



south africa

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Improving productivity through new technology

Evan Enslyn remembers the days when his father laboured with a few simple pieces of equipment to plant, protect and harvest his maize crop. A primitive planter, a harvest crew for picking the maize by hand and a stationary thresher for separating the mielie (corn kernels) from the cobs were his tools. "It took hard work and perseverance. We physically did everything by hand," says Enslyn.

But today, Enslyn's Klipfontein Farm near Witbank, South Africa, has the benefit of new technologies. Crop protection products, new maize and soybean varieties, a field combine and a tractor with air conditioning have vastly improved the productivity of his farm and the working conditions for employees.

"New technologies such as herbicides have enabled us to move away from manual labour and move to larger farms," says Enslyn. "We are still busy all day because we have to look after business, especially in the office and the workshop." But by having more time to spend in the workshop, Enslyn and his workers are able to keep the farm's equipment in good operating condition. And because administration and marketing plays an enormous role in the success of the farm, having more time for marketing, office work and financial record-keeping is highly valued.



Enslyn acknowledges that new technologies sometimes cost more upfront but he says, “Making use of the new technology lowers the total costs and results in better profits that can be ploughed back into the farm to buy new technologies or improve business and marketing skills.” In addition, better profits mean a better environment for farm workers. “Workers benefit from higher salaries,” he says. “We invest in our people and provide training and food for them. We want our workers to be happy in their work.”

New biotech seed varieties, such as Bt maize with built-in pest protection, are a great example of new technologies that are helping Klipfontein Farm to expand. “It definitely pays to buy new seed technologies,” says Enslyn. Although buying new seed is more expensive, the added benefits help him save money in the long run because he uses less crop protection products to control unwanted pests.

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While weed control is important to the yield of his crop, Enslyn also wants to take care of the environment and the soil. “We need plant material on the ground,” he says. “The plant material will rot and will form a layer of humus, which will help nitrogen levels in the soil.” Enslyn is just starting to adopt conservation tillage practices and he looks to new research that will help him further incorporate these practices in the future.

Research for new crop protection products is also on his mind. He values the products and training that he receives from the crop protection industry but he looks forward to new products that go further to help retain



the natural balance of the environment. “Research is the number one priority for agriculture,” Enslyn says.

While Enslyn is looking to research to help protect the environment, he’s also doing his part to help nature find its balance. The farm has erected T-poles on the barn wall to provide a roosting spot for owls, a natural predator for the rats that can be found on the farm. “We also protect our snakes,” he says. “When we find a snake near the homestead, we try to catch it and move it near the rat colonies. The snakes move into their holes, the rats move out and the snakes collect them.” The farm is also experiencing an increase in small bucks and rabbits and Enslyn is proud that five brown falcons have returned to roost in the nearby bush. “We look after the wild animals and will protect them. We want to create a balance through biodiversity. Back to basics.”

For Enslyn and farmers like him, new technologies offered by the plant science industry have helped him to grow his farm, improve profitability and create a more prosperous life for his farm employees. In addition, new farming practices have helped him understand the value of a more holistic approach to farming – one that balances the needs of nature with the interests of commercial farming.



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