



CFU FARMING OSCAR AWARD 2020

The Zimbabwean “Farming Oscar” has a long and proud history, having been introduced in 1961 by the Late C G Tracy, as an award in recognition of those who have generally done well for agriculture.

This year’s winner is no exception and fits the required profile as having given outstanding service in the advancement of agriculture. The 2020 recipient was born in Harare in 1954, the eldest son in a cattle farming family from the Marondera/Hwedza area. He was educated at St George’s College, Harare, before attending the University of Reading in the UK where he studied B.Sc. Agriculture (Hons), specializing in Tropical Agricultural Systems. Ben sought to acquire some agricultural experience in other parts of the world prior to returning home. He ultimately started work in New Mexico, USA, with a Dutch agriculturalist. Meanwhile his father and young brother were tragically killed in an ambush in the Liberation war necessitating Ben’s immediate return to assist his mother and the family, taking over management of farming operations.

In 1980 whilst escorting an injured farm worker to Marondera hospital, he encountered a Dr Sue Parry, and was totally smitten. Thereafter he regularly lined up his workers seeking out any worker, with even the vaguest ailment, to provide an excuse to revisit the hospital. In 1981, he married Sue and over the subsequent years, raised four of their own children – Talitha, Angela, Stephanie and Peter - as well as supporting many others along the way.

In 1982 he moved to Headlands, initially working with Anthony Fischer. In 1983 they leased Nyamera Farm (Helensvale Estate) in the Makoni District. In 1987 they purchased the farm and, after 18 years of hard work, it was compulsorily acquired under the Fast-Track Land reform programme.

Whilst on Nyamera, he developed a well-integrated system of mixed crops and livestock. The principal crops included tobacco, potatoes, maize, paprika, Katambora Rhodes Grass, passion fruit and Yellow Clingstone peaches. Other crops grown at various times included groundnuts, High-Veld cotton, barley, pyrethrum and horticultural crops such as sugar- snap peas, mange tout peas, various brassicas and onions.

He built up a commercial beef herd of 450 head, his 'EZI Beef,' representing a calculated genetic cross between Exotic, Zebu and Indigenous breeds for which he was 'Cattle-man of the Year' runner-up on more than one occasion. In addition to cattle, he also kept a flock of sheep and a small drove of donkeys. He was also involved in the construction of two dams and a weir on the three bordering rivers of the farm for irrigations systems on the farm. He invested in considerable housing development for farm workers, the construction of a clinic, a recreation centre and soccer field, a well - equipped pre-school and an out-reach base for a community health worker. A skills-training centre for farm youth was also under construction when the farm was acquired.

He was well known for his community involvement and he served on several farming related committees including ICA's, Commodity Associations, the CPA and was a Rural District Councilor for many years.

With the emergence of HIV & AIDS and the subsequent orphan crisis, Ben was involved together with his wife in initiating and rolling out a District comprehensive HIV&AIDS awareness programme, using his fluency in Shona and knowledge of traditional culture to good effect. They were also responsible in setting up the Farm Orphan Support Trust (FOST) which was the very first registered community based orphan care program, and a global first to offer psychosocial support for orphans. In the mid 1990's it was recognised by the UN as a "Best Practice." Despite all the farming disruptions, FOST continues to provide critical support to orphans and vulnerable children, principally in farming communities in Mash Central and Manicaland.

After leaving Nyamera in 2005, he worked with Justice for Agriculture (JAG) for a few years where he undertook engagement with and documentation of the events on farms at the time. In 2010 he joined the Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU), initially as Manager of the Agricultural Recovery and Compensation initiative (ARAC) and from mid-2017 as the CFU Director.

In these capacities he interacted with a wide range of stakeholders and continued to deal with a very broad range of farming and agricultural sector related matters.

He took over the reins of a much down-sized Union during an extremely difficult time and threw all his energy and perseverance into the position. He has worked diligently to uplift the Union, to ensure transparency in accountability and to build up relationships with the constituency whilst advocating for the restoration of property rights and appropriate compensation. He has always been critically

aware of developments that may affect the Union and has been tireless and fearless in voicing concerns. He supported the development of many different networks and communication channels and he has made himself available to any seeking advice, contacts or just some form of solace. Though lacking staff capacity, Ben has done his uttermost to ensure that the traditional various services offered by the Union have continued. He has also served on various committees related to wage negotiations, climate change, anti-microbial resistance and represented CFU at the World Farmers Organisation.

In addition to the above, he has been and remains involved in a number of other community -focused organisations. He serves on the Board of the Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust; the Farm Families' Trust; the Ruvarashe Trust for the disabled; as a trustee for FOST and he is an active member of St Gerard's Parish Church.

He is a man of faith, a family man, forever a farmer and cattleman in his heart and a person who is deeply committed to this country. His desire has been to see a resolution to the outstanding issues related to the land reform programme. He passionately believes in a restitution that would see not only justifiable compensation for lost assets but the restoration of Rights whereby commercial farmers now and in the future would have the same rights as every other Zimbabwean national and be allowed to put their skills and extensive experiences to use, without coercion or exploitation, for the good of the whole country. It remains his belief that only such will truly bring healing to this nation.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is now my honour to present the Commercial Farmers' Union of Zimbabwe Farming Oscar Award for 2020 to the person well known as "Ben":

Mr Peter Benjamin Purcell Gilpin

Awarded with gratitude during the 77th Commercial Farmers' Union Annual Congress on Tuesday 10th November 2020 at the Sabre Business Park, Harare.

A J Pascoe
President CFU

Mike Clark