

# Nampo maps the way forward

Increasing efficiency and minimising costs were some of the topics discussed at this year's Nampo Harvest Day in Bothaville. **Lindi van Rooyen** reports.

## Lack of research could sink SA agriculture

Concern over the lack of investment in research was expressed by all sectors within agriculture at the recent Nampo Harvest Day in Bothaville.

Speaking at the Senwes panel discussion, Agbiz CEO Dr John Purchase said technology supply in SA was "not bad", mostly thanks to private sector involvement, but the state was under-investing in research into new technologies.

**'WE NEED TO IMPLEMENT ALTERNATIVE PLANS URGENTLY.'**

"Good technology helps to bring the overall cost of a product down because efficiency is increased. So investment in technology is for the public good and government should be more involved," he said. Purchase added that government did not have the expertise to get technology development going and that if it failed, agriculture could fail, because of reduced competitiveness.

Prof Herman van Schalkwyk, rector of North-West University, said government had to take 'ownership' of certain areas of research, as the private sector would not. "This includes research on the establishment of

small farmers. Research in technology is crucial because if we don't have it, we'll stay behind. The question is, do we have reason to be worried about the level of investment in agricultural technology? The answer is yes."

Meanwhile, members of the panel of speakers said alternative energy sources needed to be implemented to ensure an uninterrupted power supply. "SA is so far behind in terms of electricity generation that we're always on the brink of disaster," said Senwes managing director Francois Strydom.

"We must start looking at alternative sources of energy and realise that sugar and maize by-products can be used for fuel. There are many options we can look at that farmers can provide."

Purchase said that Eskom had confirmed that load-shedding would take place this winter as it was behind schedule with maintenance and capacity-building. "We need to get our minds critically engaged to get alternative plans implemented urgently," said Purchase.

Louis de Kock of Wildeklaar Farm in the Northern Cape and one of the largest onion producers in SA, advised farmers to apply technology on their farms that would increase efficiency and minimise their dependence on Eskom.

## On-farm silos mean greater profits

The age of on-farm silos has dawned and manufacturers are having a hard time keeping up with demand.

Shopping for silos at the recent Nampo harvest day in Bothaville, BP Greyling, from Wakkerstroom in Mpumalanga and the 2011 Agricultural Writers' Association's Farmer of the Year, was told he could only be helped next year because of the high demand.

Greyling said the benefits of having his own facilities included higher profit margins. "I'll be able to harvest my maize two months earlier because I can dry it myself and then get it on the market earlier. The interest on having the income from the maize in my bank account for two extra months adds to my profitability."

Kobus Steenkamp of Monsanto SA said the

farmer's risk was also reduced if the maize was taken off the lands quicker. "Once the maize starts drying, it can be susceptible to pests. The cobs can also start falling off the plant, so if it's harvested before it's too dry, the yield will increase."

Stephan van Rensburg, sales director of GSI Africa, agreed the concept was fast gaining acceptance.

"There are just too many advantages to having your own silo and the financial savings are one of them. Farmers can save on fuel and labour expenses as they don't have to send trucks to the co-op silos where they wait in queues.

"Farmers can also store their grain until market prices are more favourable and they can do their own drying and cleaning, which usually results in a better price for their product."

Van Rensburg also said the sizes of the ordered facilities were getting bigger, because yields were increasing. He advised farmers to calculate their return on investment.

"Those far away will find it's worth it to put up their own silo."

**BELOW:** Farmers can save costs and increase profits by erecting their own silo facilities. PHOTOS: LINDI VAN ROOYEN

