

Successful commercial farming is possible

by Hanlie du Plessis



Motsepe Matlala

Meet Motsepe Matlala, president of the National African Farmers' Union (Nafu) and a very successful black commercial farmer in South Africa. He is proud to be able to say that although he did not receive any assistance from the government, with determination he was able to amass resources to buy his farm.

Matlala has a 1 400 ha farm in Mpumalanga that he bought with his own money. The government's goal is that by 2014, 30% of the commercial farms in our country will be owned by black farmers. At this stage, only 4% of agricultural land has been transferred.

"I don't see agriculture as a black or white arrangement. My view is that black and white farmers need to work together for the good of the agricultural sector," says Matlala. One example of working together is the creation of a farmer development

trust by the Nafu and Agri SA, the main commercial farmer's body. The aim of the farmer development trust is to assist emerging black farmers financially and with training.

When he talks about his farm Matlala says: "I did not chase the previous owners out of here when I bought this farm." He arranged an ownership deal that made everyone happy. He bought his farm two years ago. The previous white owners agreed to remain on the land as managers.

The farm boasts diverse enterprises. There are apple orchards, maize and wheat fields, as well as sheep and cattle. Matlala realises the value of the previous owner's expertise and know-how. "We believe that the land must be shared by all South Africans without any reference to colour or creed. The National African Farmers Union of South Africa has no intention of grabbing any farm from anyone."

According to Matlala there are many opportunities for emerging black farmers in South Africa in both large-scale commercial as well as smaller-scale farming. He estimates that South Africa has a few thousand black commercial farmers.

A commercial farmer, according to Matlala, is anyone who produces for the market and makes enough money to sustain the farm.

Matlala goes on to say that there are about 5 million cattle in the hands of black South Africans. However, the people need to be trained regarding animal husbandry, how to market beef products, the best time to slaughter a cow, animal health and other relevant issues. "Black farmers must be able to participate in the total agricultural value chain, including the processing of produce, the development of commodity associations and the accessing of international markets," Matlala says.

With a man like Motsepe Matlala leading Nafu, the future for the emerging farmer in South Africa is a bright one! **UM**