



Gif Mafuleka with his Tuli herd. Gif explains that, when they are bothered by a high fly population, they would always graze in one close group in one area of the enclosure. "They fight the flies better as a group."

Building towards a great future

By Marike Brits

Mphiwe Siyalima is a farming project on the farm Leeuwfontein, northwest of Bronkhorstspuit. This project was born as an initiative of Gif Mafuleka, with the assistance of strategic partners.

Gif worked for McCain as a crop manager on this exact farm. An opportunity, which he grabbed with both hands, arose when the farm was bought by the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform. Gif successfully applied to lease the land and the Mphiwe Siyalima farming project was established.

When the farm was a working McCain farm, mainly peas, sweetcorn and cabbages were cultivated. He continued with this, but branched into maize and more vegetable types as he acquired equipment and experience, finally branching into cattle breeding. Today Gif manages four self-sustainable registered branches under the flag of Mphiwe Siyalima.

He explains that the greatest advantages of having four farming enterprises on one farm, are improved cash flow and more crop rotation options. Gif holds a

BTech degree in crop production from the Tshwane University of Technology and completed a management development programme through Unisa.

Gif's love of farming comes from his grandfather, a subsistence sugarcane farmer. "If I ever get the opportunity to procure a sugarcane farm in Natal, I would branch into that direction."

The four branches

For the McCain crop enterprises, peas, sweetcorn and beans are planted at a varying scale, depending on the time of the year. It totals 60 hectares under irrigation and is delivered per contract to McCain.

For the second branch, maize production, 350 hectares of which 60 hectares are under irrigation are planted. The harvest is delivered to Afgri and a portion is used as supplementary winter feed for the cattle.

The vegetable branch sees cabbage, spinach and butternut planted on a small scale for Massmart and the local market. The vegetable management is done by students who are recruited bi-annually – they teach each other and are guided by Gif. The vegetable branch employs 20 local women.

The farm is becoming increasingly mechanised with the maize and McCain crops operations already being fully mechanised. An increasing portion of the cultivated land is also being irrigated. "We are blessed with water sources on the farm. For the irrigation we mostly use the dam, but there are also four boreholes on the farm."

The fourth branch is the cattle. Although Mphiwe Siyalima is already three years down the road, it was only in February 2011 that Gif decided to branch out into cattle farming. This component of the farm is very young, and we spoke to Gif about his future goals for this component.

First stud steps

His first step was to buy ten pregnant Tuli cows and ten crossbred heifers. As soon as the animals arrived on the farm, Gif knew that he liked the Tuli breed. "I chose Tuli cattle because it is a hardy breed; they are temperate and can adapt to harsh conditions. I also prefer medium-framed indigenous cattle. The Tuli cattle are calm and easy to work with."

At first he contemplated whether to fol-

low the commercial or stud route. However, it was not long before he decided on stud breeding and registered the Mphiwe Tuli Stud. He then bought ten registered pregnant Tuli cows to support his breeding focus of eliminating the commercial crosses he started with and to bring good hybrid vigour into the herd.

Gift explains that the only problem of breeding with Tuli cattle is that there isn't many different Tuli bloodlines in South Africa, making inbreeding a big risk. "This motivates me to breed with Tuli, so I can play a role in expanding the breed."

Both the initial groups of pregnant cows have now calved. These calves, a total of 17, will be ready for inspection to be registered in 2013 and will be used to start up the stud's breeding lines. The Tuli-line cattle that do not make it into the stud, are kept alongside the stud animals as a commercial herd and sold to Klippeiland, a butchery in Bronkhorstspuit. "We have recently sold our first commercial animals – this money will be used to buy more registered animals to supplement the stud."

At a recent auction the Mphiwe Tuli Stud bought a registered bull for R32 000, as well as two registered cows. "I believe that the bull and cows are a good investment, as they have a good pedigree and will get me started towards my goal of owning 100 registered breeding cows." Gift now wants to improve the quality and quantity of the stud through proper herd management, and would like to hold his first production sale in 2018.

Future stud steps

The Mphiwe Tuli Stud grazes on natural veld. Gift believes in a high-pressure grazing system where the cattle are rotated between small enclosures in an attempt to utilise every bit of nutrition in an enclosure and to prevent under-grazing. The veld grazing is supplemented with suitable phosphate and production licks and a portion of the maize production is used to supplement the available feed during winter months.

"I am not happy with the grazing yet; I want the enclosures to be grazed even more. My plan is to invest in portable electric fencing and to use this to divide enclosures into even smaller sections."

For now he uses natural breeding and all cows run with the bull. Gift says he would



One of the maize fields under irrigation. Leeuwfontein is blessed with ample water sources.



Gift uses a high-pressure grazing system. Here you can see the difference between grazed and non-grazed veld. According to Gift, there should be an even greater difference between these two enclosures.

like to move in the direction of artificial breeding further down the road, but he still has a lot to learn and other priorities to answer to first. After the cows have calved, they are kept separately for two months before they are returned to the same enclosure as the bull. The heifers run with the bull for the first time at the age of 18 months. For the group of heifers in the Mphiwe Tuli herd, this will be after they have been inspected for registration.

"When the group of heifers that passed the inspection are bred for the first time, it will also be the first time that I will have been truly able to influence the outcome of the stud herd. So far I have done very little to determine stud specifics as all the calves in the herd were born here, but none of them

were bred by me. Now my breeding decisions and recordkeeping will start to play an important role."

Gift says that when he buys cows, he looks for an inter-calving period of below 380 days. "When buying registered animals, I focus on good pedigree, the presence of the poll gene and low inter-calving periods. In future my focus will be on the correct breeding decisions."

Using knowledge, experience and advice, Gift is creating success and playing an important role in the country's economy and future. The meaning of the project's name, *Using our given talents, we are farming together*, represents the core of Gift's attitude and the role he is playing in South African agriculture. **SF**