



**SOUTH WEST MASHONALAND
REPORT TO CONGRESS 2011**

Weather

The raining season started off very well and this area was above average on the 28th of January 2011 but then the rain suddenly disappeared for 9 weeks only to return at the end of March. The seasons total rainfall was 500 mm, 300mm short of normal.

Winter has been relatively mild except for 2 nights of heavy frost which destroyed tomato crops all over the region along with other susceptible crops.

Land

The land issue has been much quieter only because there are now only 16 white commercial farmers in the whole region from the Munyami (Hunyani) river to the Munyati River after Kadoma. There is 3 farmers fighting in court and it is only a matter of time before 2 of these farmers run out of legal arguments.

Production

Maize - The early cut off to the rains resulted in maize not pollinating or poor grain fill, however early planted maize did yield reasonably well.

Tobacco – No more than 250 ha of commercial tobacco was grown in this region, yields were down and viability of this crop is now in question. Labour is also proving to be a stumbling block for these farmers, because of low production and high wages.

Citrus – From 750 ha of orchards and 3 pack sheds, and now 80 ha and half a pack shed.

Soyabeans – Only about 250 ha of soya were grown this last year and the yields were affected by low rainfall.

Horticulture – Vegetables dominate this sector and has been a cash flow saver for many farmers, but the markets are limited and transport an obstacle for buyers.

Poultry – This is the only sector that has had positive results and continues to grow, however high food prices and competition from imported chicken is a threat to the future of this industry.

Cattle – This industry plods along with no future for development because of small tracks of land available for grazing. Butchers now source more and more beef from the small scale farmers.

Winter Cereals – Farmers reduced their hectares because of the lack of constant ZESA. Total estimated wheat is about 300 ha.

Finances

This is by far the greatest problem that farmers are facing, profit margins are now unsustainable and farmers are selling capital assets to continue.

Only large farming operations can spread high over heads, and there are very few big operations left.

Tobacco farmers have not been spared in this crisis, and many struggle to convince merchants to finance them.

If there is not a drastic change in either the costs of inputs or the price paid for product then farmers will be totally unviable this coming season.

Commercial Farmers' Union

I continue to be amazed at the positive attitude of the Presidium and the Director. What seems to be a hopeless situation to many is always transformed into a positive situation by Deon Theron and his team.

Deon is the third CFU president that I have sat on council with and as the President's before him he has devoted himself to the future of commercial agriculture in a selfless manner.

Deon and Martha have sacrificed so much for little or no reward and the farmers of South West Mashonaland are truly great full for your dedication and commitment to commercial agriculture.

We wish Deon and Martha all the best for the future.

***B Lenton
(Chairman)
08 July 2011***