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Working together to Improve Small-scale Grower Productivity

The sugar industry has had a long-standing and successful partnership with the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs (KZN DAEA) to provide joint extension services to the approximately 22 000 small-scale sugarcane growers. This partnership which began in 1995 between the South African Research Institute (SASRI) and the DAEA, ran for over a decade and then fell dormant for a few years after 2007. This initiative was then revived in 2010 through the signing of the Extension Venture Agreement (EVA).



Billy Gillespie (SASRI ES) briefing SSGs at a recent grower day.



An EO from the department teaching a group of SSGs how to correctly apply fertiliser during planting.



An EO from the department presenting to SSGs at a demonstration plot.

The main purpose of EVA is to improve sugarcane production by bringing together the strengths of both the government's Extension services and SASRI's Extension. The partnership aims to achieve this by drawing on the available technology and information provided by SASRI and transferring this to growers via the additional capacity and resources provided by the DAEA's Extension teams.

LATEST TECHNOLOGY

SASRI's Extension Specialists contribute to the DAEA's Extension Programme of Work (PoW) according to the strategic needs of the small-scale grower sector. They also monitor and evaluate extension programmes in conjunction with the DAEA's Extension Officers. SASRI needs to ensure that the latest technology and resources are accessible to the Extension Officers for them to be effective and efficient in delivering advice to growers.

The DAEA's Extension Officers provide appropriate sugarcane technology and information to small-scale growers. This is done through one-on-one grower interactions, grower days and road shows. Each Extension Officer is also responsible for establishing at least one 1 hectare (ha) demonstration plot where a grower training programme is carried out according to the sugarcane farming calendar.

RIGHT: A group of SSGs learning how to effectively manage their soils to ensure good sugarcane production.

An EVA Monitoring Committee has been established to monitor and evaluate the performance of the venture and is made up of ten members with equal representation from SASRI and the department's senior management team.

AN IMPROVED EXTENSION SERVICE

The EVA partnership has delivered positive outcomes in several areas and monthly courses at SASRI ensure that new research outcomes and technologies are shared with the Extension Officers. Through this partnership, basic extension tools such as soil samplers, measuring wheels, knapsack sprayers, laptops, cell phones, 3G cards and basic office equipment have been provided directly to the DAEA to contribute to the success of the joint venture. In addition, SASRI shares a variety of information with the DAEA including technical bulletins, small-scale training posters (English/isiZulu) and sugarcane information sheets. There are also training videos that have been produced to assist in transferring good farming practices to growers on subjects such as planting, soil sampling, fertiliser application and leaf sampling.

The EVA partnership has also made use of an effective extension communication tool, namely radio. The DAEA have secured broadcast airtime on SABC radio which will no doubt contribute significantly to the ongoing success of the joint venture.

The sugar industry has seen an increase in the average yields of SSGs since 2011. This has been a direct result of coordinated and improved extension services and associated support delivered to the SSGs through EVA. In addition to the improved yields and income of growers through sugarcane production, livelihoods and standards of living have been uplifted in the rural communities.



Bongzi Bhengu
Extension Technology
Resource Specialist
South African Sugarcane
Research Institute



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