

PROGRESS REPORT : NOVEMBER 2006 – JUNE 2007

1. OVERVIEW

The acute need for practical capacity building of farmer skills for commercial agricultural production is now becoming widely appreciated across South Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and even the islands off Africa's shores. This has resulted in great interest being shown in Buhle's approach to addressing these needs. More and more training programmes and courses are including a greater emphasis on experiential and practical skills development however relatively few are in any position to provide extensive hands-on, production decision making responsibilities to learners on their own production units over the entire production cycle. This remains one of the strengths of the Buhle approach.

The Academy has been approached by several interested parties and significant proposals have been submitted to various levels of government and private sector development initiatives. These submissions often take so long to be processed that it is difficult to report on progress. Unfortunately the apparent commitment of the Department of Agriculture previously reported on in supporting the development of Buhle as a "Centre of Excellence" has failed to bring any clear action. By contrast the Director General of the Department of Labour, Dr Mkosana has expressed keen interest on a number of occasions in support of the skills development programme at Buhle and is currently evaluating a proposal for expanding Buhle's capacity and the possible establishment of a satellite skills centre in the Eastern Cape in conjunction with the University of Fort Hare.

The training activities at Buhle have continued according to plan with all the courses well attended and quality tuition being provided. Particular emphasis has been placed on the post-training follow-up programme during the period under review and graduates in Kwa-Zulu Natal, Mpumalanga, Freestate, North West and Gauteng having been visited on their farms. In addition, the deployment of 9 recent graduates in a mentoring programme with African Products on commercial maize farms is in process for the 2007/2008 cropping season.

2. TRAINING

The following successful training courses were conducted during the period under review:

COURSE	DATES	STUDENTS
Livestock Course	16 th January – 23 rd March 2007	14
Basic Vegetable Course	6 th February – 11 th May 2007	18
Poultry Course	27 th March – 18 th May 2007	29
Crop Production Course	17 th October 2006 – 14 th June 2007	20
Project Management	21 st - 25 th May 2007	9
	Total	90



Buhle was invited to quote as a training provider for several training courses commissioned by the Department of Agriculture and other agencies. Buhle has proved its capacity to develop appropriate curricula and course material at short notice and present these courses effectively to the satisfaction of the attendees and principal alike. Fees quoted for these services are based on cost recovery and constitute a reasonable source of supplementary income. While these short courses are welcome and demonstrate Buhle's adaptability, they place a substantial additional load on our current staff. The focus at Buhle remains on the long courses that are definitely more effective in the long-term.

3. GRADUATE FOLLOW-UP

A major post-training follow-up programme was conducted during this period with individual visits being made to a total 111 graduates in the eastern areas of Mpumalanga, the northern areas of Kwa-Zulu Natal, the FreeState and North West. While there are some disappointing accounts of past students who have done nothing with their training there are many encouraging and exciting success stories of progress towards the goal of sustainable commercial farming ventures started and expanding.



COURSE COMPLETED	NUMBER OF GRADUATES VISITED FEBRUARY – MAY 2007
Livestock Course	27
Basic Vegetable Course	16
Poultry Course	30
Crop Production Course	32
Project Management	6
Total	111

The African Products Project are providing an exciting opportunity for crop graduates to farm commercially but with an effective safety net in place to prevent major errors in decision-making. Expert and timely advice will be provided to the trainee farmers by Buhle staff in a business context.

4. BUHLE DEVELOPMENTS

- **FHHF Board of Trustees Meeting 8th February 2007**

The Financial Statements for 2005 and 2006 were approved and signed. An update on Buhle activities was presented and discussed including a SWOT analysis of Buhle shown below.

S.W.O.T. Analysis Buhle – February 2007	
Strengths (Internal)	Weaknesses (Internal)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Focussed on farmers & the major need of emerging farmers – practical & business skills ○ 6 years experience in providing effective practical training services ○ Strong support from private sector – input suppliers, FDT, banks ○ Recognition and support from public sector – Dept of Agric, Land Affairs & Labour. Full institutional accreditation with AgriSETA ○ Donor subsidised training accessible to resource poor farmers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Limited internal funding resources ○ Limited land available for expansion ○ Staff capacity ○ Insufficient awareness among some emerging farmers of the services offered through Buhle ○ Slow pace of formalising the curriculum in terms of unit standards requirements ○ Department of Agriculture views Buhle as competition in some aspects
Opportunities (External)	Threats (External)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Emphasis of government on farmer capacitation, accelerating the land reform programme and BEE objectives ○ Keen interest in replicating the Buhle training model by African States – Nigeria, Mozambique, Zambia & SADC ○ Local interest in replicating Buhle model in other provinces of SA ○ Partnerships with Provincial, government departments, development institutions, municipalities, private organisations ○ International resources (Netherlands) accessible for capacity building of Buhle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Insufficient funding commitments for long term sustainability ○ Limited availability of commercial farming expertise for training ○ Many other training institutions entering the market ○ Compromising the effectiveness of the curriculum by being drawn to a more academic focus

- **The Maize Trust**
 The 18 students supported by the Trust for the Crop Course have done extremely well and many of this group will become “Stars of Buhle” in terms of fulfilling our mission over the next few years. A further submission for the 2007 / 2008 season has been approved in principle by the Trust. The Trust is also willing to assist with the upgrading of trainee facilities at Buhle and the appointment of surveyors, plans for existing buildings and the services of an architect to draw up a site development plan are required. Visits by several architects have already taken place and quotations submitted.
- **National Department of Agriculture**
 Despite the promising indications from July 2006 the Department of Agriculture: Directorate Agricultural Education, Training and Extension was not willing to assist Buhle with the necessary infrastructure to provide experiential training to 100 agricultural graduates per year as originally requested by themselves as part of their Internship Programme, the maximum figure that could be accommodated by Buhle using our existing facilities was 30 interns. However the Department was only prepared to consider 5 interns after a brief assessment and even this has fallen through. No response to our submission regarding farmer training has been forthcoming despite their expressed support for the capacity building of farmers based on the Buhle model. This situation constitutes a puzzling enigma.
- **Mpumalanga Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs**
 Good contact has been established with the provincial Department and the cooperation between the Department and Buhle looks promising particularly in relation to the training of farmers who are beneficiaries of the land reform programme and settlement projects. We are also very happy that the Mpumalanga MEC for Agriculture and Land Affairs was able to attend our graduation on 14th June and address the gathering.
- **The Department of Labour**
 A most positive response was received following the Director General’s visit to Buhle at the end of 2006. A submission from Buhle was requested that includes the increasing of capacity at Buhle and the establishment of a satellite academy for farmers in the Eastern Cape in conjunction with the University of Fort Hare. This promising development is now with the Department of Labour for evaluation under the National Skills Fund.
- **Nuffic - NPT**
 (The Netherlands Programme for the Institutional Strengthening of Post-Secondary Education and Training Capacity [NPT]) is a programme of North-South cooperation that helps developing countries strengthen their institutional capacity for providing training by mobilizing expertise that is present in Dutch organisations. Their commitment to capacity building of Buhle remains enthusiastic but is dependant on expanding the staff numbers of Buhle in order to invest in capacity building. This in turn seems to depend on raising government funding for increasing Buhle’s staff numbers.
- **Western Cape Farmer Skills Training**
 No further progress was made during the review period. It appears that the Departmental officials delegated with this project have lost interest despite two visits to Buhle by senior officers last year. The potential support from Nuffic and the Netherlands Embassy for this programme has unfortunately now been jeopardised.
- **AgriSETA Accreditation**
Accreditation No. : PAET8700 Provider code: P8BUH30720000000605
 Since full accreditation was awarded to the Academy for one year ending on 5th December 2006, an extension of this accreditation has been requested. A monitoring inspection visit was conducted on site by AgriSETA on 20th March 2007. No feedback from this visit has yet been received but we assume that no major problem areas were identified. The director attended an AgriSETA commissioned training workshop on the development of unit standard based training material on 16th April 2007 and a further workshop for accredited providers on 12th June 2007. Additional Unit Standards are being selected for incorporation into the training courses at Buhle. A consultant, Mr Jan Nel of Hygro has been commissioned for this purpose and is currently finalising the Vegetable Course training material restructured in line with selected unit standards.
- **Commercial Broiler Joint Venture**
 No further progress with the commissioning of a business plan and funding commitments have been made. A large agricultural input supplier Afgri (Pty) Ltd has now expressed interest becoming involved but the project will need to be funded through the banks.
- **Project submissions to Bill Gates Foundation and a tender for Department of Agriculture training through Agri-Africa**
 These submissions were unsuccessful.
- **Gijima KZN – The Kwa-Zulu Natal Local Economic Development Support Programme – Local Competitiveness Fund Implementation Phase 4 – Capacity Building of Commercial Poultry Producers – Nkandla, Umgungundlovu District**

The Buhle poultry farming capacity building proposal for this European Union funded programme was submitted on 17th November 2006. We have been informed on 9th February 2007 that the Department of Economic Development has pre-selected our concept note. Our full application will therefore now undergo due evaluation.

- **Leeuwpan Mine – Kumba Resources**

The project has hit a major snag as there is no water available. The mine will have to drill and secure sufficient water for irrigation before further planning of the 8 ha vegetable project supported and funded by the mining company, can proceed. (A further 150 ha project that involves the rehabilitation of mining land for commercial farming use could also be considered. Should Buhle develop a successful working model it can be replicated on larger rehabilitated areas within the mining group.)

- **African Products**

African Products support for the Crop Course continues and planning for the farming of land owned by the company by several Buhle graduates with further coaching and mentoring, is in progress. The project is due to begin with the new planting season from August 2007. Nine of our current students have applied to be involved in this far-reaching mentorship programme that can be replicated with other companies and farmers.

- **Premier Foods – hydroponics course**

Premier Foods has further increased its donor funding to support the crop production course in addition. The Hydroponics Course linked to the existing Vegetable Course and presented by Hygro has progressed well but has put time pressure on the open field practical work. Donations of materials to erect and equip a net-house at Buhle have been slow but we expect to erect the net house within the next few months in time for the next Vegetable Course in August.

- **Buhle visits and promotional presentations**

- Siyakhula Trust – Due diligence visit to Buhle for Standard Bank of SA
- Senior Monsanto officials from US visit to Buhle
- Department Land Affairs - Mr Manaka
- Prof. Nico Visser – Royal Netherlands Embassy
- The Maize Trust – Trustees project evaluation site-visit to Buhle
- AgriSETA monitoring visit
- Ugandan delegation – AfricaBio
- Burkino Faso / Kenyan journalists visit - AfricaBio
- Dr Ira Hill & Larry Carter – Swaziland homestead farmers project

- **Significant meetings and functions attended**

- Jan Nel – Hygro – unit standards for Buhle courses – 23rd January 2007
- Afprod meeting – Graduate mentoring project – 29 January 2007
- King’s Hope Development Foundation - Olievenhoutsbosch: meeting with Monsanto – 30th January 2007
- Bethesda Outreach meeting – Hammanskraal – 31st January 2007
- Afgri visit – Ms Trish Riley – Assessment of opportunities for Afgri assistance - 6th February 2007
- FHHF Board of Trustees meeting – Irene - 8th February 2007
- AgriBSA – Dr Michael Bradfield - cooperation with Buhle - 14th February 2007
- Greenbridge – Mr Greg Lesabe - grain trading cooperation with Buhle – 21st February 2007
- King’s Hope project management meeting – 22nd February 2007
- SA Futures Exchange (SAFEX) meeting – grain marketing training - 26th February 2007
- Land Care Celebration – Verena – 8th March 2007
- Buhle tutor training – Conducting Assessments – 4th April 2007
- AgriSETA Workshop conducted by Impetus Consulting on training material development – 16th April 2007
- The Royal Netherlands Embassy function – 26th April 2007
- Afgri meeting with director and officials – Mr Moji Mogari – Afgri will provide poultry training facilities for Buhle and investigate partnership in a commercial broiler production unit - 7th May 2007
- Pastor Ben Edache and Dr David Keetch – Nigeria farmer training project – 10th May 2007
- World Vision – meeting with Dr Ira Hill and Mr Eric Schmidt - 11th May 2007
- NAMPO Agricultural Show – Bothaville – 17th May 2007
- Esparanza Cooperative – Mr Alphons Dube – project assessment conducted – 17th May 2007
- Delmas Municipal Council – meeting with Municipal Manager re land sale of 4 ha’s for potable water treatment plant and pipeline servitude – 21st May 2007
- Gauteng Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Environment – Agricultural Hubs Launch - 22nd May 2007
- Mpumalanga Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs – Mr Ventie Mahlangu 1st June 2007
Positive discussion of areas of cooperation for farmer training.
- GTZ representative Mr Arne Schuffenhauer - survey on local public and private activities in the agri-processing and also producing sector.

- African Products – Site visit and discussion of Ithuba –Afprod Farm Project parameters – 5th June 2007
- AgriSETA – Workshop for Accredited Providers – 12th June 2007

- **GENERAL**

- **Farming activities**

Late rains again delayed the planting season (climate change?) and as a result no commercial **dry beans** were planted except for the demonstration plantings. The season has been exceptionally dry and this has been reflected in poor yields. Our yield expectation for **maize** this season is less than 3 tons per ha. The students have however been able to gain valuable harvesting and marketing experience well before the closure of their course. This has also given us more time to address specific areas that the students have identified that needed more instruction and practise. The **vegetables** were of excellent quality this season and the **broilers** were the best ever with liveweights in excess of 2 kg per bird and slaughterweights of 1,6 kg after only 5,5 weeks. The mortality rate was 5,4 %. **Rhodes grass** - 20ha of Rhodes grass also known as Katambura grass (*Chloris gayana*) has been very successfully established. The first seed harvest yielded very well at 373,5 kg/ha. The income can only be determined once the seed has been cleaned, blended and exported by the buyer. TZ germination tests have been completed indicating a germination percentage between 20-26%. 4,785 tons/ha of high quality hay was made from the first cutting. Due to the lack of late summer rainfall no further hay crop could be made.

- **Computer server system**

A number of initial teething troubles have been resolved and the system has facilitated internal communication, backups, e-mail and internet access by staff and students. The donation of 11 laptops by Monsanto SA to Buhle last year enables students to write up business plans and assignments and develop their computer skills.

5. FUNDING

Our current donor funders are:

- Monsanto Fund
- The Maize Trust
- Standard Bank of S.A.
- Omnia Fertilizers
- African Products
- Premier Foods
- Pioneer Hi-Bred

An application for funding has been submitted to the Department of Labour and we are awaiting their response. The Maize Trust has approved funding in principle for the 2007/2008 season. The Monsanto Fund and African Products grant approvals extend for the next period so no further application to them is required at present. Where training was conducted for other institutions and government departments, full or partial funding is obtained from the respective institutions contributing to own generated funds amounting to about 9.4% of our total requirements for this financial year. With the financial year ending on 31st May the 2006/2007 year end financial reports will be available to all interested parties as soon as they have been prepared by our auditors and approved by our Board of Trustees.

6. CONCLUSION

Without the continued support of our donor funders, quality practical skills training of the kind offered at Buhle would be out of reach for many new land owners and aspiring farmers. This year, yet again, the unpredictable variations in weather conditions and commodity price fluctuations have shown the extent of the risks that relentlessly face farmers in agricultural production. With so many development programmes few beneficiaries really achieve the goal of becoming sustainable commercial farmers who are able to compete with other producers locally and worldwide. The growing appreciation that a considerable range of farming expertise is absolutely critical to the success of any agricultural enterprise, especially for beginner farmers, is most gratifying.

Much progress has already been made in establishing Buhle's credibility, credentials and capacity for addressing these needs and the next few years will show significant numbers of successful black commercial farmers established in sustainable farming enterprises at all levels of the industry. The achievement mirrored in the eyes of students who understand and grasp the concepts of agricultural production and have the confidence to accurately apply their knowledge and skills in the real commercial world, is the real reward. Thank you again to our donors for making this possible!