

ANNUAL REPORT FOR MASVINGO REGION 2012

This has been a difficult and unusual year for our province during which a number of controversial events further undermined the continuance of commercial agriculture.

The season itself was also a contributing factor to poor yields as although there were some good showers fairly early in the season they were very scattered and there was very little runoff into the major rivers which feed the main catchment dams which supply the lowveld sugar industry. Further south in the province the rainfall was far less than normal and as a result the grazing for cattle and wildlife has been adversely affected.

Sadly, we also saw the passing of two of the lowveld's pioneers and most notable characters in our industry being Bobby Alderton and Eric Harrison both of whom will be fondly remembered and never forgotten. More recently we lost Nome MacMurdon who had been with her late husband "Mac" through his most difficult years.

The constant pressure against our remaining farmers, both political and economic, has still not ceased which has once again not gone unnoticed and for which we have a huge respect for those particular individuals who are still holding on. Life has certainly not been easy for those of you that have managed to retain and hold on to your farms and particularly those who have only been able to hold onto a small sub-economic portion of your farms.

Unfortunately though, in many cases those farmers often feel isolated, victimised and have been coerced (or in some cases even intimidated) into shying away from openly retaining their membership of this union which has been the strength of our industry. However, we were pleasantly surprised recently when doing a tally of our Masvingo membership which was far more than we had initially thought. I thank you all most sincerely for your support, as like any other business or industry in Zimbabwe at the moment finance has been one of the most difficult commodities to obtain.

As a union we have continued to vigorously lobby for your rights and farming interests as well as to constantly promote the union's proposal for a solution and a way forward, which although very widely accepted (locally and internationally) and praised as the only feasible way forward, we see no one taking it forward to the implementation stage. We are very confident that when the time is right we will be able to move forward to resuscitate our industry and for compensation to be paid to those who do not want to continue. It is for this reason that it is absolutely essential that we all come together under a single banner to show strength through our united front.

Although most of our membership have been driven out of the sugar industry it is heartening to see that at least the major companies have survived. The prosecutions to evict the remaining private farmers in the industry have continued throughout the year with us losing another two despite the fact that they should have been protected by their Mauritian BIPPA. In terms of the BIPPA agreement signed with the Zimbabwean Government as well as in terms of the GPA, they have also received no compensation – like all other dispossessed farmers in Zimbabwe.

Of the four remaining farmers on trial in the Chiredzi Court under the Gazetted Land (Consequential Provisions) Act three also have BIPPA protection from 3 separate international agreements signed with the Zimbabwe Government. The fourth is a Zimbabwean citizen. This has been a trying and testing time as well as a financial burden for those farmers who I must sincerely thank for their resilience and fortitude as they have set up a very useful paper trail which will one day assist us all by providing credible evidence of the racial persecution and destruction of commercial agriculture in Zimbabwe.

In particular I would like to single out Benoit Lagesse who has been an inspirational and influential leader in the entire sugar industry in Zimbabwe as well as his now floundered local sugar farmers' association, which he led successfully for so many years. Although he has now resigned from the national sugar board I am sure his incredible experience in the marketing and production of sugar will be called upon once things get back to normal.

A small group of our dispossessed sugar farmers in Chiredzi have found employment by contracting for land preparation under the EU scheme to revitalise the Chipiwe small-scale scheme at Mkwesine, as well as on the estates. Some have also been assisting the main companies with the haulage of cane.

It is of concern though that the replanted cane at Chipiwe will be under threat later this year due to the very low level of the water in Manjirenji Dam (less than 20%). Lake Mutirikwi's level is also very low (less than 40%) so the water will have to be managed very carefully, particularly due to the fact that a huge amount of water is being siphoned off by unauthorised and illegal users along the way.

The SUSCO initiative being financed by the ABC Bank has rather controversially been initiated to assist settlers on our members' land which has been taken by Government without legal transfer or any compensation being paid to the lawful owners. Previously the new settlers were not utilising the land as efficiently as it was before but under the scheme new cane has been planted, inputs provided and consultants are on hand to advise the new growers to ensure productive crops are grown.

Another group of people whom I must also sincerely thank are those in the wildlife conservancies who have done their utmost to hold onto and protect probably the most valuable natural resource in our region being the wildlife. Although hunting permits were initially issued by National Parks following game counts being carried out by professional and experienced people in the conservancies, they were cancelled the very next day.

In particular we must all sincerely thank Willy Pabst and David Goosen whose determination and diplomacy has been a major factor in resolving many difficult situations which have occurred in the Save Conservancy as well as the tourism industry as a whole. Their sphere of influence is huge which has definitely benefitted the country as a whole.

Despite many meetings being held nobody was willing to provide any logical answer as to why the permits were withdrawn. As a result there was no option but to take the matter to the courts who have subsequently, in effect, ordered them to be issued. Many months later nothing positive has happened despite the full support of the appropriate ministers etc.

The wildlife industry and tourism as a whole will be negatively affected unless these permits are issued. This punitive and unnecessary measure could in fact kill the entire tourism industry in Zimbabwe and we plead for a swift resolution to the crisis.

Over the past year the Save Conservancy was guided and kept intact by the incredible work carried out by Chairman Richard Whittall, despite being interrupted by a period of illness during his tenure. I thank him for his dedicated work carried out over the past few years and in particular by keeping his community together through regular social and sports activities held in the conservancy.

The Chairmanship was handed over to the very capable ARDA Chairman Basil Nyabadza. ARDA has a property within the conservancy. I welcome him to the team and look forward to working with him.

In August last year Clive Stockil was deservedly awarded the French National Order of Merit for his much appreciated work carried out in the development and overseeing of the Save Valley Conservancy for so many of its developmental years and has subsequently been appointed onto the board of the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority for a 3-year term.

Our rhino population took a major knock in the early months of the year when 10 rhino were killed, with the majority being on a single property alone. The new measures which have recently been implemented seem to have brought this to a halt.

Another issue that is of huge concern is that of one of our own farmers who has allegedly been working together with a couple of greedy and dubious politicians in an effort to take over tourist facilities and hunting rights on at least three conservancy properties in our province. It is alleged that apart from taking part in organising jambanjas on those properties he is also accused of financing and advising civil prosecutions against the legal owners of those properties in an effort to evict them.

The state of our commercial cattle industry in our province is not in a healthy situation at all as the number of large-scale producers has declined considerably so the quality grass fattened beef which used to be supplied is no longer available in large numbers. The abattoirs therefore have to rely on one-on-one sales of individual animals which are only available in communal or resettlement areas.

The volumes are no longer there and the lack of grazing available this season will take its toll on the herd. Much of the grazing areas have been ploughed up and planted to maize, sorghum or cotton, most of which has been unproductive, due to late planting and unreliable or insufficient rainfall. Foot and Mouth disease has also had an adverse effect on the marketing and movement of beef cattle.

I am afraid that I must once again apologise for not holding meetings in our province this year, apart from attending the Save Conservancy AGM and numerous court cases of our farmers being prosecuted for eviction. However, I am in constant contact with our members through telephone calls, visits to the office here and emails etc. Instead of writing updates for our Masvingo members only I have been using the CFU Calling, which I put together every Friday, to communicate with all of our members and keep them as updated as possible using that means.

As soon as I can get a team together we will make a tour of the province to speak to you all to give you an update on the national situation and the work we are constantly doing on your behalf. We also need to convince you all that we are heading in the right direction on your behalf but of course we desperately need your input, ideas and debate as well.

One person I must sincerely thank this year is Rob Beverley who has attended all the CFU Council meetings with me, bar one, when he visited his son who is working in Viet Nam. He is also representing you very ably on the ARAC Committee. Rob's input at all the meetings has been very wise and is really appreciated indeed.

I also thank Gary for effectively being the only person still holding his association together, particularly during the difficult year he and Theresa have faced. Tribute must also go to Theresa, who in the defence of her special herd of elephants has managed to garner a lot of local and international support for her cause and to keep the Chiredzi River Conservancy intact. Good support from JOMIC was also received which was greatly appreciated.

As you know I have spent another year assisting here at CFU Headquarters where one can witness the incredibly difficult work our top team undertakes on your behalf. Charles Taffs has been a very hard worker and, to his credit, is very impatient and likes to see the work

done, now, and wants positive results to happen yesterday. This of course is very difficult when dealing in the current political environment. His energy spent in trying to resolve the situation, and to keep your Union afloat financially has been absolutely incredible, and his motivational speaking has lifted the spirits of many of the downhearted.

Fortunately, we have had Peter Steyl assisting Charles and calming him down when things have got rather anxious or heated and keeping him on the right track, which has been most appreciated, as well as his work with ZFAT and improving cooperation between the other unions.

Again our other Masvingo man, Hendrik Olivier has been constantly burning the candle at both ends and keeping your union running smoothly as well as many, many other responsibilities. His tireless and incredible capacity for work and total loyalty and commitment to our Union has been an inspiration to us all for which I sincerely thank him.

Of course the rest of the staff who keep the Union together and running are not at all forgotten and their tireless work is equally appreciated, especially during the uncertain times of this last year when finances have been extremely tight indeed.

To my own family, I would like to thank them for their full support again this year as without them I could never have continued and the same goes for the families of our CFU leaders who have always been there for them during the difficult times.

Although it has been a long and brutal 12 years I am still confident that commercial agriculture will definitely be re-established in Zimbabwe once again. For those near destitution we must pray that we will be rewarded in our search for an amicable way forward and for compensation to be paid to those who so desperately need it and that this will all happen very soon.

Please remain strong and united as always.

Thanks you.

Mike Clark
Chairman
Masvingo Region