



# STICKING OUR NECKS OUT FOR GAME FARMS

**More maize  
not the answer**

**S**OUTH AFRICA'S LARDER – the supply and stock of food, the assured food supply and the affordability of food – has never been as favourable as it's now at end-March 2010. The statements by Deputy Minister of Rural Development and Land Reform Joe Phaahla (and departmental director-general Thozì Gwanya) that Government may have to look at game farms because they

do not contribute to food security aren't only out of place but show a serious lack of knowledge. Perhaps Agriculture Minister Tina Joemat-Pettersson should send a copy of her department's strategic plan for 2010/2011 to both of them. They're clearly in need of some instructive reading on agriculture.

Two long-term targets relating to the current use of SA's total land area of nearly



122m ha are very clear. The table below shows that 5,45m ha – or almost 4,5% of SA’s surface area – can be described as “bare and degraded areas”. Elsewhere, commentators point out that up to 90% of the 5,9m ha of land acquired by the State in its land reform programme is currently unproductive.

The second fact slowly being realised is that in respect of the cultivation of exotic species, such as maize, it’s impossible for SA, with its relatively low rainfall, to compete against the high rainfall areas from where these species were originally introduced. This makes it so much more essential for SA to put greater value on its indigenous and unique biodiversity.

This simply means that SA must allow much more of its marginal agricultural land to switch to tourism and game farming. The diagram (p16), that originates from a document by Namibia Nature Foundation’s Chris Brown and is entitled *Namibia’s Conservation Paradigm*, shows that the economic value of indigenous species is higher than that of exotic species in regions where the rainfall is less than 700mm a year. This comes in the midst of the misplaced policy of suppressing the value of indigenous species through agricultural subsidies that artificially increase the value of exotic species.

SA’s average annual rainfall is 464mm against a world average of 860mm. Very few, if any, regions in SA regularly get more than 700mm a year.

Brown’s diagram set me thinking. Have a look at the weather forecast on one of the news channels, such as CNN. The globe is divided into green rainfall areas and yellow semi-desert areas. Most of SA falls into the latter. Then think again: is it logical to plant maize in SA and then to supplement the rainfall with expensive irrigation to the optimum precipitation of around 1 200mm per season just to reach a record crop of 10t to 12t per ha? And then, in addition, part of the record crop may have to be transported long distances from the dry regions to the green areas, the natural habitat of maize, where the natural rainfall is more than

1 200mm a year. When you look at it like that, irrigation doesn’t make sense.

But it’s good to see that the Department of Agriculture is focusing on food security – especially the affordability of food. In the past, the old National Party government was all too eager to support an inefficient agricultural sector through subsidies and tariff protection, because farmers formed an important part of the party’s voters.

The story of maize – there’s apparently

*SA must allow much more of its marginal agricultural land to switch to tourism and game farming*



**TINA JOEMAT-PETTERSSON** Maybe her colleagues should read her strategic plan

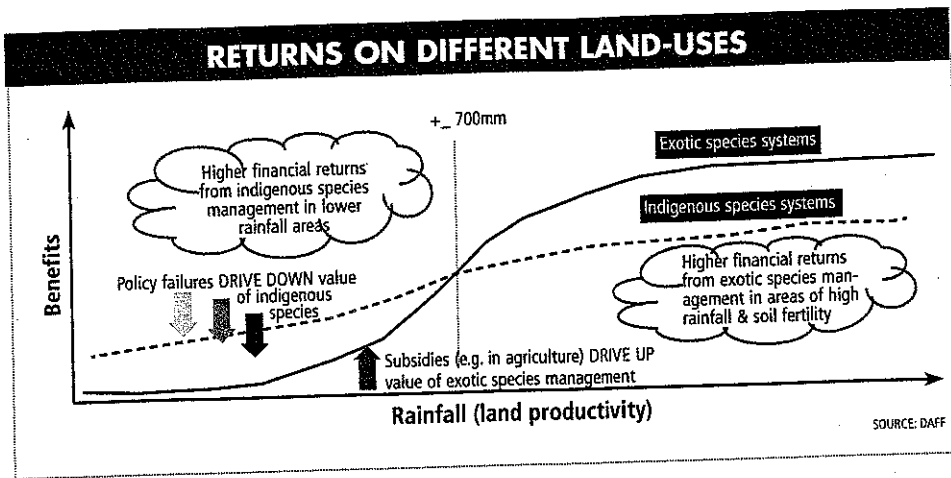
a record crop of 13m t right now – is an excellent example of how a sector can adapt to new challenges without Government intervention. In a Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism document called *Land use and productivity* we read that the area under maize has fallen from 4,1m ha in 1987 to around 2,9m ha – a drop of 1,2m ha, or 29%. The average production per ha rose from only 1,7t in 1987 to 3,3t by 2004 and for the current crop the figure could perhaps be more than 5t/ha.

Phaahla needn’t be concerned about game farms that don’t produce food; he should rather be concerned about land not being used effectively and do something about increasing the output per hectare.

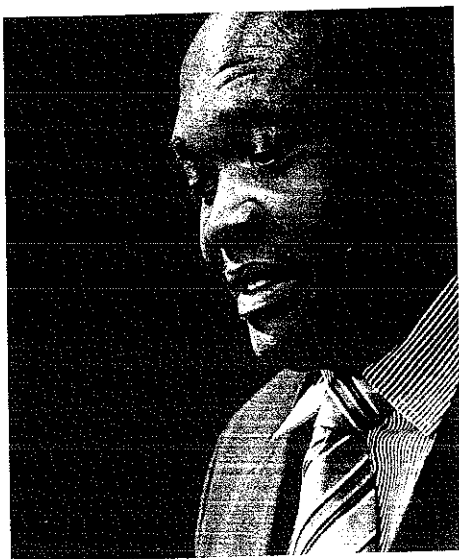
#### WHAT’S ON THE LAND

Category	Area (hectares - millions)	%
Bare and degraded areas	5,45	4,47
Cultivated areas	12,76	10,46
Grasslands	24,30	19,92
Indigenous forests	0,52	0,43
Mines	0,20	0,17
Forest plantations	1,72	1,41
Shrublands and herblands	42,27	34,66
Urban areas	1,85	1,51
Waterbodies	0,68	0,55
Wetlands	0,87	0,72
Woodlands and bushlands	31,34	25,70
Total	121,96	100,00

SOURCE: Council for Scientific and Industrial Research and Agricultural Research Council: National Land-cover 2000 (NLC2000)



**THOZI GWANYA** In need of some instructive reading on agriculture



**JOE PHAAHLA** So is he

The balance of trade of SA's agricultural sector now shows clearly how good food security is. In the 2007/2008 year (July to June) imports of food slightly exceeded exports and in some circles a great fuss was made about the tragedy that SA had now become a net importer of food. However, over 2008/2009 exports of agricultural products increased by 46% to R49,2bn while imports were R38,4bn. That's a net surplus of almost R10bn and all indications are the surplus for 2009/2010 could be even bigger. The diagram is one of which SA's farmers can be proud. It shows SA currently enjoys a high degree of food security.

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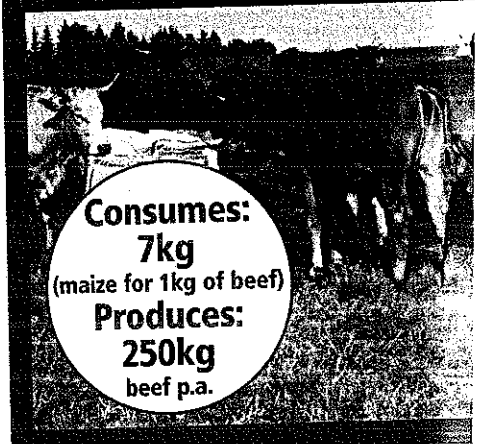
## HEED THE LITTLE

"I'M MORE IMPORTANT than you because I produce more meat than you and use less land and consume less maize to do so," the little red hen said to the big brown cow while scratching in the farmyard and pecking up the whole maize seeds lying around. Before the red meat men around the braai fires get too upset, let the little red hen explain.

A good laying hen easily produces 200 eggs a year and these are converted into 200 juicy broilers of 1,5 kg each. So the little red hen puts 300kg of white meat on the table every year.

At best, the big brown cow produces only one calf a year, which at best turns into 250kg of slaughtered beef. But remember: producing 1kg of beef in a feedlot usually requires about 7kg of maize while in its short lifetime of less than 35 days a broiler seldom consumes more than 4kg of food, mainly maize. In SA, the big brown cow also needs at least 7ha of grazing to raise one calf a year. The little red hen needs no more than a few square metres.

The diagram, which also comes from DAFF's strategic plan for 2010/2011, is very informative about the contribution by each branch of agriculture. For the year to 30 June 2009, the total income of agricultural producers was R126bn, a 13,7% increase over the previous year. Poultry's contribution – which increased by 21,7% in monetary terms last year – is now slightly more than



# RED HEN

**Consumes:**  
4kg (maize per chicken)  
**Produces:**  
300kg white meat p.a.

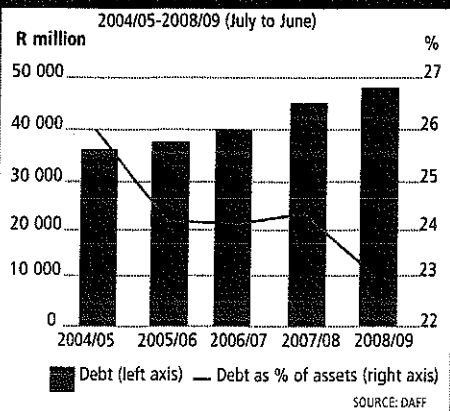
that of red meat.

Thanks to an excellent crop in 2009 and good prices, maize moved back into third spot after its income had fallen by 44%, while fruit farmers could only show a 9,2% increase in income in the year.

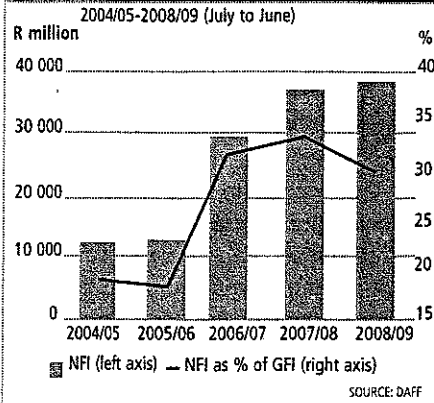
In bygone days, farmers' large debts were often considered a big joke. And it was rumoured that his not so bright children were the ones who stayed on to farm – because the clever ones became ministers or teachers. This situation has long since changed. The two graphs show net farming income (NFI) as a percentage of gross farming income (GFI) has doubled since 2004 from 15% to around 30%.

Agricultural debt as a percentage of assets is also dropping and is currently 23%. Very few consumers – that is, the children who went to study further – have debt levels lower than 25% of their assets. A lot of them probably owe more than the total value of their assets. ■

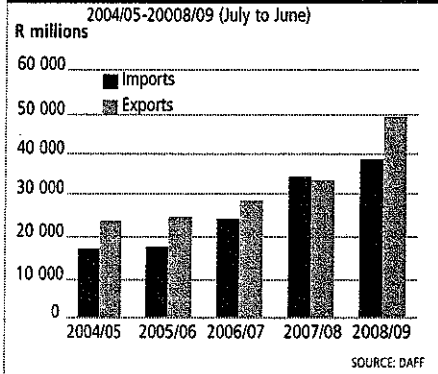
## AGRICULTURAL DEBT



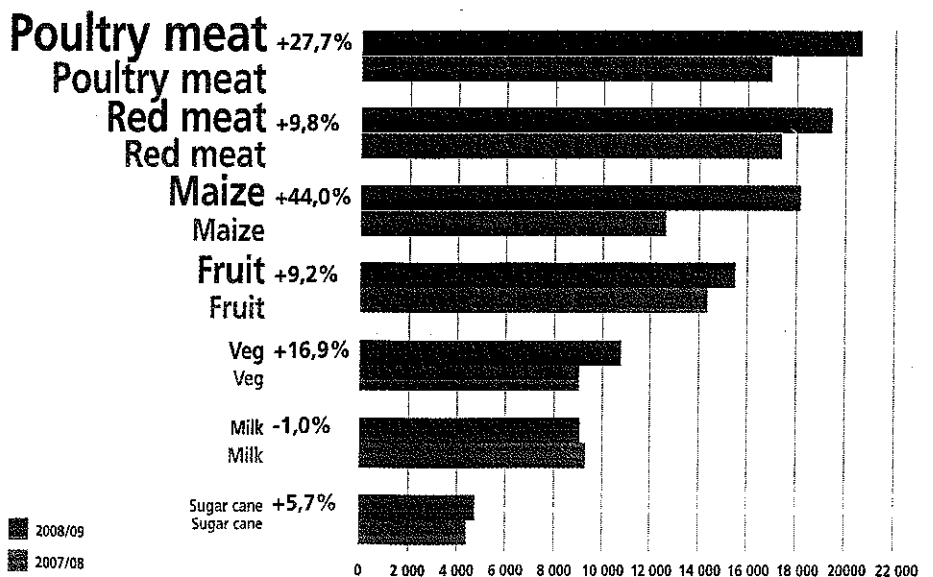
## NET FARM SECTOR INCOME (NFI)



## IMPORTS AND EXPORTS OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS



## GROSS INCOME FROM MAJOR PRODUCTS (R'MILLION)



# Conservation versus commercial farming

THERE SHOULDN'T BE such a contest. Follow Namibia's policy, as espoused by Chris Brown: "Namibia's approach to conservation is to treat natural resources as having significant value. There's no upper limit to the value." He then says the following, which I consider the most important of all: "The wildlife of no other continent even closely approaches the actual and potential value of that of southern Africa. The beauty of this situation is that wildlife, if carefully managed, will always be Africa's comparative advantage."

Read that last sentence again and then reflect on what happened to the automobile industry in the United States. Even though its three main manufacturers were

odd-looking marsupials.

Southern Africa's natural assets give it such an enormous advantage that their development must be given precedence over slogans about food security.

I recently visited Namibia and travelled hundreds of kilometres and spent hundreds of rand just to see two sites, both fortunately in the same place. One was The White Lady, a Bushman drawing in the Brandberg, and the other is the Brandberg itself.

Those two tourist sites have created considerable wealth for the region. The potential agricultural income from the thousands of hectares covered by the Brandberg can't be measured – for the simple reason it's nothing. No domestic animal would survive there.

Under the leadership of Chris Brown – and at the request of the people who made their land available for the development of the Gondwana Cañon Park next to the Fish River Canyon – the Namibia Nature Foundation conducted a comparative study on the income per hectare for different uses. The table shows the financial gross return from tourism is R165/ha (N\$1 = R1). Communal livestock farming (which is probably a few Boer goats and a couple of cattle among the stones) is only R4,71/ha, while organised or commercial farming is R15/ha.

In SA, the Kruger National Park covers around 2m ha. The SANParks report seems to say the Kruger's gross income last year was around R500m. That's about R250/ha/year. That's a lot more than the neighbouring cattle farmers earn per hectare, regardless of whether they are communal or commercial.

And the Kruger earns that income despite the prescriptions by Cites and other game rangers and bleeding hearts from other areas who strongly oppose the best exploitation of, especially, the park's surplus elephants. ■

## NAMIBIAN CASE STUDIES

Item	Communal livestock	Freehold livestock	Tourism
Financial gross income per hectare (N\$)	4,71	15,00	165,00
Net cash income per hectare (N\$)	0,93	0,48	23,00
Livelihoods income per hectare (N\$)	1,08	3,27	19,00
Financial rate of return	5,5%	9,8%	12,9%

for many years the world's largest there was no "comparative advantage". First, the Japanese (and then almost all the countries in the East) overtook them by miles. The massive fall of the biggest, General Motors, is still fresh in our memories.

In SA there are many private game reserves that can boast of having the Big Five. No Texas oil millionaire can claim the same in his country. There's a lot of land in Texas and a lot of rich people. But the biodiversity of the land doesn't lend itself to establishing game farms with the Big Five. Australia also has millions of hectares of semi-desert that definitely isn't suitable for exotic agriculture. But they can do nothing with it, except perhaps breed more of those



## CONCLUSION

SA IS CURRENTLY in a very favourable position. The increasing productivity of its farmers over the past decade gives it excellent food security and affordability. The private sector has entered into conservation on a large scale, especially its economic and sustainable exploitation.

The transformation of large sections of marginal agricultural land (especially in Limpopo) into lodges and other businesses – including hunting lodges, where our unique fauna and flora can be utilised to the maximum benefit of the country and its people – is a wonderful example of what can be done. Let's preserve that unique advantage and ask all role players to think carefully about what they say about the land question, which is still very sensitive in SA.