

FEATURE Empowerment

Empowerment trust banks on barley

Since its inception, the Overberg Boerdery Trust has not only increased its output of barley, but raised dividend payments to its farmworkers. **Jeandré van der Walt** visited the farm near Caledon.

The Overberg Boerdery Trust was launched in 2006 on the South African Breweries Barley Farm (SABF), a model operating farm for dryland barley production near Caledon in the Western Cape.

"Gerhard Greeff, a previous agricultural services manager at the former SAB, urged us to start the trust," says board chairperson Christiaan Hans.

PROFIT HAS RISEN TO THE EXTENT THAT THEY NO LONGER RELY ON SAB FUNDING

Hans's wife, Beryldina, is vice-chairperson of the trust. The other members are Boysile Hoko, Simphiwe Hoko, André Hans, Johan Andries and their respective spouses, Titi Hoko, Cindy Hoko, Jacolene Hans and Maria Andries.

In 2007, the members planted their first barley crop on 68ha leased with financial assistance from the Department of Public Works. SAB Maltings also helped with interest-free loans.

Since then, the trust has gradually expanded its operations and now farms on 135ha.

"In 2016, we leased an additional 65ha of municipal land, just outside Caledon, with the help of Casidra [the Cape Agency for Sustainable Integrated Development in Rural Areas]. A lease of nine years and eleven months was agreed upon," says Hans.

Production tonnage and profit have increased to the extent that

the members no longer rely on funding from SAB. In 2018, even after a sizeable dividend payout (they prefer not to disclose the amount), the trust was financially sound enough to purchase the next season's inputs.

FARMING IN MUTUALISM

Farming operations on the 68ha coincide with SABF's rotation system, which is also followed on the municipal land. The members usually use a five-year rotation of canola, wheat, barley, and oats. Farm manager Hennie le Roux says this reduces the risk of soil depletion, as well as pest and disease build-up.

After the merger between SAB and AB InBev in 2016, the company launched a programme aimed at encouraging local barley production and incorporating emerging farmers in the supply chain. The agreement, valid until 2018, specified that when emerging farmers produced malt-quality barley, AB InBev would take all of it.

"They therefore didn't form part of Unigrain's mandate contacts," explains Le Roux.

To enable the trust to produce barley throughout these two years, they planted 68ha to barley on different lands at SABF to prevent pest and disease build-up.

"Because the trust followed the five-year rotation system before the agreement, they were subject to great fluctuations in their profit

OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP:

• The Overberg Boerdery Trust operates on the 2 200ha SAB Barley Farm, a model operating farm for dryland barley production near Caledon.

• Some trust members, from left: Boysile Hoko, Christiaan Hans, Simphiwe Hoko, André Hans, Johan Andries, and their mentor, Hennie le Roux.

• Drought is a major challenge. Low rainfall affects the plumpness of barley grain, which, in turn, plays a major role in yield and profit.

PHOTOS: JEANDRÉ VAN DER WALT

margins. This agreement between AB InBev and emerging farmers gave the trust an enormous boost, as barley has the highest profit margin by far," says Le Roux.

The members managed to improve their average barley production from 2,5t/ha in 2007 to 3,46t/ha in 2018. They achieved a canola yield of 1,8t/ha in 2014, while wheat yielded 2,84t/ha in 2015.

Their malting barley is sold to AB InBev, which assists them with marketing their other crops.

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

According to Hans, drought, and all the pests associated with it, is a major challenge, as it can have a significant impact on yield. To counter its effects, the trust makes use of conservation farming practices, such as minimum tillage to boost the health, structure and moisture-holding capacity of the soil.

Every third year, soil samples from their lands are sent for analysis to determine the fertiliser requirement.

"Because SABF is an experimental farm, we regularly conduct trials on the farms. We're currently running a five-year optimal fertiliser trial on a small piece of land. The results from the trial are applied to the commercial lands to save on fertiliser costs," says Le Roux.

A chemical spray programme is followed from June to September. He says that although they follow a programme, no optimal dates are set.

"We'd rather conduct regular inspections to determine whether or not to spray. In this way, we keep our costs

