

Transformation TIMES

Doubling the deciduous fruit industry by 2050

A Review of the DFDC SA October 2020 - Issue Six

Thembi's Talk- Notes from the CEO

Optimism versus reality, the two are interconnected as we plan to “unmask” the future. One can only remain optimistic, but COVID remains a reality. Without delving much into the impact of the pandemic (would be repetitive in fact), the recovery dialogue is both optimistic and yet realistic.

As we “unmask” the future, we are cognisant of the “new normal” and that business will never be the same. In an investment shy environment, we are going to work double hard to leverage funding. As the input costs increase, producers will require almost double the effort to sustain their businesses. Unmasking the future also has to take into account our farmworkers; optimism alone will not secure their jobs but a recapitalized industry that steadies growth will be realistic to pronounce job security.

Coming from women's month, this issue would not have been complete without putting a spotlight on women who have got game in the deciduous fruit industry. The story of Marilyn Siegels demonstrates that one can realise their destiny at a later stage in life, that a giant leap in one's career (change), can be the best and most fulfilling, coupled with awards!

Newly appointed PALS Chairperson, Lien Visagie, is also another example of women breaking boundaries with a clear purpose in the agricultural sector. She emphasizes that “black farmers are now worthy members of agriculture, the business community and growing the economy”. And she intends to realise this with a social conscience in mind, advancing human dignity and breaking the poverty chain.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Thoko Didiza, also conducted a webinar in the month of August, highlighting the strategic role women can play in agriculture, and the need to focus on women funding and support for sustainable development.

September was heritage month, we keep on referring to the facets of heritage, culture, traditions, societal norms and standards.

With this “culture and tradition” in mind I sign off while I am inspired by Edward van Niekerk in entrusting agriculture-generational wealth towards his daughters!



Thembi Xaba, CEO

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DFDC, the transformation division of



Introducing the new chairperson of PALS and the way ahead



Lien Visagie, the new chairperson of PALS

Lien Visagie was born in and into the fruit farming world of Witzenberg and although life was not always plain sailing, she claims to have had a good life thus far. Adopted at the tender age of nine months, she eventually relocated to work in Kuilsrivier as a housekeeper, but the world of fruit farming called her back and she ended up at Donkerbos, a farm between Op-die-Berg and Citrusdal, on top of the Witzenberg. Soon she was on top of the world, getting married to an old school connection, Bennie, the love of her life for the past 33 years.

She kept on qualifying herself to do better and better in life, ending up working for and running the Donkerbos crèche and aftercare centre. Through all this she became a noticeable and solid pillar in her community. Then life really got meaning when she was introduced to black empowerment.

In 2012 CP van der Merwe, the owner of Donkerbos identified a group of workers on the farm that fitted the criteria and offered them shares in the farm Disselfontein that he acquired. Lien and Bennie were part of this fortunate group because of their hard work and dedication over many years. Eyethu Intaba (on our mountain) was established in 2014 with 70% share in the name of CP van der Merwe and 30% belonging to the empowerment group of 13. The mission was to switch this shareholding as soon as possible. Three directors were chosen for this group – Johnny Karolus, Joseph Xolisi Ndaba and Lien Visagie.

In the same year the Partners in Agri Land Solutions (PALS) initiative was established in Ceres. The directors of Eyethu Intaba decided it was a great opportunity to become a member. Lien kept on excelling and last year she was elected as one of the directors of PALS. It then took one year for Lien Visagie to become the chairperson of the PALS board. She is perfect for it. Because she cares, always looking out for the underdog, empowering people, especially looking after the sisterhood.

“You know,” she concluded her story, “like most things in life, making it boil down to being empowered and enlightened. As a young woman I always wanted, and expected, to be helped with things I then believed to be unbecoming for a woman. One day Mr CP van der Merwe said to me that it’s all about choices. If a bulb in your house has gone out, you can wait for someone to come and fix it, and sit in the dark. Or take charge and fix it yourself. That day, the lights came on for me. As a woman I don’t have to stand back for anyone.”

Moving into the future Lien says it’s time farmers and all role players claim their human dignity, to help the weak, innocent children and to break the poverty cycle.

Farming people need to get into the circle of ownership with new opportunities, planning and empowerment. The more people sharing in the value chain, the better it will be for the land’s economy. The management of PALS is dedicated to make transformation in agriculture happen. Not only in the Witzenberg region where it all began, but countrywide.

“It’s time that all role players in agriculture as well as the government stop bickering about land reform, land grabbing and dead ends. The PALS Initiative conforms to the standards of the NDP and has been proven to work. Together we can be stronger for a better South Africa.

“In essence in agriculture we all want a peaceful and growing country. We are tired of fighting and arguing about agriculture land. Through PALS many people came home. Many more should join in. Land ownership is happening in the right way. There is no destruction. Black farmers are now worthy members of agriculture, the business community and a possible growing economy in South Africa,” she concluded.

For the first part of PALS’s existence, they were looked at from quite afar. However, things are changing. On 18 June 2020 President Cyril Ramaphosa said during the Parliament’s virtual Q&A that it is clear what is possible if we share a common vision: “We must be able to utilise various options to empower our people and to make sure land is in the hands of our people. An example is the PALS initiative in the Witzenberg district where commercial farmers have been working with local communities and farm workers to promote land reform.”

The practical experience and establishment of successful land reform enterprises in Witzenberg positively influenced and inspired other areas and provinces. Plans for the implementation of new land reform initiatives in the Northern Cape, Eastern Cape, Free State and other areas are in an advanced stage with local PALS centres also envisaged.

Another interesting directional development is that, because the PALS projects are being implemented around country towns that exist because of agriculture, those towns are now beginning to use the PALS concept as the solution for problems such as ineffective infrastructures like sewage, municipalities and more.

Watch this space.



Watch Parliament's first virtual Q&A

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3t2zyx_kfw&feature=emb_title

(Start time 2.46.59 – End time 2.48.12)

**To contact PALS: admin@wpals.co.za
<https://wpals.co.za/>**



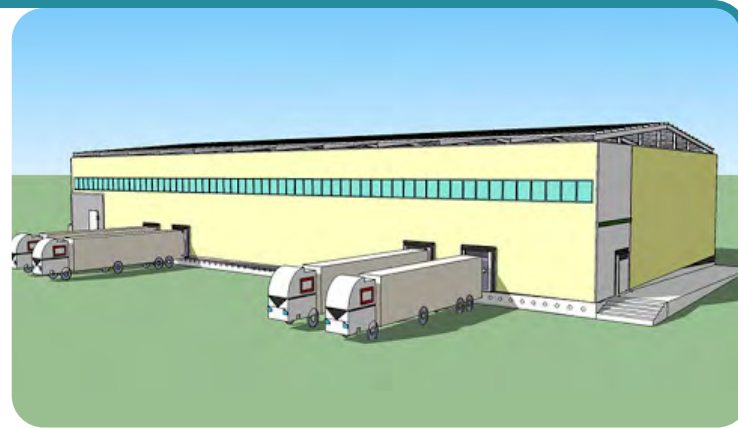
Investing for change – Overberg cold storage project

The recent national lockdown and subsequent impact on our economy together with the calls for the restructuring of many of the South African sectors to stimulate economic growth has emphasized the need for greater infrastructural investment. This challenge has been met by the Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDOA) and the Western Cape Provincial Treasury. These two spheres of Government have identified an opportunity for black growers within the pome and stone fruit industry to own and participate in the value chain through unlocking investment in cold storage facilities in the Overberg region.

This initiative forms part of the growth strategy of the Deciduous Fruit Industry (DFI) to “double the industry by 2050” through increasing black participation and ownership in the value chain. This initiative has been well received and supported by Industry and the black pome and stone fruit producers within the Overberg area. This initiative is the first of its nature and although there were initial concerns regarding the feasibility study and the location of the cold chain storage, the industry is working on these concerns and will provide the necessary platform to ensure the complete implementation of this great initiative and future growth.

Many of the previous economic development initiatives that were implemented in partnership between the Industry (HORTGRO and the DFDC) and the WCDOA were focused on a primary level. Through the DFDC Commercialization Programme a substantial investment was made in the production infrastructure. Hence the investment into cold storage facilities is the logical next developmental area.

The Overberg Cold storage project is a golden opportunity for all growers in the Overberg region. Recent expansion and investment in new orchards coupled with newer production technologies necessitates an increase in cold storage. Fruit (apples and pears) worldwide is being stored for longer periods to be able to service the market demands more effectively and efficiently. The increased phytosanitary issues associated with exports further increases the demand for cold storage. Hence this is the right move at the right time!



3D drawing of unspecified cold storage facility

The Overberg Cold Storage Project is unique in the following sense:

- This initiative is once again a clear illustration that public-private-partnerships between government, industry and business can bring about structural changes in ownership.
- This will be done through WCDOA investing R10 million on behalf of the black producers to enable their ownership and participation in the cold storage project.
- This initiative will further unlock additional funding through share acquisition from the producers and a strategic partnership whereby the producers will be investing in an expansion into cold storage. The cold storage facility is therefore linked to a bigger strategy with packing and marketing services that will ensure a commercial entity from the onset. This will result in broader impact to the benefit of all the shareholders.
- This is regarded as an investment opportunity for black pome and/or stone fruit producers to lower the entry barriers into the value chain that will create additional income streams through dividend flows enhancing the profitability and sustainability of these growers.
- The implementation of the project is closely monitored by a representative steering committee.



To transform is to renew

Marilyn Siegels, Western Cape female farmer of 2019

There is more than one type of transformation in this world. The most important one for the father and two daughters team of Protea farm was to farm for themselves. But then getting new life into old orchards was also an almost miracle transformation.

The year 1994 was a great milestone in transformation. It was also the year Marilyn Siegels (then Van Niekerk) achieved one of her first big milestones. Matric.

At this stage Edward van Niekerk, her father, was working for Brian du Toit on the farm, The Valley, in Elgin, but farming was nowhere near a future option in Marilyn's mind. With the influence of Brian, who was more than just an employer to Edward, she managed to get into Stellenbosch University, enrolling to do a BSc Dietetics. Food was already playing a role then, Marilyn explained. After graduating in 2 000 she was offered a job as junior lecturer at SU.

"The whole academy was white and there I was, realising I have to constantly prove myself. It was clear they still had to do a lot about transforming into the new South Africa," she said.

She stuck it out for seven years when she got tired of having to hear she only got the job because she was black, because of affirmative action. Still, farming was far from her mind...

A corporate stint of nine years as medical representative at Nestlé followed. Apart from the fact that food was a core element of her job, farming was not an option. Yet. During those years her father was getting desperate to realise his biggest dream. Although he did very well as a foreman and manager at The Valley, he wanted to do his own thing. He so dearly wanted his own farm.

"On 3 August 2013 that dream started to become a reality. It took me almost seven years of endless negotiations to finally receive Protea Farm from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform. I signed a 30 year rental lease with the government with the option to buy," Edward said.

After acquiring the farm he and Yolande, Marilyn's sister, climbed in boots and all to revive a badly neglected farm. In 2016 Marilyn started helping after hours with the financial side of the farming business, but had virtually no real knowhow of the actual farming. It took her two years of helping with the financial books and business planning to swap her corporate shoes for a set of Wellingtons. The future has arrived.

January 2018 she officially became part of the team with Edward and Yolande. The first task was to help plant an additional 14,7 ha of new orchards, financed by Jobs Fund. They were mentored by Michael du Toit from the Valley and Gerhard Taute of Fruitways on doing it correctly. They looked, they listened, they learned.

“I’m one of those people filing everything. I mean, that’s the blueprint for the next time you plant, not so?” Marilyn explained. Clearly her method of combining theory, practice, management and control measures is working. It took here only 21 months to be named the Western Cape’s best female commercial farmer. The criteria state that to qualify a farming business has to have at least an 80% black and female ownership (40% for her and Yolande each, with Edward the remaining 20%) and contestants are judged on their knowledge and command of the full chain of the business.

Awards aside, the biggest challenge is to maintain the most profitable balance between reviving old neglected trees and replacing the ones that are so far gone, they cost more to maintain than they can deliver. They take this on with leaps of faith, like planting 15 ha of new trees in one go where the going rate normally is around 5 ha.

“At present we cannot claim a successful business, but we’re getting there. Everything goes back into the farm, and one day we would like to earn a real income each, to be able to improve this house and surroundings. But before that, we need to improve and uplift the livelihood of all our workers. That is the real essence of effective transformation.”

Marilyn started her working life telling people what is good for them to eat. Now she is producing the good food for the people. Yet, being a woman and being black in a domain traditionally dominated by white males is not easy. But easy is not a synonym for transformation. Being resilient, being wide awake and focused is more the elements associated with this process. As well as the determination and belief that you will prove to the world out there you will pull this transformation off.

It looks like the Protea Farm team is well underway.



The Protea Farm team - Yolande van Niekerk, Edward van Niekerk and Marilyn Siegels



Industry News

Planned strategy session on DFDC transformation

The strategy session is planned between Hortgro and the Deciduous Fruit Development Chamber (DFDC) for 27- 28 October 2020 in the Western Cape with the option for participants from up north who cannot travel to the Cape to join virtually (one of the few positives of Covid-19 is that the lockdown empowered us all to be Zoom savvy!) The strategy will be facilitated by Prof David Venter from the University of Stellenbosch Business School.

The strategy session is meant to, amongst other, clearly articulate the “doubling of the deciduous fruit industry by 2050” and what needs to happen to achieve it. In addition, the alignment of the industry on the transformation imperatives will be discussed and strategized in detail.

Attendance is Hortgro Pome, Hortgro Stone, DFDC Executives as well as other participants.

The young lawyer standing tall at PALS

Yongama Femele is a young lawman dedicating himself to making PALS work. Originally from Sterkspruit in the Eastern Cape, he got introduced to the town of Ceres in the Western Cape as his mother became a seasonal fruit farm worker in the Witzenberg district.

After primary schooling, and after meeting Mr Mahohloana Ponoane, an attorney in the Free State who was also from Mlamli Village, Yongama’s home, he moved to Ceres in 2010 in pursuit of a better education to realize his dream of becoming an attorney. Two years later he met Gerrit van Vuuren and Altus Joubert, the naming partners of Joubert Van Vuuren Attorneys. They were instrumental to help Yongama obtain a BA. LLB through the University of the Western Cape.

During the course of his studies, he returned to Ceres during holidays for shadowing work at Joubert Van Vuuren Attorneys. That’s where he got introduced to land reform by Gerrit van Vuuren. After he finished his LLB in 2017, he returned to Joubert Van Vuuren Attorneys and did his clerkship of articles there as a candidate attorney. He worked closely on land reform with Gerrit and assisted on some of the PALS land reform projects.

In November he will apply for admission as an attorney.

“For our country’s future, I think it is important to extend the PALS initiative to all parts of South Africa,” says this young man on a mission.



Yongama Femele



Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Thoko Didiza

CHANGE THE NARRATIVE

Female farmers were given the opportunity to reflect on their journey in agriculture when they joined the Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Thoko Didiza, in a webinar to discuss successes, challenges, and the way forward.

The “Generation Equality” webinar was held at the end of August with more than 200, mostly women, attending the virtual meeting. It was a follow-up event of the first “Generation Equality” symposium that was held 25 years ago in Beijing. At that event in 1995, 40 000 women from around the globe congregated to develop a blue print for gender equality. The blue print identified 12 critical areas that need immediate intervention and change, such as access to basic education and health services.

Emancipation

Minister Didiza further highlighted the role of South African women in the struggle for freedom, justice and equality.

“Women have always been at the forefront of every cause, and yet women still struggle to get access to resources. In agriculture it is access to land and economic support.”

She said that South African women face difficult stumbling blocks such as discriminatory cultural practices that make it difficult for women to own land, gender violence and access to education and health. “So what have we really achieved since 1994?” she asked.

She recalled an incident when she became Director-General for the Department of Agriculture in the 1990’s. “I attended a meeting in a rural area and some of the men refused to believe that I was the minister. I was young and female. They called me a child. The patriarchy is deeply imbedded in the minds and psyche of our society.”

“And yet, although women face many obstacles, you will always find women at the forefront – also in agriculture. **Women are everywhere in agriculture. It is our duty to change women’s stories, by empowering girls.**”

Didiza said that everything should be done to encourage young girls to stay in school and educate themselves. They have to have access to basic human rights, to basic health. Young women should be encouraged to grab the opportunities that agriculture brings.

“We face a future where food safety and security will be everyone’s problem. Women should play their part.”

According to Didiza women’s representation in leadership positions in the private sector is limited. And yet women change the narrative when they become leaders. “They change perspective, they think differently, more holistic.”

Didiza called for policy changes to help empower women economically. **“I also call on women who have achieved success to mentor and encourage other women to do the same. We have to build a network of women in agriculture, to work shoulder to shoulder, and unlock potential.”**

Didiza said that especially small-scale farmers have the potential to grow the economy faster by bringing jobs to rural areas and thereby improving the living conditions for young people.

Farm attacks

Mimi Jacobs (52) a farmer from Rosemead farm, outside Bloemfontein, in the Free State shared her story that had nearly cost her, her life.

Jacobs was the victim of a brutal farm attack earlier this year. She was punched, kicked, stabbed and threatened with rape. Tied up and left for dead. She managed to untie herself before looking for help on a neighbouring farm.

Jacobs had only praise for her neighbours, community and the police who helped her through the traumatic experience. “Farm attacks don’t discriminate. They don’t care about your skin colour, gender, whether you are the boss or a worker. On farms everyone is fair game.”

Jacobs said that she will continue farming. “I am asking the minister to help us improve security on our farms. We cannot do this alone.”

Jacobs said that the working relationship between farmers, farm workers, the police and organised agriculture must be strengthened. There should be better information exchange.

Jacobs called for better and more police patrols on farms and urged police not to follow predictable patterns. “It is easy for criminals to infiltrate information systems and learn police routines.”

She said all farms should be equipped with the latest technology, such as surveillance equipment and use aerial drone surveillance. “CCTV cameras must be installed in all farmsteads, offices, workers’ houses, storage, and production facilities.”

In her reply, Minister Didiza said that:

“In agriculture we have to support each other and look beyond race, gender, colour, and creed.”

She gave her assurance that farm attacks were high on her agenda of things to do.

“Farmers play a vital role in the agricultural sector and the agro-processing value chain, to ensure sustainable food production and food security for the country and the continent at large.”

Didiza called on law enforcement agencies to leave no stone unturned in apprehending and arresting perpetrators, and asked stakeholders involved in government’s rural safety strategy to double their efforts in ensuring the safety of farmers and their workers.

**Generation Equality:
Realising Women’s Rights for an Equal Future**

#GenerationEquality

