

Communal sector requests state assistance

by Bonita Francis



Communal wool growers farming with sheep in the Eastern Cape, also known as the Province of Legends, are struggling with major threats such as stock and wool theft, predation and stray dogs, compromised biosecurity and climate change. These challenges can be faced with the government's assistance and by standing together.



Approximately a thousand delegates gathered at the Falakahla administrative area in Idutwya on 24 August 2017 to attend the annual congress of the Eastern Cape Communal Wool Growers' Association (ECCWGA). It was the sixth year that the five communal regions of the NWGA combined their efforts to host such an event.

Members of the NWGA leadership including Guillau du Toit, national chairperson, Herman Hugo, national vice-chairperson (commercial), Sipiwo Makinana, national vice-chairperson (communal), HB van der Walt, Eastern Cape chairperson, Machiel Odendaal, Mpumalanga chairperson, and Othard Klingenberg, chairperson of KwaZulu-Natal, attended the congress with all the staff of the NWGA head office in Port Elizabeth.

The congress thanked the NWGA for assisting wool farmers in the former homelands of Transkei and Ciskei for the past 20 years so that they could acquire the necessary skills to compete in the formal market.

In his chairperson's report, Lawrence Maduna from Sterkspruit said the communal sector was truly grateful to be in the unique position whereby communal breeders could contribute towards the genetic improvement of flocks.

For the past 15 years, almost 45 000 quality rams have been introduced to communal flocks, improving wool production from 222 610 kg in 2002 to 5 744 961 kg in the past season with an estimated value of R299 882 007 being sold in the formal market. This income is a result of both a dramatic increase in volume, but is also due to higher levels in the wool price, which is a perfect example of wool's ability to create wealth in extensive rural farming areas.

As the five-year contract with the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) has reached the end and the NWGA's many attempts to renew it for a further five

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years have failed, Maduna urged government to assist farmers by continuing the programme and being part of this success story. Congress also pleaded that the roll-out of the ram exchange programme be accelerated to meet the optimal ram-tot-ewe ratio by increasing the number of rams issued per year.

Solution for stock and wool theft

In response to the resolution by the congress about its concern about stock and wool theft, Allison Singh of Vodacom introduced a live-stock-tracking device that is placed on the sheep with a secure harness and monitors the movement of livestock. Farmers receive automatic alerts when the animals' movements are compromised. He explained that good cell-phone reception is critical for this product, but

Vodacom is also part of a global data service platform (GDSP), which further strengthens the network.

Lieutenant-Colonel Sello Rute, the commander of the Eastern Cape provincial stock theft and endangered species unit, said farmers are not branding or tattooing their animals. He urged the farmers to use only registered brands and tattoo equipment. He warned against people taking the law into their own hands and referred to a vigilante group that



HB van der Walt, Eastern Cape chairperson, with Xithulele Mbatsha, responsible for NWGA training and development in the communal areas.




Lawrence Maduna, Eastern Cape vice-chairperson, reported on the growth and development in the communal sector.




MEC for Rural Development and Agrarian Reform (DRDAR), Mlibo Qoboshiyane, addressed the delegates.

caught and punished thieves. "Farmers should report stock theft cases immediately, and not three months later," he said.

In his address, Guillau du Toit emphasised the need for government resources to continue with the NWGA's flagship development programme in the communal areas. "This programme is measured every year and the output and impact is phenomenal."

Du Toit thanked Cape Wools SA (CWSA) for providing funding to appoint six additional production advisers to assist in managing 1 195 active shearing sheds. He pleaded with the MEC for Rural Development and Agrarian Reform (DRDAR), Mlibo Qoboshiyane, to provide the support for the NWGA programme that had been pledged by DRDAR two years before, but which failed to materialise. "Farmers cannot live on promises, but a concerted effort from government is necessary to assist in realising the opportunities that wool can unlock for local, communal people."

Another resolution passed by the congress was a request for government to invest

in establishing a wool-processing plant that would be accessible to the communal farmers and benefit them. In a written reply, Clarence Friskin of Segard Masurel said the lack of processing plants in South Africa was mainly due to unfair competition from China, India and Eastern Europe. "In China the processing plants are subsidised by the Chinese government. They also benefit from very cheap labour. Unfortunately, in South Africa there are no government subsidies to assist processors."

According to Friskin the first challenge for a processing plant is that it takes a huge amount of capital to set up a scouring and combing plant. To be successful and profitable, the plant then needs to run at full capacity, i.e. 24 hours, for four days a week. The second challenge is to ensure that a sufficient quantity of the right type of wool is available to run the plant at full capacity.

He said to run a scouring plant (that is the washing part) efficiently, like the one at Cape of Good Hope Wool Combers, only requires five people. "If the plan is for jobs to be created it would make more sense further down the production pipeline, i.e. once the fabric is made."

In another resolution, congress urged government and CWSA to accelerate the building and renovation of more shearing sheds, the fencing of grazing camps, and the scooping of dams.

CWSA chairman Dr George de Kock responded by thanking the government for infrastructure development in the Mbhashe area and said that industry, comprising the NWGA and CWSA, have been reliable partners with government and would like to remain that way to the benefit of all farmers.

He added when the CWSA and the Wool Trust were able to afford it, equipment such as wool presses would be made available to shearing sheds. Dr De Kock pleaded with government to rather support the needs for infrastructure such as shearing sheds than to establish processing plants. 



Allison Singh of Vodacom introduced a livestock-tracking device that is placed on the sheep with a secure harness and monitors the movement of livestock.

