

2020 - 2021

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# ANNUAL REPORT

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**HARRY GWALA AGRI**

N P C

*united in growth*



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## Message from the Chairperson

### Dear partners, contributors and stakeholders

**I believe that Harry Gwala Agri presents the opportunity to help developing farmers and people in our community and in the process, secure the future of farmers and food security on our land.**

HGA continues to have a positive impact on the upcoming farmers and rural communities with whom we live alongside and each year, through the obstacles, successes and failures, our knowledge of how best to serve these communities develops and we are able to refine our focus as an organisation. With the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to play a major role in shaping how we do things and the uncertainty and unpredictability of our political landscape, what is clear is that the more self-sufficient we can be in terms of food security, the better, and imparting the skills to others to be able to be the same, grows as a priority for us.

One of our challenges as an organisation is how to determine success when we are engaging with farmers across different scales of operation and predominantly small-scale subsistence. What is considered as success in one operation will be very different in comparison to another and as our organisation was founded by commercial farmers and continues to

be directed by us, a change in perception has had to take place. A discussion in our most recent board meeting was a case in point. We partnered with the Mphithini Primary Co-operative with a little hesitancy in 2019, because communal farming ventures are often beset with complicated politics and, unless there is strong leadership within the group to guide decision-making and achieve consensus, it can be a lot easier working with one person rather than ten. We may look at the bottom line at the end of a season and think that not much has been achieved, but from a different perspective, a group of individuals are now employed who were not before, their business has grown and diversified, and the communities around them have benefited by having access to food where before there was none.

When we launched the student programme our goal was to create an opportunity for students to be able to complete the training required for them to obtain their qualifications. What we did not realise at the time was that for half of these students, the stipend that they would receive through their involvement would be the only income their families would be receiving exclusive of government social grants. The positive knock-on effects of the programme are beginning to be realised too with a large number of students having gone on to find employment after completing our programme, from internships abroad, to starting businesses in their home communities such as Zikhona Bhantshi who with a friend is now growing vegetables and supplying their local Boxer. Several students have been given permanent positions on the farms on which they obtained their training, proving that the programme can be a win-win arrangement for both host farmer and student as we identify young farmers who prove to be assets on the farms on which they are placed. At the core of the programme though is the growth in confidence that the students achieve having set out to obtain a qualification, often at great sacrifice to their families, and successfully doing so.

The work we do would of course not be possible without the committed support of our partners and I would like to thank the companies that have continued their loyal support this year. I also wish to acknowledge and thank our commercial farming community who have hosted students, mentored upcoming farmers and who make financial contributions towards the initiative. The funding streams to an NPO such as ours seem to ebb and flow over time and it is easy to become disheartened when times are lean, but I am confident that we will continue to receive the financial backing we need in order for our collective impact to strengthen and ensure lasting change in our region.

Finally, in closing, I would like to acknowledge our team. The strength and success of any organisation largely depends on the "men on the ground". Dylan Weyer is one of those men – dependable, committed and extremely competent. Not only is Dylan an efficient member of the management of the day to day runnings of HGA, but a humanitarian, who cares and shows his passion and deep concern for all the people involved, from both the beneficiaries of the projects as well as the students. Thank you on behalf of myself and the organisation. Your commitment to our cause is greatly appreciated.

Sarah Firth, thank you for all the time and effort that you put into the organisation. I'm sure it's not always easy as a busy mum, but your work is always done with your cheerful enthusiasm. I'd also like to thank our board of directors; your input and support is greatly appreciated.

**Thank you all!**

# The Team

## Board of Directors



**Rory Bryden**

Chairperson  
*Dip.Agric.*

Rory Bryden has been a commercial dairy farmer in Kokstad for 22 years and has successfully led the Board of HGA since 2018. He believes HGA presents the opportunity to help developing farmers and people in our community while securing the future of farmers and food security in our land.



**Robert Stapylton-Smith**

Vice-Chairperson  
*B.AgricAdmin.*

Rob Stapylton-Smith is a commercial dairy farmer from Eastwolds, Donnybrook and a director of Stapylton-Smith Farming CC, Baynesfield Estate and SA Large Herds Conference. He believes that HGA is a vehicle through which to redress the wrongs of the past in our country.



**Peter Button**

*D.Agric.*

Peter Button is a commercial citrus and beef farmer in the Umzimkhulu area. His involvement in the organisation is based on the belief that for farmers to be able to live happily on their farms in the years to come they need to uplift the communities residing around them by focusing on food security and education.



**Douglas Strachan**

*MPhil.Sustainable Development.*

Dougie Strachan is a commercial dairy farmer between Umzimkhulu and Highflats and has established a successful food security project with two communities. He brings a great deal of wisdom on the subject of poverty alleviation through upskilling farmers at the household level.



**John Bredin**

*Dip.Agric.*

John Bredin is a commercial dairy farmer from Ixopo and the current chairman of the Clover Producer Trust. HGA is a culmination of long and hard negotiations initiated by him to flesh out the mission statement.



**Leigh-Anne Hauff**

*M.Psych.*

Leigh-Anne Hauff is a registered Counselling Psychologist and married to a commercial dairy farmer in the Donnybrook area. She is excited about the role that commercial farmers can play in reducing inequality in our country. She believes that no project is too small and that connection and communication is key.



**Dylan Weyer**

Project Manager  
*MSc.EnvSci.*

Dylan Weyer has been working as the only full-time employee at HGA since April 2018. He is responsible for establishing and driving progress in identified projects as well as managing stakeholder relationships. He has a passion for rural communities and their development and this has helped him facilitate key partnerships between commercial farmers, developing farmers and students and the private sector.



**Sarah Firth**

Secretary  
*LLB.*

Sarah Firth has worked in the farming community both privately and for the Zwartberg Farmers Association for a number of years and is married to a commercial farmer. Mrs. Firth works for HGA for five days per month where she manages administrative tasks related to the operations of the organisation.



**Phila Mkhize**

*MBChB.*

Phila Mkhize is a Clinical Research Associate, but also passionate about agriculture and has devoted a significant amount of time to working with developing farmers in the Hlutankungu area near Highflats.



**Peter Christianson**

*CA[SA].*

Peter Christianson is a Chartered Accountant with over 20 years' experience sitting on the Boards and Audit Committees of several Public Sector organisations. He ensures adherence to strict standards of corporate governance and accountability in the organisation.

## Management Team

# The Organisation

## Background

Harry Gwala Agri is a non-profit company aimed at the upliftment of aspiring farmers in the Harry Gwala District Municipality of southern Kwa-Zulu Natal through skills development and education. The initiative was established by commercial farmers and founded on the belief that they can no longer farm alongside others who are unable to do so due to past injustices. It was felt that action needs to be taken to extend support to those for whom agriculture is an important or potential livelihood option and who have the motivation and will to improve not only their own circumstances, but who, with the right guidance and skills, can make a meaningful contribution to the local economy. In addition to this, part of the impetus behind setting up the company was the realisation among the commercial farmers that many had over time, sought to address the districts inequalities by establishing projects with their staff or neighbouring communities and that these projects would benefit from being consolidated under one umbrella in order to strengthen their collective impact and to grow the initiative from the platform they laid. Four farmer's associations presently underpin the initiative: Highflats-Ixopo, Ingwe, Zwartberg and Mount Currie.

## Governance and structure

Harry Gwala Agri was launched as a non-profit company in March 2017 and is a registered NPO (2016/140997/08), PBO (930066774) approved by SARS for tax exemption and a BB-BEE level 1 contributor. The company is chaired by Mr Rory Bryden, and vice-chaired by Mr Robert Stapylton-Smith, both successful dairy farmers in the district. The board consists of six other directors, all of whom bring a unique set of skills and expertise and whose involvement is governed by a shared belief in the organisation's mandate and guiding principles. Together they offer, without remuneration, invaluable direction and support to the company's management comprising project manager, Mr Dylan Weyer and secretary, Mrs Sarah Firth.

## Mission statement

"As commercial farmers, we realise that we cannot farm alongside others who are unable to do the same due to past injustices. Harry Gwala Agri was formed in response to this. We are a project and relationship-driven non-profit company which aims to advise, facilitate, skill and fund passionate developing farmers, whilst adhering to strict standards of corporate governance and accountability. In the spirit of Ubuntu, we know that we cannot help everybody, but believe that everybody can help somebody. In practical terms, this means that Harry Gwala Agri unlocks the resources (knowledge, networks, skills and funding) held by commercial farmers and other stakeholders and channels these towards selected educational and agricultural projects. By customising our support to the unique demands of each project, we aim to make a difference."

## Project focus

The initiative provides education and skills development to passionate upcoming farmers and existing developing farmers through the following two avenues:

1. **In-service training programme for agricultural students**
2. **Agricultural mentorship projects**

Engaging with the public, private and non-governmental sectors is also an important focus in order to garner support for the initiative and to publicise the involvement of those who make it possible.



# Student In-Service Training Programme

Our programme developed when we first began engaging with the Esayidi TVET College in Umzimkhulu in mid-2017 and found that there was no system in place for their farm management students to obtain the 18 months of experiential learning that they require in order to obtain their diplomas. At the time, this campus alone enrolled upwards of 200 students for this course every year with the vast majority unable to graduate because they were unable to find an opportunity to undertake their training.

Thanks to the establishment of our partnership with Pannar Seed and several commercial farmers coming on board by agreeing to offer students the opportunity to gain experience on their farms, we were able to intervene.

## Recent developments

Until the beginning of 2021 the focus of our programme was entirely on assisting the Esayidi College students, but this opportunity has now been extended to students from other colleges and universities around the province, including graduate students who are looking for internships to grow their work experience. To date we have placed students from Stellenbosch University, UNISA, Mangosuthu University of Technology, Tshwane University of Technology, and a number of different TVET colleges.

Our selection process has had to evolve to accommodate changes in our programme. Because we have students who each require

a different number of months of training we have moved from having one selection window a year to an ongoing process of receiving applications and interviewing students periodically, while keeping a waiting list of students that we can place as and when an opportunity arises. Students are required to submit their CV's and supporting documents in exchange for an application form which, once evaluated, determines whether or not the candidate will be interviewed. Their final hurdle before placement is to be interviewed by the host farmer. The contract period remains at six months which includes a three month probation period and is renewable.

60  
of 100

STUDENTS  
PLACED

Since the beginning of 2021 we have received over one thousand email enquiries (not to mention numerous text messages and phone calls) from students from academic institutions across the country and now have a database of 350 students from which to draw. More than 100 students have been interviewed of which 60 have been placed.

R1m+

COMMITTED  
TO STIPENDS

R1 144 500 has been committed to student stipends, excluding the supplementary income being received from some host farmers.

For 50% of students, the stipend that they started receiving upon enrolling in our programme was the only income their household was receiving at the time with the exception of government grants.

The average household size of our placed students is seven.

23

HOST  
FARMERS

The number of host farmers that have now been involved in our programme is 23.

54%

EMPLOYED/  
STUDYING  
FURTHER

Of the students we have been able to maintain contact with since they completed our programme, the majority (54%) are either currently employed, doing another internship or studying further. Of those that are employed, eight are working for commercial farmers in our district.

## Update on Walter Khumalo

Walter has already completed his first year as a Junior Manager at the Hauff's farm near Donnybrook after having spent a year-long internship on a dairy farm in California through the Future Farmers Foundation. In California they were milking 760 cows three times a day in a parallel parlour requiring two staff members whereas in his current job he is moving between three different dairies milking almost 2500 cows between them, with a team of 6 people at each dairy.

Although Walter says he is enjoying many aspects of his job from the pasture management to the breeding programme, he is preparing himself for a potential change in focus in the years to come as he is concerned about the substantial capital required to start one's own dairy farm. He has been exploring his options in the poultry sector and has been furthering his agricultural studies through the Peter Chard Institute in his free time which includes modules on poultry. He has also started a business selling chickens from his home near Port Shepstone. We applaud him for his initiative and ambition and wish him every success going forward.



Below is another star student emerging from her training at the Hauff's dairy near Donnybrook. Zandile Nzimande has been given an opportunity of an internship abroad through the Future Farmers Foundation, when COVID regulations allow for this to proceed.



Zandile Nzimande with host farmer Mr Mark Hauff.

## Post-programme support

Before establishing our programme we had little idea of the challenges that we were going to encounter once our students had completed their training.

The purpose of establishing the programme was to offer students with the opportunity to obtain the training needed to fulfil the requirements of their qualifications and although we were fulfilling our mandate by creating this opportunity, we wanted to ensure that students ultimately received their qualifications. We faced a setback in early 2020 when after several months of silence, we finally got word that some of our students' applications had been rejected with no explanation as to the reason for this.

Fortunately, through the intervention of our board member Mr Peter Christianson who sits on the audit committee for the Department of Education in KZN, we were able to make contact with the HOD of Education, Dr Vusi Nzama and only then were told what criteria needed to be met for an application to be successful. However, because the students whose diplomas had been rejected had left the district and returned home, some to the deep recesses of the Eastern Cape for example, trying to resolve the issue was a challenge.

One of the criteria we discovered was that students should be exposed to modern technology being used on commercial farms, such as the use of computer software to manage a dairy or poultry house.

Unfortunately, generally only the management staff are involved with this and so we tried to arrange workshops for the students to give them exposure to this, but these efforts were for various reasons thwarted. In the end tutorials were set for the students to complete remotely and this effort fortunately paid off and the students whose diplomas were rejected have now received their qualifications.

Of the students who we have assisted with their diploma applications,

74%

have now been accepted and the balance are awaiting the outcome.

Tumeka Sapo being taught how to use the software to prepare packaging labels at the Carisbrooke Valley Citrus packhouse.

There are still terrific inefficiencies in the application procedure and the waiting period for the outcome abysmally long with three months being the shortest timeframe expected for a response. The inefficiencies occur at every step in the process. A student, once having completed their training is required to submit a long list of certified documents that they are to acquire from their college. Some students complete their entire 18 months of training still waiting to receive a particular certificate that was earned before starting their practicals. In the interim they may choose to get their other documents certified but if three months has lapsed before submission, the certification is no longer valid. In other examples, some students are required to make a several hundred kilometre road trip to go to the college to submit their applications, simultaneously hoping to obtain outstanding documents, only to discover that the computer system is down or the lecturer to whom they are to submit their documents is not available. An online system of submission needs to be employed so that students are not required to incur the cost of transport to try and submit their documents, at times having to make multiple trips in order to do so.

The criteria certain documents are required to meet is unreasonable. The reference letter that the student is to obtain from their employer requires an official letterhead printed in colour, and an official business stamp. We interviewed one particular student in 2019 who broke down in tears during the interview because she had already completed 25 months of in-service training but because her employers did not have a business stamp with which to stamp her reference letter, she was not permitted to submit her application. One particular college requires its students to submit a 120 page report as an outcome of their training and are not allowed to submit their diploma applications until the report has been completed. This is despite the fact that the report is not a requirement for the qualification and other colleges offering the same course do not require this.



The pre-school classroom and jungle gym against the backdrop of the beautiful Carisbrooke Valley.



Children of the staff at Olivar Farm and neighbouring commercial farms, all thoroughly enjoying their experience at the Iminathi pre-school.



The centre is a valuable base from which to extend skills development to farm staff from across the district and of course of great benefit to the commercial farms from which they come.

Photographs taken by Iminathi staff.

## Iminathi Training Centre

Despite the challenges of running a pre-school and training centre during the COVID pandemic, the Reynolds and their team at the Iminathi Training Centre continue to have a massively positive impact on the community around them. During the early stages of lockdown, when their centre were forced to close, the family went about distributing mealie meal and dry soup mixes to around 2000 people. With schoolchildren able to return at the start of this year, 18 children enrolled at the pre-school which they are hoping to expand to 30 kids in 2022. The training centre has been busy and recently completed two weeks of training involving 60 attendees and covering topics from first aid to forklift training and citrus scouting and earthworm breeding. The latter course was run by a dynamic group of young agripreneurs who call themselves Agri Business Corner and offer training in beekeeping, pasture chickens, and conservation agriculture, besides the use of worms for composting.

HGA, through its relationship with Future Farmers, assisted with the placement of two agricultural graduates in October 2020 and they have proven immensely beneficial to the centre by getting involved with administrative and agricultural tasks on the farm and assisting with the co-ordination of training courses. They are particularly enthusiastic about assisting with the launch of a communal vegetable garden and seedling bank which will be of benefit to the local community who can access vegetable seedlings and be a space in which to teach the children who attend classes at Iminathi, the skill of growing vegetables.

## Background

The Reynolds family are dairy farmers between Ixopo and Umzimkhulu with big hearts for the upliftment of those around them through education and skills transfer. Mrs Sarah Reynolds began teaching their staff English in 2016 and this ignited a vision for a permanent facility on the farm from which people could be educated. In 2018 they converted their old dairy buildings into a training centre and ran their first course later that year. They then went on to construct a pre-school for local children in 2019 which HGA was able to make a contribution towards. The training centre now provides a base from which to offer agricultural-related training which is outsourced to reputable service providers and covers a range of courses from personal financial management to tractor maintenance. Beyond this the family have been stalwart supporters of our in-service training programme, hosting five of our students to date.

## Testimonials from the student in-service training programme

"I thank you for everything you have done for me. I don't know what I would have done without your guidance. My mother confirmed that my diploma is back and I should go collect it."

Asanda Jele

"Looking back at how I entered this program.... you're the one who made it possible, even when our diplomas got rejected, you never gave up... Continue doing the great work you doing! Thanks again."

Njabulo Makhathini

"Goodmorning sir hope you are doing well. By God's grace I am soo happy finally yesterday I called the college to confirm about my diploma and good news they are all out on the list you sent me. But I won't forget how you work and fight soo hard for us as students with DHET it was soo stressful I know and I thank you for being there for us. Thank you soo much I know you are continuing working out for those students who haven't get theirs and they will too. Thank you very much."

Thobekile Mhlongo

"Sir, I will forever be grateful to you for your help, thank you for all the support through this journey. Now I got my Diploma because of you. I am so humbled and grateful. I appreciate you a lot. Thanks a lot sir."

Sanelisiwe Gibixego

"Hi Mr Dylan.....I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, if was not for your hard work today I would not have received my diploma. Thanks for mentoring and motivating me."

Sisanda Yeleni



# Agricultural Mentorship Projects

Our programme developed when we first began engaging with the Esayidi TVET College in Umzimkhulu in mid-2017 and found that there was no system in place for their farm management students to obtain the 18 months of experiential learning that they require in order to obtain their diplomas. At the time, this campus alone enrolled upwards of 200 students for this course every year with the vast majority unable to graduate because they were unable to find an opportunity to undertake their training.

Thanks to the establishment of our partnership with Pannar Seed and several commercial farmers coming on board by agreeing to offer students the opportunity to gain experience on their farms, we were able to intervene.

## Principles guiding our mentorship projects

1. The initiative must come from the farmer or the community themselves, indicative of the level of drive and passion required to be successful in agriculture.
2. Financial investment in a project is designed to offer a 'leg up' but should not raise expectations of on-going support of this nature.
3. The objective is skills development through mentorship partnerships with the ultimate goal being the self-sufficiency of the aspiring farmer or community involved.
4. Project progress is monitored and evaluated through structured report writing and feedback meetings between the facilitator (HGA), the mentor and the aspiring farmer.
5. The mentee is required to display a measure of accountability and transparency with regards to the financial management of their enterprise and must, for example, be prepared to register their business with SARS if they have not done so already.

## Impact to date



## Update on Summerhill Farm

In 2002 Mr Ducky Ngcobo purchased Summerhill Farm. This farm shares a boundary with Eastwolds and so in the same year, Mr Robert Stapylton-Smith took up the role as mentor to the upcoming commercial dairy farmer. Mr Ngcobo has accomplished much despite having only completed grade six at school. What he lacks in formal education he makes up for in his positive, entrepreneurial approach to his business.

Mr Ngcobo continues to make consistent progress with his dairy operation and this is on account of several factors:

1. His positive, entrepreneurial approach to his business.
2. Meticulous fertilizer and chemical application each year as guided by Mr Graeme Horn from Omnia and Mr Steve Shaw from Farmers Agricare.
3. Wise use of funding that has been received from the Agri-business Development Agency (ADA) to dramatically improve the infrastructure on the farm over the last three years.
4. The ongoing guidance and support of longstanding mentor, Mr Rob Stapylton-Smith.
5. The important role that Mrs Zelda Venter plays in working with Mr Ngcobo to ensure sound governance of his business.

This year the R382 000 VAT refund from SARS on the ADA funding was judiciously allocated towards the construction of a loading ramp and race, more calf pens and the laying of shale around the new dairy. Thereafter, a further R75 000 was made available by the ADA and this was used to construct a calf handling facility.

After purchasing an additional 14Ha of land last year, Summerhill Farm now has 50Ha of kikuyu, 44Ha of maize, and 11Ha of irrigation. The one obstacle Mr Ngcobo faces is the need to put in place a succession plan in terms of the management of his farm. There have been two managers that have come and gone over the last two years and no-one currently fulfilling this role.

The governance of the business goes from continues to improve and involves a monthly meeting between Mrs Venter and Mr Ngcobo to discuss his financials.





HGA stands in the gap for upcoming farmers by linking them with agricultural specialists that can assist them with their needs. Here Mr Absolom Mazibuko of the Mphithini Co-op, Mr Graeme Horne of Omnia and Mr Dylan Weyer, HGA's project manager, survey the land in 2019 to consider the co-op's options going into their first planting season.



## Update on Imphithini Primary Co-operative

The Imphithini Primary Co-operative consisting of 13 members was registered with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in March 2018 and gained the right to occupy 20 Ha from the local tribal authority. Over the past two years they have reaped harvests of maize and dry beans and continue to reinvest their earnings to increase their yield each year.

As mentioned in our project principles, we would prefer not to promote the existing culture of handouts but rather provide what is needed to get a project started through a system whereby the cost is paid back by the project participants over time. In our first year working with the co-op they were required to cover 25 % of the overall cost of the project. This year the co-op has had some of its input costs cut through sponsorship but have covered 40% of the cost of the project, including the purchase of an electric hammer mill.

The co-op invested most of the income from the sale of their maize to De Heus in the first season towards the costs of the second season and decided to plant dry beans and white and yellow maize. One of the challenges this project has faced has been the limited options for mechanisation assistance in the area. A local contractor from Deepdale has been employed to date but whose implements are unfortunately not up to scratch which has had consequences. Nevertheless, the land preparation and planting was completed by early December 2020 informed by the soil test results supplied by Omnia and the dry beans then planted in January. Both crops were insured and fortunately made it through another season unaffected by hail but there were a few other challenges that were faced, most notably the amount of lodging that took place in the maize which may have been a combination of it having been planted at too high a density and then heavy rainfall and strong winds. There was also some evidence though of a late flight of stalk borer.

A different sales approach was taken this year with the co-op deciding to target the large number of communities that reside around them as a market. The decision to purchase a hammer mill was taken, inspired by the success that this has achieved in the Mazabakweni community where an increasing number of households have begun cultivating maize in their home gardens as the opportunity is now there for them to be able to mill their own maize. HGA purchased the hammermill on behalf of the Co-op but an interest-free repayment plan is in place for a duration of six months.

The maize and beans were harvested at a fortuitous time as the crop was ready for sale to local community members when the wave of unrest took place and left the grocers in the nearest towns bare. The dry beans that were planted on about 0,4Ha did well and a yield of just over a tonne was obtained and this was sold quickly and proved lucrative. The small amount of yellow maize that was planted (0,3Ha) also went quickly as locals use it as feed for their livestock. The white maize (planted on about 0,8Ha) has been sold both milled and un-milled with recent buyers favouring it for use as an ingredient for the brewing of traditional beer.

The results from the soil testing done in winter show the reward of soil corrections that have been made since 2019 and mean that the co-op will reduce their input costs in the 2021 planting season. Thanks go to Omnia, Geysers Fertilizer & Lime, Stapyton-Smith Farming CC and Pannar Seed for your contributions of lime, fertilizer and seed last season. On account of the success of the dry beans last season it is likely that the co-op will decide to increase the size of the area planted to this. Still having access to another 18Ha of tribal land, their desire is expand their project but their limitation remains mechanisation with another year of

sub-standard land preparation and planting having taken place and still having had to perform all remaining tasks by hand from the spraying of chemicals, weeding, harvesting of the crop etc. DARD were approached for assistance for the next planting season and initially agreed but apparently have budget constraints at present and are now unable to help.



Mrs Banangile Mjwara and Mrs Thembisile Sosibo celebrating the harvest of their maize which was all done by hand.

# Home Gardening

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought home the value and importance of being able to produce one's own food and this was stressed even more with the recent spate of unrest and looting that took place across our province and jeopardized people's access to food. The Harry Gwala District Municipality which is our organisation's geographic area of focus is home to numerous rural communities with only about a fifth of the population of around half a million living in the small towns dotted around the district. For this reason, we feel that HGA can have a noteworthy impact on improving food security by extending support to members of those communities who would like to be producing their own food but either for the lack of skill or access to resources, are unable to do so.

## Scaling-up the impact of the Strachan's food security project

On account of the success that the Strachan's continue to achieve through their food security project, a series of field trips were arranged to expose members of other rural communities in the district to the home gardening practices being employed. The first farmer's day took place in May 2021 in Mazabakweni and what was striking driving into the area was the sheer number of households involved in cultivation. This was the first project HGA came to know in 2017 and so it is very encouraging to see how it has grown over time, with an ever-increasing number of households now growing their own food.

A number of commercial farmers attended the farmer's day and brought representatives from their neighbouring rural communities to participate. Mazabakweni is home to a number of inspirational farmers including Mr Stembiso Khumalo and his family who have been farming vegetables commercially there for 20 years. Mr Khumalo walked the farmer's day participants through the different crops they are growing and the methods being used to achieve success. They grow cabbages, peppers, butternut, tomatoes and lettuce on about 10 Ha of land with produce being sold to retailers in Kokstad and Ixopo. Mr Khumalo is certainly one of the role-models in his community on account of what he and his family have accomplished despite very little outside assistance, showing just what can be achieved with a bit of drive, passion and determination.

Mazabakweni project participants demonstrated the use of the hammermill which has proven so lucrative for them and this was particularly helpful for the Mphithini Co-op members who attended the day and recently acquired the same machine and begun milling their own maize for sale to their local communities.

The next event took place at Lilydale Farm near Donnybrook in September 2021 and was attended by community members from the Eastwolds/Mackenzie area as well as Creighton. Mr Dougie Strachan once again performed a demonstration of the agro-ecological cultivation technique that has proven so successful in his project. A total of 24 starter packs were given to households wishing to start cultivating their own home gardens and the packs included a fork, a rope to measure out planting intervals, and fertilizer and seed. The next phase in the rollout of this project is to establish hubs from which fertilizer and seed can be repackaged and sold locally in the same way that this has been done so successfully by the Strachan's at the Mazabakweni and Umzimkhulu sites. Having access to inputs in the quantities required for small-scale agriculture is one of the major challenges that besets upcoming farmers and we believe this is an intervention that will improve this situation.

Distribution of starter packs at the Lilydale farmer's day.

## Project background

Mr Dougie Strachan has worked with his neighbouring community, Mazabakweni for the last twelve years after a staff member approached him for assistance with her home garden plot. Mr Strachan agreed and began with a demonstration to the community of a simple yet effective planting technique suitable for home gardens and this developed from a pilot project into a two-year Masters research project exploring how household nutritional intake could be improved. The skills imparted have been passed on by farmer-to-farmer extension to other households across Mazabakweni and has reached neighbouring villages as news of their success has spread.

The original project participants formed a stokvel and share the benefits of a hammermill which locals can use at a fee and the income derived from this has been used to allow them to diversify their farming to now include poultry. Sometime after the launch of the project in Mazabakweni Mr Strachan used the same approach to help communities residing on the farm he grew up on in the Umzimkhulu area which was incorporated into the Tranksei in the 1980s. Seed and fertilizer are bought in bulk and repackaged to sizes suitable for garden cultivation and then sold from a central point in the community by a project member. This season 250 bags of seed have already been sold between Mazabakweni and Umzimkhulu, giving an indication of how many households are now growing their own food.





## CHEP partners with HGA for improved food security

Brambles is the world-leading provider of supply chain logistics based on the provision of reusable pallets, crates and containers and it operates in more than 60 countries around the world primarily through the CHEP brand. CHEP South Africa's forestry and milling division owns 18 pine timber farms in the Harry Gwala District Municipality and Weatherboard (Pty) Ltd owns a sawmill and pallet manufacturing plant near Creighton which employs around 380 people. With one of Brambles' sustainability goals being to better the communities within which they work through improved food security, the company approached HGA in early 2021 wanting to achieve this for their staff residing on the 18 properties, some of which are located in remote parts of the district a long way from retailers.

The project was launched on CHEP's property, Runnymede which is located in the Swartberg area. There are eight permanent staff living on the property which increases to 13 seasonally. The staff have over time, tried growing different vegetables with varying degrees of success. The main challenges to overcome here are the bitterly cold winters with regular frost and snow; the strong likelihood of hailstorms in summer and some pressure from roaming

Eland and the resident livestock. Soil sample results were however surprisingly good and we forged ahead with preparations to make the area productive. The first task was to fence the plot and this was completed by a team of young men who we were put in touch with by Mr Russel Clarke who is the training and co-ordination manager for Makhoba Farms and manages the YES Programme which these gentleman had completed and acquired a variety of skills including fencing. It was good to be able to offer them further work experience and we would highly recommend their expertise in the fencing department.

The first vegetables were planted at the end of September 2021 and include spinach, cabbage, spring onion and green pepper along with nasturtium and marigolds to ward off pests and add to the aesthetics of the garden. Up until this point, entirely organic methods have been employed utilising lime and compost to prepare the soil in line with the results from the soil tests and the use of manure, compost and bonemeal while planting.

We look forward to a productive partnership with CHEP and improving the lives of their staff and their families through improved food security.

## One Home One Garden - Hlutankungu

We were first introduced to the members of the One Home One Garden in Hlutankungu in 2017 and were immediately impressed by the level of cohesion in their community and particularly their drive and passion for agriculture. The project involves 15 households who have come together and registered themselves as a co-operative. Each household however cultivates independently but benefits from the knowledge sharing and support that comes from their collaboration.

The exciting recent development to emerge from this energetic and determined group is that they have secured a market in the Highflats Spar and Triangle Store to which they will be supplying chillies, spinach, cabbage, dry beans, potatoes and green peppers going forward. As has been seen in other projects around the district, success breeds success and Hlutankungu now has a second organised home gardening group coming through the ranks, no doubt inspired by what has already been achieved by their peers.

The One Home One Garden team continue to benefit from the knowledge sharing that takes place at their meetings which now involve a field trip to a different members home each time to learn from their successes and failures.

The group also arrange a monthly flea market which provides a space for farmers to sell their produce and are hoping to open their co-op shop in the new year which will give local farmers access to appropriately repackaged inputs. Although the community was affected by the unrest that took place in August 2021 with two of their shops being looted, project member, Mr Nigel Dennis believes the community is now even closer than before and HGA has no doubt that they will continue to grow from strength to strength.

Mr Dougie Strachan assisting a participant at the Lilydale farmer's day

## Vogelvlei Farm Community

The Vogelvlei Farm Community is made up of people who work on the farm, and on neighbouring farms. There are also older retired people who have worked their productive years in the gardens, in the dairy, and in the various houses. There are a number of activities that take place in this vibrant community and Mrs Caroline Mackenzie, whose family farm it is, has been instrumental in encouraging their success.

On the farming side there are 30 households that reside in the community and vegetable gardening has been an activity long engaged in. Through our involvement with Standard Bank and Sutherland Seedlings we have been able to facilitate the sponsorship of fencing, gardening tools and seedlings to the community which has been gratefully received. Since our last report, the number of households cultivating gardens has increased from 18 to 27 and we are grateful for the small role we have played in the provision of inputs.

Other activities engaged in by the community include the baking of sourdough bread with which Mrs Mackenzie has been experimenting; woodwork projects and soccer. The local side, The Long United Soccer team recently won the Kokstad League and have since been promoted to a more competitive league. The quote below from Mother Theresa really seems to capture the ethos of this community:

*"I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot; together we can do great things."*



Mrs Agnes Lukhozi in her productive garden at Vogelvlei.

# Other Agricultural Projects

## On Wheels project

Mr Louis Kwashube is part of a six member co-operative located about 30km west of Umzimkhulu that is determined to make their land productive. The difference with this group is that four of the six members are wheelchair bound which we only discovered last year when we met the members in person for the first time at their project site.



Mr Kwashube had over a period of two years approached HGA looking for information on fodder grass for beef cattle, where to purchase bulls, land preparation procedures using kraal manure, where to sell goats, sheep breed options, the planting of eucalyptus trees, and the cultivation of dry beans. He had clearly been exploring his options. Mr Kwashube and his brother have title to 120 Ha of land that was previously owned by the Catholic Church near Lourde's Mission between Umzimkhulu and Franklin. The co-operative submitted a proposal to the Department of Agriculture for the establishment of a poultry project and it sounds as though this may be approved. In the interim, they have forged ahead with the planting of maize, cabbages and dry beans on one hectare over the last two seasons. Another one of the members, Mr Siphamandla Gumbi, is based in Durban as a mobility consultant for the company, Chairman Industries, which specialises in the manufacture and supply of mobility equipment for people with disabilities. With his expertise he can offer excellent guidance to his team in terms of what their project can achieve in spite of their physical limitations. HGA will continue to serve an advisory role in this project wherever it can and work alongside these determined individuals to help them make a success of their project. We would however like to make an appeal to prospective funders for financial support for this project and to anyone from their area with vegetable cultivation or poultry expertise who would be interested in mentoring this group.

## Brookside project

Brookside Farm was bought by government from the Van Niekerk family in Kokstad some 15 years ago and entrusted to the care of the previous employees on the farm.



In the last year however, the occupants of the property have come under pressure to use the resources and skill they have at their disposal, to make the land more productive or risk losing it. Aware of this, former owner, Mr Jed Van Niekerk and HGA Chairman, Mr Rory Bryden, agreed to assist with the planting of 50Ha of maize with Mr Van Niekerk providing the mechanisation and Mr Bryden covering the cost of the inputs.

## Franklin cattle clinic

In 2019, plans were afoot for HGA to work alongside Franklin dairy farmer, Mr Richard Mingay, to construct a cattle handling facility adjacent to the Franklin community in order to vaccinate animals against the likes of Bovine Brucellosis (CA) which is of great concern in the area.



As the land earmarked for construction was municipal we approached Greater Kokstad Municipality with our proposal for the facility. Unfortunately a whole year passed before permission was finally granted by which time it had become increasingly unfeasible for Franklin community residents to keep livestock on account of the fact that the vast majority of the grazing land they were previously utilising had changed ownership. A decision was therefore made to shelve the idea of the construction of the facility and to instead arrange a series of vaccination clinics. The first of these took place from the Mingay's dairy last summer and around 170 cattle were treated for liver fluke and ticks and 104 vaccinated against CA. Thanks go to MSD for the donation of the CA vaccines and ear tags, to the Mingays for the use of their facility, and to Mr Cornelius Kritzinger from Cedarville for running the clinic at a nominal fee.

## Siyabonga Nomlala's tunnel project

Mr Siyabonga Nomlala is a farmer from Franklin who, driven by his passion for agriculture, put together a proposal for a tunnel vegetable production project in 2015 and submitted this to the Greater Kokstad Municipality (GKM).



He had engaged UKZN, Cedara, the Department of Agriculture and Daisy Fresh Hydroponics for guidance on this and then, to his delight, his proposal was approved. In 2018, twelve tunnels were constructed and fitted with irrigation and the Department of Agriculture supplied the project with fencing. Sourcing clean water was his immediate challenge and a year later a borehole was sunk but in the interim, neighbouring commercial farmer, Mr Richard Mingay assisted by delivering clean water to the project.

Mr Nomlala has grown a range of vegetables to date including spinach, tomatoes, english cucumber, and green peppers which are sold to various retailers in Kokstad. Besides the tunnel operation, he is leasing 34 Ha from GKM and this season, with the assistance and guidance of Mr Mingay and Mr Clive Cunningham, planted 19 Ha to maize which Mr Mingay harvested for silage for his dairy operation next door. HGA was able to assist the project with a loan of 1 tonne of urea (purchased at a discounted price from GWK) which Mr Nomlala repaid interest free once the maize was harvested. The project has been of benefit to the Franklin community, employing up to 15 people on a full-time basis.

# Acknowledgements

The work we do would not be possible without the support of our partners and contributors and we would like to extend our gratitude to the companies that have come alongside us to grow our impact in our region.

Particular mention must be made of Mascor, Pannar Seed, De Heus, Dairy Farmers of South Africa, Meadow Feeds and the P. Trimborn Agency for your consistent backing over the last three to four years.

We would also like to acknowledge the four farmers associations who form the backbone of our initiative through their mentorship of upcoming farmers and agricultural students and through the financial support they have offered.



# Engaging stakeholders

Since COVID arrived at our doors in early 2020 the way people engage with one another has changed dramatically. Regular meetings in person seem to be a thing of the past with interaction shifting more towards virtual platforms. Despite the vagaries of social media platforms they certainly serve their purpose. Some of our students for example, got first word of their approved diploma applications via a Facebook post. HGA now has 3500 followers on its Facebook page and this and our website are important avenues through which we can circulate our quarterly newsletters and provide updates on our projects while giving publicity to our partners who make them possible. We still however prefer to meet in person wherever possible and continue to take these opportunities when they present themselves, our most regular engagements being with the local economic development forums.



# Partners and Contributors

Companies that have partnered with HGA and made contributions to our projects in 2021.

Partner	Investment	Allocation
 Mascor (Partner since October 2017)	Loan of a Toyota Hilux 4x4 Extended Cab	HGA
 Pannar Seed (Partner since February 2018)	R216 000	Student stipends and running costs of in-service training programme
	Seed	2 bags to the Mphithini Co-op
 De Heus (Partner since March 2018)	R3/tonne/month of feed sold in the Harry Gwala District	HGA running costs
 Dairy Farmers of South Africa (Partner since July 2018)	R15 000/month since July 2021. Previously R5 000/month	HGA running costs
 Meadow Feeds (Partner since August 2018)	R5/tonne/month of feed sold in our district	HGA running costs
 P. Trimborn Agency (Partner since January 2019)	R80 000	African female skills development
 The Co-op Community Trust (Partner since October 2019)	R5 000/month	HGA running costs
 CHEP	R150 000	Food security project to support CHEP staff

Contributor	Investment	Allocation
 TWK	R12 000	Credited to HGA TWK account
 Omnia	1200kg of MAP	Mphithini Co-op
 Geyser's Fertilizer & Lime	6 tonnes of lime	Mphithini Co-op



## A special thanks

For the past three years Mrs Lianne Ashton has generously given of her time to photograph our people and projects. Without her exceptional talent, we would not be able to show case our impact so effectively as well as grow in popularity on our social media platforms. We can't thank Mrs Ashton enough for her support of our initiative. Unless otherwise stated, all photographs taken in this report were taken by Mrs Ashton.







**Company Registration No:**

2016/140997/08

**Registered with Social  
Development as a Non-  
Profit Organisation:**

218-645 NPO

**Public Benefit  
Organisation No:**

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