

Winter School Motivates Southern Farmers

Namibia's winters in the South are not only known for the nasty turns, but also for the winter schools that are held by the Southern farmers' associations during this time. This year was no exception as the Karasberge Farmers' Association held its 14th winter school under the auspices of the Keetmanshoop Region Agricultural Union on 3rd and 4th August. This event was followed by the Grünau Farmers' Association winter school on 5th August.

Entitled "Proud to be a Farmer" the Karasberge Farmers' Association presented a resoundingly successful two days featuring relevant and interesting topics. The event was attended by approximately 180 participants, predominantly members of the Karasberge-, Klein Karas-, Keetmanshoop-, Aus-, Bethanie-, Guruchab-, Koës- and Aroab Farmers' Associations.

A highlight of the first day was a presentation on farming ethics by Dr. Corrie Visser, who noted that there are certain codes of conduct and responsibilities required of a proud farmer. In short, a farmer has a responsibility towards the self to prepare for tasks by combining knowledge with experience in order to successfully manage a farming enterprise. The second responsibility highlighted by Dr. Visser is the responsibility towards one's family and people in one's employ. He thirdly referred to the proud farmer's civic responsibility towards his/her community and country. In conclusion Dr. Visser focussed on the proud farmer's responsibility towards the Creator in his/her relationships, beliefs and faith.

Other topics presented with during the first day's activities included, amongst others: information by Namproducts on the activities of Farmers Meat Market and contemporary small livestock marketing; Prof. Willie van Niekerk on feed pen finishing; and Mr. Paul Strydom on the role of the Meat Board in marketing.

The second day's activities yielded similarly riveting topics. Mr. Sakkie Coetzee of the Namibian Agricultural Union (NAU) addressed the issue of organised agriculture in a changing socio-economic environment and the importance of the producer's involvement in the NAU. Mr. Leon van Wyk's talk on the proud farmer's farming management practices provided further food for thought. In his presentation, Mr. van Wyk emphasised the importance of a management program for successful farming, noting the increasing importance of the producer's analysis of farming practices and activities in financial terms, where such a system of farming effectiveness analysis can yield diverse results from which a management system can be developed.

The highlight of the second day was undoubtedly the herd competition conducted under the watchful eye of Phillip Strauss, well-known judge in the Karas Region. The competition called for each farmers' association to enter a group of five Dorper ewe lambs that were sheared within 6 weeks preceding the competition. Other competition rules included that the tails had to be cropped and no ear plates were allowed. The judging process considered aspects such as functional build, selection, quality, type and uniformity. The Karasberge Farmers' Association was announced the winner of the competition, with the Koës Farmers' Association and the Aroab Farmers' Association in second and third place respectively.

Needless to say, the ladies were presented their own interesting program over the two day duration. Talks on topics including health, beauty techniques, care for jewellery, clay pots and clay products engrossed women for hours.

The cuisine, sense of togetherness and hospitality with which I was received in the South were so delightful that I could not help but reflect as I wended my way back through the mountains, "This area is completely different to the north of Namibia, but there is something that sticks to you like a burr, perhaps it is precisely this difference in nature and the love of its people for their environment..." Look forward to next year's Karasberge Farmers Association winter school.