

Behind every successful farmer, **there is a worker**

by Fidelis Zvomuya



For Pitso Sekhoto, transformation within the agricultural sector will not achieve its objectives if farm workers are not economically empowered, especially within land reform projects.

Pitso, owner of Tlokweg Dairy Farm in Senekal, Free State, says that investment in workers underlines the confidence a farmer puts in his farm employees and will result in increased productivity and high worker performances.

“When I was allocated this farm, my objective was first of all to empower the workers through building a trust that will hold shares,” he explains.

He believes that farm workers are behind the success of every farmer in the world and hence they need to reap what they are sowing through schemes that will benefit them and their families in the long run.

“You will never be a successful farmer without the support of your staff. All my achievements in the short period I have been at this farm rest with the professionalism, dedication and commitment that my staff put into their daily activities. I am good at business management and giving direction, but the workers are the ones who put theory into practise,” he asserts.

However, empowerment requires a lot of dedication and commitment: “Don’t even attempt it if you are not serious about it. You will face many obstacles along the way, but at this farm we are highly privileged to have had such a good relationship with our staff. In fact, they have become a part of our family since our very first day of operation.”

A land reform success story

Tlokweg Farm has been dubbed one of the country’s most successful land reform projects and boasts the best of dairy cows, crops, beef cattle, sheep and apple orchards.

“It is hard work, 12 hours a day, but already it looks as though it has paid off. Just a year later, this farm is worth more than twice what it was.” says Pitso.

He bought the 2 200 hectare farm as part of a land reform funded project in 2008 and originally ventured into beef, sheep, maize and sunflower production, but realised that there was potential as far as milk is concerned.

In May of last year, he started his dairy project with only 10 Ayrshire cows and grew his herd to 128 by the end of the year.

“I didn’t know anything about dairy. The first thing I did was to look for someone who knows the animals and has experience in dairy production,” he says, adding that he then employed Kgaugelo Mashile, who was working at a dairy farm near Pretoria.



Pitso Sekhoto, owner of Tlokweg Dairy Farm

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“Without him, the dairy section wouldn’t be where it is at the moment. He invested a lot of time in making sure that we achieve more than what we aimed for,” says Pitso.

Kgaugelo says he is proud to have been given the responsibility to grow and improve Tlokweg’s dairy. “We are like a family here, meaning this farm is ours and everyone has to play their part in making sure that it is a success,” he says.



Kgaugelo Mashile is the dairy farm manager at Tlokweg Dairy Farm

The farm does indeed also belong to the 38 farm workers, who hold 28% of the shares of Makolobane Farmers Enterprises (Pty) Ltd, which owns Tlokweg Farm, in terms of the Zoopjesfontein 247 Trust structure.

Basic principles of success

Pitso concentrates on getting the farming basics right, driving turnover by investing in more cows rather than just higher yields, intent on getting the most from his milk contract and then ensuring that everyone is focussed on the same profit objective and keeps a close eye on costs.

He says their growth is driven by the wellbeing of their cows. “Taking care of these cows is one of the most important things we do.”

He takes a comprehensive approach to caring for the animals, looking at every angle of comfort, care, health and nutrition. “The cows eat a more balanced diet than you and I, and they are cooler in hot weather than we are.”

“As dairy farmers, we aim to ensure the safety and quality of the raw milk to the highest expectations of the food industry and consumers. Our on-farm practices should ensure that milk is produced by healthy animals under acceptable conditions for the animals and in balance with the local environment,” he says.

Initially, they produced 5 177 litres of milk a month, but by December last year this had increased to 38 084 litres and in July this year they were delivering 40 462 litres to their buyer, Nkunzi Milkyway in Pretoria, who processes it for Woolworths’ stores nationwide.

The farm aims to increase its production by 4 000 litres every month and is set to employ more staff members when they start producing their own feed.

Pitso says he has also learnt a lot from his fellow white commercial farmers who have implemented successful transformation and Agri BEE deals. He believes that for land reform programmes to succeed, there is need for a comprehensive partnership for knowledge transfer with the white commercial farmers. **UM**