

BREAKING THE INFORMATION BARRIER

USING RADIO TO IMPROVE SMALL-SCALE GROWER KNOWLEDGE

The South African Sugarcane Research Institute (SASRI) is continuously finding innovative ways of ensuring that its wealth of knowledge and technology is accessible to the industry. Radio is proving to be an effective extension tool in communicating and promoting agricultural practices in small-scale sugarcane growing areas.

SMALL-SCALE GROWERS REMAIN A UNIQUE AND CHALLENGING SECTOR WITHIN THE SUGAR INDUSTRY WITH REGARDS TO GETTING INFORMATION ACROSS IN A MANNER THAT IS SUITABLE AND RELEVANT. LANGUAGE BARRIERS, LOW LEVELS OF LITERACY AMONGST SMALL-SCALE GROWERS (SSGs) AND CAPACITY OF EXTENSION STAFF ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY EXTENSION SERVICE PROVIDERS. THROUGH THE EXTENSION VENTURE AGREEMENT (EVA) PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN SASRI AND THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS (DAEA) THE CAPACITY OF EXTENSION STAFF HAS INCREASED CONSIDERABLY PROVIDING EXTENSION SERVICE TO APPROXIMATELY 20 000 SMALL-SCALE SUGARCANE GROWERS IN KWAZULU-NATAL. HOWEVER, THE WIDE GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS AND DISPLACEMENT OF SSGs IN RURAL AREAS HAS MADE IT DIFFICULT TO MAINTAIN REGULAR FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT WITH GROWERS.

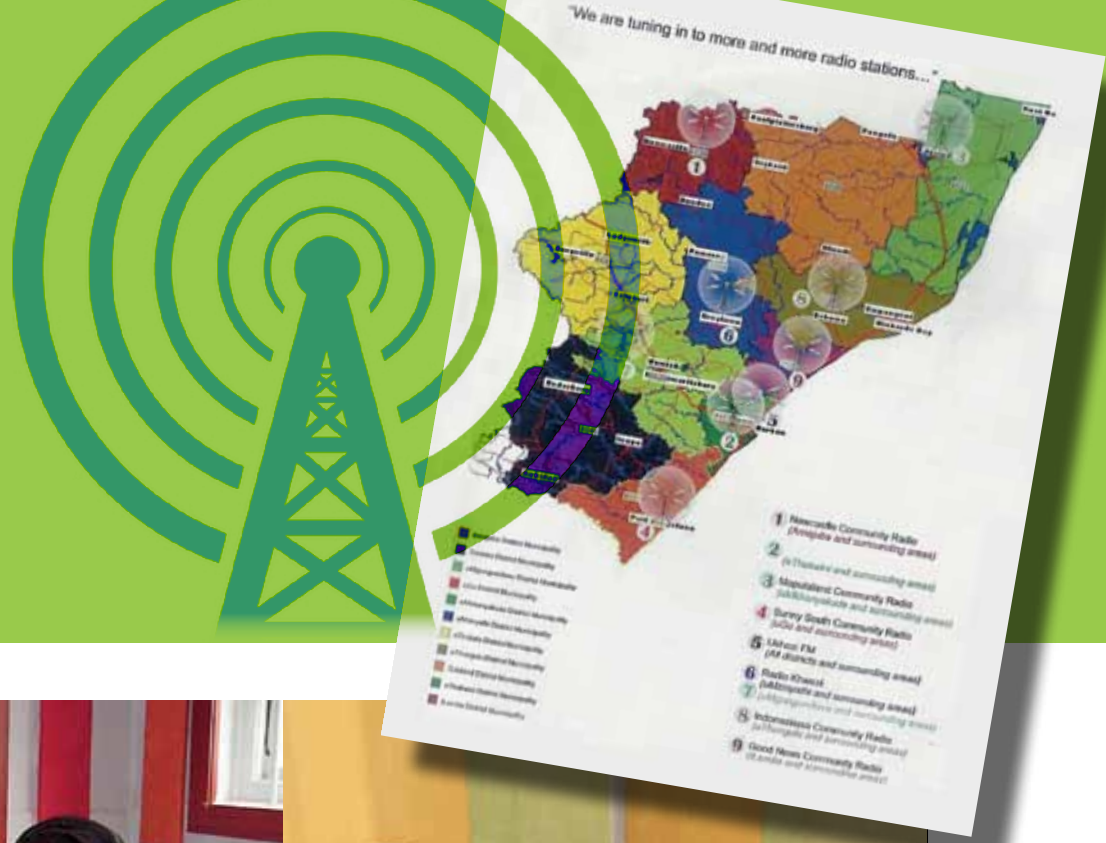
SASRI and DAEA partnership

With 89% of the rural community in South Africa having access to radio, this medium is proving to be a cheap, unique and effective method of transferring information to sugarcane SSGs. The DAEA has seized this opportunity through a three-year renewable contract for broadcast airtime and use of studio facilities with all community stations and the SABC. Through the existing partnership, SASRI have been able to broadcast sugarcane educational programmes jointly with the DAEA extension team on nine community radio stations and on the public broadcaster's Ukhozi FM. Five of these radio programmes are pre-recorded and five are broadcast live. Agricultural programmes are broadcasted in isiZulu approximately every six weeks, by Extension staff that have been trained in radio

broadcasting at Cedara Agricultural College. Between March 2012 and January 2013, seven topics have been covered including the following: fertiliser application, liming, programme planning, harvesting and haulage, planting and replanting, pests and diseases and careers in agriculture. This provides a fine balance between focusing on educating, promoting SASRI's better-management practices and encouraging the youth to get involved in the agricultural sector.

The Radio Forum

The DAEA Training Resources Development department coordinates the entire radio project through a 'radio forum' made up of representatives from relevant government departments, all radio stations and various related organisations. The forum meets on a quarterly basis to provide feedback



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on broadcasts and discuss issues or challenges that may have arisen. The forum also decides on topics to be covered based on relevance and feedback from listeners.

Successes and future plans

Radio broadcasting is proving to be an effective means to inform, raise awareness, provide advice and engage with SSGs by responding to their questions, either on-air or after the broadcasts. In the past year, 51 calls were taken during the live broadcasts and 76 calls were received at the SASRI offices following the radio programmes. Increased awareness through the broadcasts has resulted in an influx of phone calls to extension staff from growers. Through this medium,

physical barriers such as wide geographical areas are insignificant, providing an alternative source of keeping SSGs informed and updated with the latest recommendations and information from SASRI at no cost to the grower. SASRI will continue this involvement with a focus on monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness and impact of radio as a technology transfer medium, with the objective of improving the quality and method of delivery so that it continues to draw a wider audience. ☺

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