects are also among the most diverse groups of organisms in the history of life. Numerous crops rely on them for pollination, and their importance extends into other agricultural and human health issues.

In fact, for thousands of years, people from all over the world have eaten insects. To date, 420 African insects have been scientifically recorded, with grasshoppers and termites among some of the favourites.

The Central African region remains the most important hotspot of having a culture of entomophagy (the consumption of insects as part of a traditional diet or as an alternative source of protein). The insects mostly eaten on the continent are dominated by the orders *Orthoptera* (grasshoppers, locusts and crickets) and *Coleoptera* (beetles).

2,5 BILLION
people eat insects daily.

Nutritional benefits of eating insects

Insects are also nutritious. Many insect species contain relatively more protein than conventional meat sources, like chicken or pork. Insects also contain essential fatty acids and important minerals and vitamins. For example, termites, when dried, contain up to 36% protein.

Because insects are an affordable and local food source rich in protein, they can be used as a meat replacement. Recipes vary by region and include snacks, stews and even stuffed dates.



Source: magnific.com

Insect recipes

All over the world, but especially across Africa, including South Africa, insects are regarded as a valuable food source, especially due to significant shortages of food in many countries on the continent. However, it is vital to prepare the insects properly before eating them.

Follow these important steps:



Wash the insects thoroughly.



Boil, steam or fry them for at least five minutes.



Eat the prepared insects directly after cooking.



If not eaten immediately, the insects must be preserved. Either refrigerate or freeze them or sun-dry them for preservation purposes. This way, your snacks and protein sources can last for a few days.



Some insects, such as grasshoppers and African thief ants, can be eaten raw, but correct identification is essential.

Termites (*nemeneme*)

According to those in the know, termites are one of the tastiest forms of protein on the planet. Apparently, they have a slightly nutty taste and are high in oil content. They are best toasted or lightly fried until they are slightly crisp. Very little or no additional oil is required.

Harvesting

Soldier termites can be coaxed from their tunnels by probing their mounds with long reeds, which they clamp onto. Flying termites are traditionally caught by placing pots of water under lights, which attract them.

They can be preserved by dry frying them in salt until they are crispy. Termites can then be made into a stew with tomato, onion and whatever spices you like.

African thief ants (*dinhlamakura*)

These huge black ants only appear above ground once a year, just after the first rains, when they leave their nests to mate, reproduce and start new underground colonies.

Also called “big bottom” ants, they are prized for their rich taste. They can be eaten raw – fat abdomens bitten off, discarding the head and legs. But they do very well as a fatty snack, like peanuts. For this, they should be fried lightly with salt.



African thief ants can be eaten raw or as a fried snack.

House cricket (*Acheta domesticus*)

Grilled house cricket snack

These insects are great with sesame oil. Remove the wings and mix them with a few drops of oil before putting them under an oven grill for about 10 minutes, until they become crispy. Another preparation is to fry the wingless crickets in a few drops of sesame or olive oil for about 10 minutes, until crispy

House crickets and dates

Crickets can also be used as a filling for dates, creating a contrast between the dates’ natural sweetness and the insects’ nutty flavour. Cut the dates open from the side, remove the pit, and fill with fresh or frozen crickets.

Caterpillars (*Cirina forda*)

The caterpillars can be harvested from Wild Seringa (*Burkea africana*) trees, which are found across several African countries.

When you get home, rinse the caterpillars thoroughly in fresh water. Next, gently squeeze out their gut contents, as these contain remnants of their food plants, which are indigestible to humans.

Boil the caterpillars in salted water for 30 minutes. Once cooked, spread them out on a tray and leave them in the sun to dry for one to two days, until crisp. Alternatively, they can be cooked over an open fire, which gives them a distinctive, delicious smoky flavour, much like biltong.

They can be enjoyed as a snack or used to prepare a delicious stew. To make the stew, fry the caterpillars in oil with chilli and garlic. Add the tomato, onion and capsicum, then simmer for 15 minutes. Serve with rice or pap.



Fried locusts. (Source: Krit of Studio OMG/Getty Images)

Long-horned grasshopper (*Tettigoniidae*)

These grasshoppers have long been part of the traditional food culture of communities in the Lake Victoria region of East Africa. They are usually green or brown in colour and are relatively easy to collect, as they are attracted to light in the evenings.

To prepare them, remove their wings before eating them raw. Alternatively, they can be boiled or fried, depending on your preference.

Mopane worms (*Gonimbrasia belina*)

After harvesting the mopane worms, gently squeeze out all their gut contents, starting at the head and working towards the tail. Rinse them thoroughly in cold water, then boil for approximately 15 minutes, adding salt to taste. Allow them to cool before spreading them out in the sun to dry for a few days. Alternatively, smoke them until completely dry.

Dried mopane worms can be enjoyed as a snack, either on their own or served with pap. They can also be rehydrated and cooked into a delicious meal.

To prepare them, soak one cup of dried mopane worms in hot water for approximately 30 minutes, then rinse in cold water. Place them in a pot with half a fried onion, two tomatoes, curry powder and green pepper. Add half a cup of water and half a teaspoon of salt, then stir to combine. Bring to a boil and simmer for approximately 20 minutes.

Hormone-free, locally sourced, organic and free-range, edible insects deserve a place on every health-conscious food lover's menu.



Mopane worms are enjoyed as a delicacy in Africa. (Source: matomani.com)

The prevalence of insects makes them ideal as a food source

Currently, 1 trillion to 1,2 trillion insects are raised on farms annually for food and animal feed.

There are currently between 79 billion and 94 billion insects alive on farms globally on an average day.

While it is unclear what welfare reforms might best improve the lives of insects on farms, it seems possible that standardised training on best practices, and potentially slaughter reform, are promising ways to improve insect welfare on farms.

The industry is rapidly growing. Millions of dollars have been invested in startups that are working to industrialise the industry, especially to produce insect alternatives to animal feed and fishmeal. This also means that the scale could increase by one or more orders of magnitude in the near future.

Taxonomic group	Slaughtered, sold live or dead (pre-processing annually)	Alive on an average day (mean)
Crickets	370B to 430B	34 to 41
Mealworms	290B to 310B	25 to 31
Black Soldier Flies	190B to 300B	8,1 to 16
Other Insects	120B to 180B	4,8 to 15
All Insects	1T to 1,2T	79 to 94

Tabel 1: Annual worldwide prevalence of edible insects.
Source: Rowe, A. (2020).

**These estimates only include insects whose bodies are eaten in whole or powdered form for food and animal feed.*

I want to encourage readers to send their edible insect recipes and photos to martie@proagri.co.za. Your recipe might be featured in either part 2 or part 3 of this article series.



Source: Curated Lifestyle | Unsplash

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The Conversation. Read the article here: Africa's superfood heroes – from teff to insects – deserve more attention.

The Conversation. Read the article here: Fried, steamed or toasted: here are the best ways to cook insects.

Cheetah Conservation

Botswana livestock guard dogs are trained to use their superpowers to protect livestock herds

By Martie Bester



Farmer Abrahm with his much-loved livestock guarding dog.

To reduce conflict between cheetahs and livestock, Cheetah Conservation Botswana (CCB) trains a local breed of Tswana livestock guarding dogs to protect livestock from any carnivore attacks. Since its inception in 2013, the livestock guard dog (LGD) placement programme has placed over 130 LGDs with farmers in need.

But where do the dogs come from, and what might their lives have been before their arrival at CCB?

From village pups to livestock guardians

"We get puppies from a variety of places. Firstly, we always check with local shelters to see if they have any puppies that would fit the bill," says Jane Horgan, researcher, Farming for Conservation (FFC) supervisor and PhD candidate at CCB. "Namely, they have to be under three months of age, healthy Tswana dogs with short coats and not too shy and not too boisterous."

Jane explains that if the shelters do not have any puppies available, CCB reaches out to their network of farmers and community members to see whether there are any unwanted puppies they could purchase. "It's hard to know what their lives were like before they come to CCB, but we suspect most have just been unwanted village dogs."

The superpower of the Tswana dogs is that they are perfectly adapted to the Kalahari. "This is a pretty harsh environment, and these small dogs have to contend with temperatures that range from 40 degrees plus to sub-zero temperatures, rocky and sandy terrain and a slew of local diseases, parasites, snakes and carnivores.

According to Jane, the dogs are physically perfectly adapted to this environment. Their short coats help regulate body temperature and prevent excess tick accumulation. Their medium size means they do not have high energy requirements and, as a result, need less food. They are also hardy dogs with strong natural resistance to local diseases.

"Behaviourally, they are also well adapted to this line of work," explains Jane. "More aggressive breeds like Anatolian Shepherds have been found to have much lower life expectancies and are killed more often by snakes and carnivores like leopards in other LGD programmes in Namibia and South Africa."

Although CCB still loses some Tswana dogs to snakebites, this happens far less frequently than with Anatolians. The team suspects this is because Tswana dogs tend to be more submissive and less aggressive. They are therefore less likely to chase after snakes or confront larger carnivores, reducing their chances of encountering them.

"They still exhibit strong protective instincts in the face of threats, but they respond in a more defensive manner, rather than with outward aggression. This keeps not only their herd safe, but themselves as well."

Building a bond with the herd

Jane explains that the training process is surprisingly simple. Puppies go through a crucial development stage when they are young, during which they form strong social bonds. By introducing them to livestock during this period, they naturally learn to bond with and accept the animals as part of their group.



Protecting and keeping livestock together are just two of the superpowers of livestock guarding dogs.

"Once the bond is formed, they protect the herd instinctively, thereby protecting them from threats as though they are all members of the same family," she says. "In terms of training, this means the priority really is to keep the puppy healthy and curtail any naughty behaviours if and when they crop up. The rest, including the dog staying with their herd and protecting them, everything just happens naturally."

There is an adjustment period as the dog transitions its bond from its original herd to its new one, but this usually happens smoothly. Jane explains that the dog is kept in the kraal for a few days to strengthen this new bond before it begins accompanying the herd into the veld.

"Similarly, the farmer must adapt to having a new working member on the farm by making sure they check on the puppy regularly and keep it healthy and well-behaved. We check in on the farmer one month after we place the puppy and make sure the dog is happy, healthy, and working well for the farmer.

The team then checks with farmers three, six and 12 months after placement to ensure that everything is going well, and to assess whether any (if any) livestock losses have occurred, and, if so, how many.

"This also gives us a chance to support the farmer if they have any problems or issues, which is rare. We also have an open-door policy, so if any farmer has questions or concerns, they can contact us, and we can offer advice and support either over the phone or with a farm visit. "

Because the Tswana dogs are trained to use their natural instincts in the best interests of their herd, LGSs respond to an approaching cheetah or other predators by relying primarily on their keen sense of smell to detect danger. They then alert both the livestock and the farmer, giving them time to respond to the potential threat.

"A dog's superpower is its sense of smell. As such, a dog can smell the approach of a carnivore long before the herd or a herder will," Jane says. "When they detect the threat, they bark in warning, which alerts the herd (and the herder, if the farm has one)."

This usually encourages the livestock to gather together. In some cases, the dogs will instinctively herd them into a tight group for added protection.

"When they are tight together in a group, they are much less vulnerable to predation. Most carnivores rely on stealth to hunt, especially the big cats. As such, when the dogs bark and alert the herd to danger, they know they have lost the element of surprise."

Protecting livestock and livelihoods

This behaviour, combined with the dog's loud barking, is usually enough to deter the predator from pursuing the hunt and send it in search of an easier meal somewhere else. "Because of this, an LGD rarely gets into physical altercations with carnivores, which is good for both the dogs and the wildlife!"

"Once the bond is formed, they protect the herd instinctively."

Commenting on the efficiency of LGDs, Jane says they deliver remarkable results, both in terms of farm productivity and wildlife conservation. "The farms where we place LGDs have disproportionately high levels of livestock predation and that is one of the qualifiers for these farms receiving LGDs through CCB's programme."



A bright-eyed livestock guarding puppy ready to begin its journey as a protector of its herd.

Read more about these remarkable dogs and the invaluable role they play in protecting farmers' livestock. They are a valuable asset on any farm; livestock is an important source of income, particularly where predator attacks have historically resulted in losses. And, as a bonus, they often become much-loved members of the farming family!

This article is part three (a) of a three-article series on the invaluable work of Cheetah Conservation Botswana. 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.

ROOIBOS

Part two:

Your Tea Does More Than You Think!

By Victor Moolman

Last month, we enjoyed a comprehensive overview of rooibos tea and everything that goes with it – from the fields in the Cederberg region to the various dishes made with it worldwide.

This month, we look at some of the specific markets using rooibos in South Africa, as well as Japan, where rooibos is becoming increasingly popular. There are, of course, many uses for rooibos we do not always think of or are unaware of.

South Africa is bubbling over with Rooibos

In 1993, the Rooibos Control Board (RCB), which was in control of rooibos in South Africa at the time, dissolved, and the management of the crop eventually became the responsibility of the private company Rooibos Ltd. This company still manages between 80% and 90% of all rooibos produced in South Africa.

Since the 1990s, numerous new rooibos farmers and producers have entered the industry, which is why we now see so many different rooibos recipes. For instance, Cape Natural Tea Products, established in 1996, exports rooibos produced by more than 20 farmers to international markets.

In 2026, no single company or body in charge of rooibos tea in South Africa. However, a handful of groups focus on marketing rooibos, such as the South African Rooibos Council (SARC), whose mission is to disseminate more information about rooibos within and outside the country.

Approximately 50 000 hectares of rooibos in the Cederberg region are used for rooibos farming. In good years, around 15 000 tonnes of rooibos can be produced, but this is not always guaranteed.

It is therefore extremely important for farmers in the area to know how the season will unfold. Dry years can cause a shortage of rooibos, but whether too much or too little rooibos is produced, rooibos has become more than just a tea in South Africa. It has become a vital local ingredient.

South Africans cook, bake, and do even more!

Rooibos tea is something of which South Africans are particularly fond, but our people, due to their creativity, has already produced many recipes that are not common abroad. Locally, rooibos plant has been used for many decades as much more than just a Sunday afternoon comfort drink on the front stoep.

The flavour of the rooibos plant is strong and familiar to South Africans, yet many people are likely unaware of the dishes in which the plant is regularly used. Bobotie, a firm favourite among local communities, consists of more than just onions and jam. One of the best bobotie recipes calls for two strong cups of rooibos tea, making it even more delicious.

This is the rooibos bobotie we have all known for years. However, not only traditional recipes call for rooibos; rooibos-glazed braai ribs are extremely popular. This is an exceptionally tasty dish and will leave everyone wanting more.

These recipes are uniquely South African and create rich flavours by using rooibos in unusual ways. In addition, rooibos carries the strong, honey-like taste of fynbos to new and adventurous places.





But overseas, something new will always surprise you

Japan boasts rooibos delicacies

Although rooibos is exported to almost every continent on Earth, Japan is one of the countries where rooibos resonates most strongly. The population is extremely health-conscious and constantly searching for new ways to improve their well-being.

Rooibos was already popular among the Japanese population, but in the 2000s, new measures and classifications ensured that rooibos was properly classified. Because of this, the plant's true health properties became better known. Now, numerous recipes across Japan's islands use rooibos in various forms.

Firstly, a unique recipe for rooibos-braised pork belly, known as Rooibos Chashu, is popular in the country. The recipe differs from South African versions and includes soy sauce, Japanese sweet rice wine (mirin), and regular rice wine. This makes for a richer, sweeter dish.

While searching for rooibos at street vendors and convenience stores in Japan, you will encounter even more interesting creations. One of these is rooibos milk tea, a cold drink enjoyed almost like a milkshake. It is particularly delicious and will delight even those with the sweetest tooth.

Yet there are even colder treats, such as rooibos milk tea gelato: a frozen dessert similar to ice cream, just a bit healthier. All these recipes require some form of rooibos or even rooibos concentrate. That does not even include the various fusion dishes that also contain rooibos.



We can certainly learn from the Japanese about just how delicious a rooibos dish or drink can be.

Next month, we will talk about the north of Britain: how rooibos took root there, and what farmers here in South Africa do daily to ensure every packet of rooibos is clean, safe and healthy.

Try this rooibos recipe!

Rooibos Nut Smoothie

Ingredients (Serves 1)

- 2–3 rooibos tea bags
- 250 ml boiling water
- 1–2 bananas
- 250 ml almond milk
- 1 tablespoon smooth peanut, cashew, or almond butter
- 1 tablespoon vanilla protein powder
- 1 teaspoon liquid honey (optional)
- 10–15 ml lemon juice
- A pinch of cinnamon (optional)

Method

1. Place the rooibos tea bags in a teapot or heatproof mug and pour over the boiling water. Leave to brew for 8 to 10 minutes, then remove the tea bags. Allow the tea to cool.
2. Place the cooled tea, bananas, almond milk, peanut/cashew/almond butter, and protein powder into a blender. Blend until smooth. Add honey to taste and pour into glasses. Serve immediately or pour into a flask.

Extra tip: Freeze the bananas and almond milk in smaller portions for a thick, frozen rooibos tea shake!





Visit SARC's website at sarooibos.co.za for more information about rooibos in South Africa.

DID YOU KNOW?

THE AFRICAN PENGUIN – Africa's very own little sailor!

By Loren Howard

He wears a black-and-white suit, brays like a donkey and has a built-in cooling system. Meet the African penguin, one of South Africa's most remarkable coastal residents!

When we think of penguins, we often picture icebergs, snow and the frozen landscapes of Antarctica. But did you know that Africa has its very own penguin species? The African penguin (*Spheniscus demersus*), also known as the Cape penguin or jackass penguin, is the only penguin species naturally found along the African coast.

These small, black-and-white seabirds occur mainly along the coastlines of South Africa and Namibia. Although they may look somewhat clumsy on land, they transform into agile swimmers as soon as they enter the water.

One of the African penguin's strangest characteristics is its voice. Unlike what you might expect from such an adorable little bird, it produces a surprisingly loud, braying call that sounds remarkably like a donkey.



That is precisely why the species is also known as the jackass penguin.

And what about those black spots on its white chest? They are not simply decorative! Every African penguin has a unique pattern of black spots, much like a human fingerprint. Researchers can use these patterns to identify individual penguins and monitor them over time.

Pink patches with a purpose

Have you ever noticed the pink patches above an African penguin's eyes?

They form part of its natural cooling system. When the penguin becomes hot, more blood flows through the blood vessels beneath the bare skin in these areas. The blood releases excess heat into the surrounding environment, helping the penguin regulate its body temperature. The hotter the penguin gets, the more prominent these pink patches become.

Love on the rocks

African penguins are highly social birds and often form long-lasting pair bonds. Many breeding pairs remain together for several breeding seasons, although they do not necessarily remain with the same partner for life. Pairs help each other keep their feathers clean and share the responsibilities of incubating their eggs and raising their chicks.

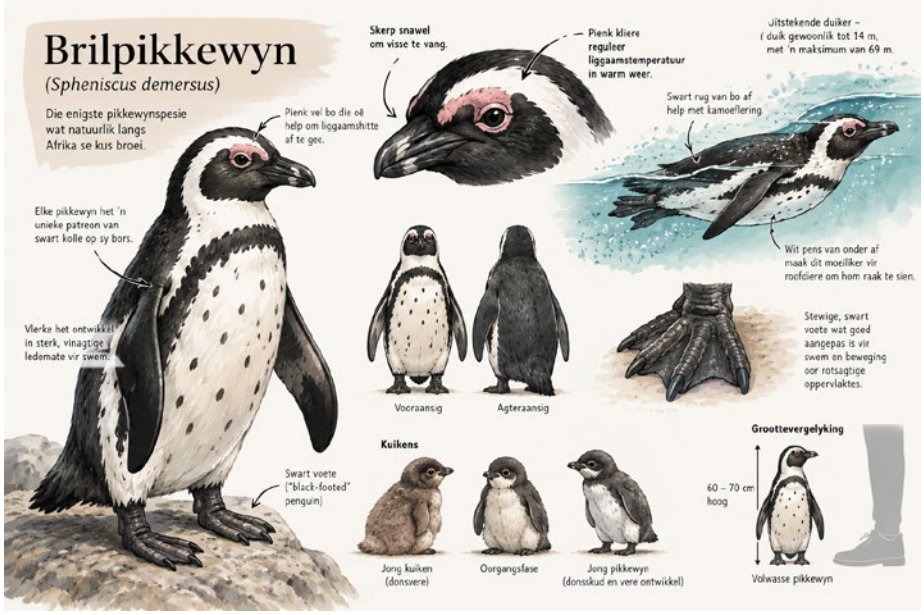
When their parents head out to sea in search of food, the chicks often gather in groups known as crèches. These gatherings offer the youngsters some protection while their parents are away.

A master beneath the waves

Do not let those short legs and waddling steps fool you. Underwater, the African penguin is an excellent hunter!

Over time, its wings have evolved into strong, flipper-like limbs that propel it through the water. Its diet consists mainly of small fish such as sardines and anchovies, but it also eats other fish and occasionally squid.

African penguins regularly dive to depths of several dozen metres and can stay underwater for more than two minutes while hunting for food. Even their feathers serve a purpose. Viewed from above, their dark backs blend in with the deep-blue water, while their white bellies make them harder to spot against the bright water surface when viewed from below. This natural camouflage makes it harder for predators to spot them.







Saltwater? No problem!

Unlike humans, African penguins can safely drink saltwater. They have specialised salt glands near their eyes that filter excess salt from their blood. The concentrated salt solution is then expelled through their nostrils. Thanks to this adaptation, they do not need to rely on freshwater sources to stay hydrated, even when spending extended periods at sea.

A little penguin in big trouble

Despite their remarkable survival adaptations, the future of the African penguin hangs in the balance. Where millions once occurred along Africa's coastline, their numbers have declined dramatically over the past century. In 2024, the African penguin was officially classified as Critically Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. One of the greatest challenges is the dwindling availability and changing distribution of sardines and anchovies, their main food sources. Commercial fishing, climate change, oil pollution and disturbances at breeding colonies add further pressure, making survival increasingly difficult. Conservation organisations are working tirelessly to give them a fighting chance. Their efforts include protecting breeding areas, rescuing and rehabilitating injured penguins and improving food availability around important breeding colonies.

Did you know?

- Only one: The African penguin is the only penguin species that naturally breeds in Africa.
- A donkey-like voice: Its loud call sounds remarkably like a donkey braying.
- Unique spots: Each African penguin has its own distinctive pattern of black spots on its chest.
- Natural cooling: The pink patches above its eyes help release excess body heat, keeping the penguin cool.
- Saltwater drinkers: Specialised glands help filter excess salt from their bodies, allowing them to drink saltwater.
- Faithful partners: African penguins often form long-lasting pair bonds, with both parents helping to raise their chicks

A small bird with a big story

The African penguin is far more than just an adorable tourist attraction along our coastline. It plays an important role in South Africa's marine ecosystem, and its declining numbers also serve as a warning about the growing pressures facing our oceans. So, the next time you see a penguin waddling across the beach in its black-and-white suit, remember that this little sailor has a remarkable survival story.

And if we want future generations to hear its donkey-like braying along our shores, we all have a part to play in helping protect the environment it calls home.



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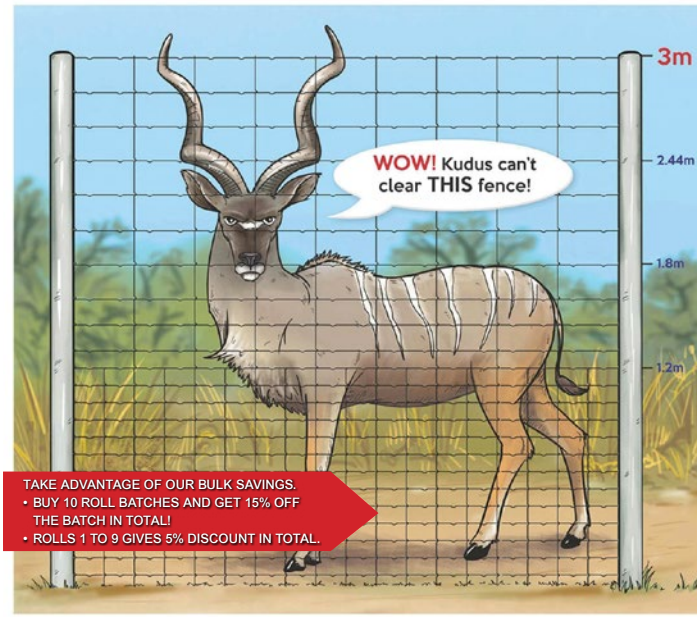

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