

FARMERS WEEKLY ARTICLE – “WHAT LESSONS CAN WE LEARN FROM THE PAST, THAT CAN HELP US IN THE FUTURE...?” - FOCUS ON LAND REFORM IN THE RSA.

Compiled by Gerdie Landman – see attached CV – 25 February 2011.

Gerdie Landman has been directly effected by land reform twice before. The original Landman family farm “Mooivlei” in the Queenstown district, was bought out in 1982. The farms were bought at market related prices, by the old Government and was consolidated into the old Ciskei – as part of the Home land policy. At the time that farm had been in the Landman family since the year 1900. It was a very productive farm and in 1962 “Mooivlei” was judged the best Caltex Small farm (Under 1 000Ha) in the Eastern Cape.

RESULT

After almost 30 years, there has never been any commercial production from that once beautiful farm again. Lesson...? Any farm needs a skilled farmer with training or qualifications to be able to farm successfully. The one family who moved into the farm house, only enjoys the fruit from the trees that were on the farm, but does nothing more on the farm.

NEW FUTURE

At age 28 Gerdie and his wife Lorenda had to find a new farm where they could build their future... State land was advertised in Farmers Weekly and Landbou Weekblad – 19 portions of equal size in the Tsitsikamma. This was around 200Ha of raw veld, but with potential to be cultivated into pastures – 4 white flags which indicated the corners of the farm. Farmers had to apply for the purchase of these farms – and Agricultural qualifications or proper experience were the criteria laid down by the judges... and although candidates had to own up to R300 000 in assets of cash, they would not qualify if they owned too much. After a personal interview with the Agricultural Land Tenure Committee in Humansdorp, Gerdie was sold 1 of the 19 farms... Portion 12 of farm 788 in the district of Humansdorp. He was one of the 19 successful applicants from 1 200 applications.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW FARMS

This was a huge challenge, but very rewarding as we could plan and build from zero... we built those farms into the most productive farming units, producing over a million litres of milk every year. We took up State loans at reduced interest rates, and were guarded by mentors and the local extension officer, Frank Weitz, who is still the extension officer for Humansdorp. From the 19 farmers who started, 18 were successful.

Ten years after we took possession, there was a land claim from the Mfengu people who were previously moved to the Ciskei – for the same reason that we lost our Queenstown farm – consolidation of the Ciskei... “Removal of black spots within white areas”... after consultation with legal advisers, we as a group of 19 farmers decided to settle the claim outside of court... The Mfengu people with their structure, The Tsitsikamma Development Trust, was handed back the 19 farms after the old Government had bought the farms from us 19 farmers – again at market related prices. This was in 1994.

RESULT

Six farmers negotiated a lease agreement with the Tsitsikamma development Trust and leased back our old farms for 15 years... We maintained production and kept the farms in good running order... while the members of the Mfengu Trust received a good rental income from their land...

LESSONS LEARNT

The biggest lesson learnt, was to rather settle the dispute over ownership, before “drawing lines in the sand”. The farms that were given back to the Mfengu community, rapidly deteriorated and became an embarrassment to the politicians and the leaders of the Tsitsikamma Development Trust. It proved that intensive farming cannot be successfully conducted without skilled farmers, capital, and enthusiasm.

CURRENT LAND REFORM

Gerdie believes that Partnerships are the key to success of land reform... “In Humansdorp district there are several projects where the land belongs 100% to the new owners...” but the commercial production is done in partnership with skilled and financially capable commercial farmers... that way, the new owners can learn the trade, which sometimes takes two generations... while the farms are maintained and generate a good financial income to both partners.

MOOIMELK COW HOTEL

The Cow Hotel was planned and built to milk more cows than the Landman family owned. Their own 326ha irrigation farm, known as Wynandskraal, can only produce enough fodder for 50% of the cows in the Cow Hotel. Therefore fodder from 3 surrounding farms is bought in to feed the 2 000 milking cows plus their offspring at the Mooimelk Cow Hotel – totalling 4 000 head of Holstein dairy cattle – big and small.

“The ideal would be if one or more of these fodder supply farms, could be owned by the staff working at the Mooimelk Cow Hotel.” Gerdie says. “These people have learned the skills, have proven themselves as

reliable workers and managers, but they need to go into a partnership with a “willing and able” commercial farmer...” therefore, if both partners can own their own fodder production farms 100%, and they can then share ownership of the Mooimeik Cow Hotel – where both parties cows can be kept and milked in a joint venture.

The advantages are so huge... immediately the fodder farm has a market for all its production, marketing milk together, buying inputs together and using the advantage of “economies of scale” – while both partners have equal say in the Joint venture, each owner is 100% land owner of his fodder production farm. “This will be a guaranteed financial success, and all the other goals of land reform will be reached”, Gerdie says

FARMERS WEEKLY

Gerdie Landman started reading farmers weekly when at Agricultural School at Marlow, in Cradock – “We had to read English and the English teacher was willing to accept it, if we read articles in Farmers Weekly” Gerdie says. That is when I started following Simond Fiske and his views on agricultural economics... he was very stimulating and we enjoyed reading what he said at the time.

END.

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