



# Make More Money

by Cutting Costs

*There is no respite from the financial squeeze that many farmers are subjected to. As margins are reduced, one is forced to trim input costs to maintain profit margins. Mechanisation costs are some of the highest costs that the farmer has to bear, thus making it a target area to cut input costs. There are a number of areas where one can fine-tune processes to keep the system as cost-effective as possible:*

## OVERHEAD COSTS

- The most effective way to limit overhead costs is to ensure that machines are utilised effectively. The more hours a machine works in a year the less a particular operation costs, typically a tractor should work for at least 1000 hours and preferably more than that. A Bell loader should process at least 16000 tons, any less makes it an expensive operation. An interlink transport unit should haul at least 40000 tons at a 25 km lead distance. If one is considering a chopper harvester one should try to be cutting at least 100 000 tons annually. Consideration should be given to sharing of equipment to ensure that it is fully utilised during the year.
- Automatic weighing systems on trucks can ensure that under-loading does not occur. It has been shown in practice that such systems can pay

for themselves within 18 months and thereafter show a profit. Weighing systems can also reduce overloading which damages vehicles and makes them vulnerable to accidents.

- One should ensure a good maintenance programme is in place to guarantee reliability and a good resale value.
- Some mills are starting to introduce vehicle scheduling systems to improve vehicle productivity, resulting in a massive saving. One user remarked "I never knew so many things were going wrong!"
- Ensure that benchmarking is carried out regularly to make certain that you are performing at "best practice".

## OPERATIONAL COSTS

- Fuel is a significant cost and the price is likely to continue escalating at a high rate. Using machines that are well maintained, matched for the job and correctly set up can prove to be very economical.
- Preventative maintenance avoids costly breakdowns and down-time.
- Monitoring systems improve driver discipline, coupled with incentive schemes have shown that they can reduce fuel consumption, accidents, maintenance and insurance premiums. In one case, a monitoring system paid for itself within four months, purely by the fuel saved as a result of reducing excessive idling!

## OPERATIONS

- Reduced tillage is becoming more prevalent in the South African sugar industry. This practice has shown massive savings in fuel and equipment requirements.
- Controlled traffic, with its many agronomic benefits, also results in reduced fuel consumption. This is due to increased tractive efficiencies and reduced draft on soil engaging machinery.
- The importance of tractor driver training should not be underestimated. Appropriate gear choice and throttle position have a significant effect on fuel consumption. This also reduces unnecessary strain on the engine and subsequent maintenance costs.
- Precision application of agronomic products reduces hopper and tank refills and increase field efficiencies, saving you time and diesel.

By following the guidelines above, a grower can make significant savings in mechanisation costs incurred in the sugarcane farming operation.



Peter Lyne (Left)  
Principal Agricultural Engineer  
South African Sugarcane  
Research Institute



Darran Boote (Right)  
Agricultural Engineer  
South African Sugarcane  
Research Institute



# MATRIARCH

EQUIPMENT



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**Tel:** +27 (0) 83 646 9666  
**Email:** ashleyb@matriarchequipment.com  
**Visit:** www.matriarchequipment.com