

UMFOLOZI GETS MAX ATTENTION

Kerisha Raghunandan and Theuns Theunissen

This April marked the first Monzi Agri Expo (MAX) agricultural show. The expo, co-ordinated by Alex Searle (SASRI Extension Specialist), is the first of its kind in the area and aims to promote agriculture and attract visitors to the awe-inspiring Umfolozi region - best known for its incredible landscapes and infamous Hluhluwe Game Reserve. The show took place over two days (13 – 14 April) and included fun activities for the whole family as well as scientific sugarcane presentations and supplier exhibitions for growers.

MAX entertainment

The inaugural expo provided for a technical speakers' programme, agricultural-related companies to exhibit their vast range of products, rounds of golf, and an evening with well-known Springbok, Butch James and rugby player, Craig McIntosh. SA Canegrowers, SASRI and the FAS Agricultural Laboratory attended the expo and had stalls on both days, along with 55 other exhibitors. SA Canegrowers and SASRI scientists had time slots for presentations and welcomed growers and other stakeholders to the stand for information and conversation. The other exhibits displayed produce, technologies, innovations, implements, machinery, vehicles, and new methods of conducting farming activities.

MAXing out your knowledge

The technical sugarcane presentations brought a rather unique 'conference-esque' spin to the show with internationally-recognised specialists presenting their published scientific and economic research. The focus was on technologies relevant to sugarcane farming, whose application or use may boost income and save costs, to promote the sustainability of sugarcane farming in a forever-changing agricultural environment.

Growers were given a chance to interact with specialists through these talks, allowing them to expand their knowledge on scientific advances being made in the industry.



Below is the list of speakers and topics covered:

- Dr Abraham Singels**
 Review of the SA Sugar industry 2017/18 season as well as an insightful discussion into questioning whether less rainfall could be the new 'normal'.
- Dimpho Elephant**
 Effects of surface applied lime and gypsum on soil properties and yields of sugarcane ratoon crops.
- Dr Neil Miles**
 Prediction of the contribution of soil nitrogen mineralisation to crop fertiliser nitrogen requirements.
- Dr Riekert van Heerden**
 A new decision-making framework for developing variety specific chemical ripening recommendations.
- Richard Howes**
 Analysis of long-term rainfall in the Felixton mill supply area: An investigation of derivatives as a hedging mechanism against drought. Howes also demonstrated the Womoba drone and took aerial photographs of the expo.
- Dr Thomas Funke**
 Biogas from sugar cane: A system for sustainability.

The event brought together a confluence of interests, from those who prefer a local platform to learn about scientific research to family-orientated fun. There were even drone demonstrations for the tech-savvy growers and helicopter flips for the whole family. The relaxed setting, array of activities and great weather created an ideal environment for networking opportunities. The show was a success in its very first year and a date has already been set for the next event. Be sure to diarise the weekend of 26 April 2019 for a weekend of MAXimum fun.

To keep up to date with future events or to check out this year's show, Like and Share the Monzi Agri Expo Facebook page.

Kerisha Raghunandan is SASRI's Publications Officer and Theuns Theunissen is Canegrowers' Regional Manager: Northern Zululand & Elephant Coast

Left: Crafts and food stalls at the show.

Top right: Employees from SA Canegrowers – Jacques Schoeman (Senior Regional Manager: Irrigated North), Theuns Theunissen (Regional Manager: Northern Zululand & Elephant Coast), Glantine Mashile (Senior Regional Manager: North Coast and Zululand), and Christopher Gemmill (Area Manager: Komati).

Second right: SASRI produces a variety of sugarcane-related publications to assist growers with their farming operations.

Third right: Michelle Binedell (SASRI Knowledge Manager) standing next to Variety N57 at the CANEGROWERS stand.

Bottom right: Dimpho Elephant (SASRI Assistant Research Officer) promoting the FAS Analytical Laboratory.

