

World-class blueberry farm boosts labour productivity with Farm Costing Solutions

In December 2019, agricultural investment firm Primocane Capital commenced with phase one of the development of Strathbreede Berries. The aim was to convert an existing pear and plum estate situated close to Wolseley, into an 80 ha high-spec blueberry farm. It's less than two years in and the farm already grows 50 ha of blueberries in pots under shade netting, over steel tunnels. Over 50 km of irrigation main lines have been laid, which are linked to a new state-of-the-art pump house and fertigation system. All produce is exported to Europe and the Far East.

Blueberry farming is labour intensive. During peak season Strathbreede employs 550 workers, which is set to increase to 950 during the second phase of the project. To manage its labour-related expenses, Strathbreede uses the Farm Costing Solutions (FCS) system that logs and records information related to time and attendance, piece work and job costing.

Each employee receives a tag that is swiped against a "reader" device when they arrive in the morning and leave in the afternoon. This accurately records time and attendance information.

And when it comes to piece work, FCS keeps track of the work performed by seasonal workers. For instance, during harvest time the fruit that each worker has picked is weighed and recorded in the system. Using FCS, Strathbreede has also developed an incentive structure to improve the productivity of its seasonal workers. Those who harvest more than the benchmark are paid more per kg, while underperforming workers are identified for retraining. Through



GPRS technology, the piece work data captured by Strathbreede is instantly sent to a central computer from where managers can monitor productivity in real time. "The productivity gains due to this incentive programme alone cover the cost of the entire FCS system," says Ted Stanford, CEO of Primocane.

Employee earnings are automatically calculated from the captured data, or manually inserted as required; FCS also integrates with popular payroll platforms, including its own Crest Payroll.

Strathbreede previously used another farm cost management software solution, but have traded it for FCS due to its ease of use and the robustness of the product. "What I've found with all these other solutions is that you pay for unnecessary bells and whistles that your staff never uses.

I'm really impressed with FCS because of the simplicity of their product," Stanford explains.

He is upbeat about FCS's after-market service and the continuing support it provides. "The team is always very transparent in the event of any issues; they are readily available on the phone, TeamViewer and regularly come to visit us on the farm."

FCS serves some of South Africa's most well known agricultural businesses, including Du Toit Farming, De Keur Estate, Boschkrans Farming, Moogezicht Boerdery, and Amana Boerdery.



For more information about how your business can benefit from FCS, contact Marilyn at: 072 896 6801, 021 903 0612 or marilyn@tms.za.net. You may also visit www.farmcostingsolutions.co.za

CGA team expansion Paula Bester

The citrus industry is facing imminent changes in food safety and sustainability requirements brought on by new policies like the EU Green Deal and Farm-to-Fork Strategy. By Paul Hardman

Given the anticipated changes, all industry stakeholders can expect the approach to citrus crop preparation and handling to undergo significant adjustments in 2021/22.

In preparation for these changes, the Citrus Growers' Association (CGA) reviewed the competencies within their Consumer Assurance Portfolio managed by Paul Hardman, and identified the need for a specific skill set. After an intensive search followed by a highly rigorous interview process, the CGA is pleased to announce that Paula Bester has joined the team.

She is assisting with the Citrus Sustainability Forum activities, keeping up with retailer and official food safety requirements, and works on ad hoc sustainability projects.

Paula's most recent working experience was as a Quality Control Officer at a food business, which has provided useful exposure to commercial food safety and assurance schemes.

Having grown up on a wheat farm in the Western Cape, Paula's roots are in agriculture. In 2020 she qualified with an MSc Degree in Food Science (cum laude) from Stellenbosch University. And her positive references from associated academics speak for themselves.

When she's not hard at work, Paula enjoys cooking, food styling, exercise, gardening and reading.

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