



The make-up of a farmer

– personal insights *about* farmers *from* farmers

Wilna Stones
SUBTROP

In an area like Letaba and Hoedspruit, there are many amazing farmers. This makes it difficult to profile a single farmer. I therefore chose to look at the farmers in my area in general: why are they so amazing? What do they have in common? What is the make-up of a good, successful, sustainable farmer?

I asked several farmers in my area and this is what they answered:

Why are you in the farming business?

Most farmers indicated that they grew up on a farm. Their interest in agriculture was stimulated by their fathers. All of them had a love for the environment, nature and the land. Farming is in their genes.

What, in your opinion, are the top five qualities or characteristics of a good farmer?

- More than half of the farmers indicated that he must have a firm relationship with God. He must have faith.
- The second most important criterion was passion – a farmer must have

passion for his crop, the soil, everything to do with farming.

- Good, sound human relationships are crucial to the success in farming. A farmer must know how to work with people. He must be fair, transparent and consistent in dealings with his farm labour. This also involves good communication with his labour, with fellow farmers. He must know when to stand firm and when to give in.
- Knowledge of the crop, the product you are farming with. A farmer must know everything about his crop, from horticulture to pathology, marketing and finance. Practical knowledge is crucial.
- A farmer must have energy and be innovative. He must be willing to get his hands dirty. He has to be on top of the game all the time.
- One farmer indicated that a farmer must have a good wife. A woman of substance, who can back him up, be strong when he is weak.

Do you think there is a future for agriculture in South Africa?

Three quarters (75%) of the farmers indicated that “yes, there is definitely a future”. People must eat and there are

many opportunities in agriculture. The secret is that one must be optimistic, have the right attitude, have endurance and the willingness to change and adapt. Adapt not only to new technologies, but also to the political situation in our wonderful country.

What in your opinion are your top five challenges on your own farm at the moment?

- The political landscape in our country. The land claims that have reopened. This makes it a challenge to stay positive.
- The ever increasing input costs, from labour to energy costs. It is a challenge to stay abreast of these increases. It requires discipline and planning; keeping the overhead costs to a minimum.
- To optimise productivity. This not only includes the labour’s productivity, but also the crop’s productivity. Agriculture is about economy of scale.
- Climate change: it is more challenging to produce a top quality product in changing, unfavourable weather conditions.
- To be able to choose the right marketing channel.

- Other challenges that were mentioned, were that some of the rural areas are becoming desolate, and the implementation of mechanisation on farm.

What is your message to fellow framers?

- Take responsibility for the spiritual growth of your family and your farm labour. Be willing and daring to do this and see what will happen.
- Stay positive at all times. Guard your heart and do not let any negative feelings penetrate your system. If you allow this to happen, you will battle to farm.
- Be motivated to contribute and play a role in South Africa and to make a success of your farming business.
- Adapt or die – you must be willing to change.
- Farmers must stick together and help each other on all levels of farming. They must not follow their own head on their own farm. Sharing knowledge is the magic word.
- Please start pruning.

To summarise

Not everyone can be a farmer, just as not everyone can be a doctor, lawyer or movie star. A farmer must have backbone, innovation, passion and a deep love and understanding of everything under and above the soil he is farming. He must be able to trust in God, be willing to carry on when all would run away; To be ever optimistic. Farming in Africa is not for the faint hearted. It takes a special kind of make-up. It has to be in your genes. **ST**

SUBTROP'S NEW MARKET DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

Derek Donkin
SUBTROP



Bonnie Buthelezi has started as SUBTROP's new market development manager on 11 February 2014, filling the position previously held by Rudolf Badenhorst who took up a position with Potatoes SA at the end of 2013.

Bonnie has a Diploma in Marketing from AAA School of Advertising and has previously worked in marketing positions at Radio Jacaranda and the Swaziland Civil Aviation Authority. At SUBTROP, she is responsible for local and overseas market development campaigns and will play an important role in building relationships with government departments, both locally and overseas as part of efforts to gain access to new markets. We are glad to have her as part of the SUBTROP team and look forward to the contribution that she will make. **ST**

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