

*SOIL SCIENCE  
SOCIETY OF SOUTH  
AFRICA*



**NEWSLETTER**

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## **SSSSA COUNCIL/GVSA RAAD: 2011-13**

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**The SSSSA does not necessarily agree with opinions expressed in this newsletter.**

***Die GVSA onderskryf nie noodwendig die menings van bydraes tot sy nuusbrief nie.***

## **MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT/ BOODSKAP VAN DIE PRESIDENT**

Dear Colleagues/Geagte Kollegas,

This is my first message to you as SSSSA President and I would like to inform you of a couple of important issues.

*Hierdie is my eerste boodskap aan u as GVSA President en ek wil u graag inlig oor 'n paar belangrike kwessies.*

Firstly, the SA Society for Horticultural Science invited other Societies to join them at a joint All-Africa Horticulture Congress in January 2012. Regrettably, your Council did not consider it prudent to support this request, on the grounds of increased expense to the delegates, together with the possibility of placing the financial stability of the SSSSA at significant risk. A Combined Congress, along with the Crop Science and Weed Science Societies, will take place at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North West University from 19<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2012. Astrid Hattingh, Piet van Deventer and Dries Bloem are our representatives on the Local Organising Committee, and they are hard at work with their preparations for a successful Congress. I hope you will book these dates and prepare presentations for delivery at the Congress.

*Eerstens is die GVSA deur die Tuinbouvereniging uitgenooi om deel te neem aan die Afrika Tuinboukongres in Januarie 2012. Ongelukkig het die GVSA-Raad nie kans gesien om hierdie uitnodiging te aanvaar nie op grond van verhoogde uitgawes vir afgevaardigdes, asook vir die risiko wat dit vir die gesonde finansiële status van die GVSA mag inhou. 'n Gesamentlike Kongres met die Gewas- en Onkruidvereniging sal vanaf 19 tot 22 Januarie 2012 by die Potchefstroom-kampus van die Noord Wes Universiteit aangebied word. Astrid Hattingh, Piet van Deventer en Dries Bloem is die GVSA-vertegenwoordigers op die Plaaslike Reëlingskomitee en hulle is reeds druk besig met voorbereidings vir 'n suksesvolle Kongres. Ek hoop u sal hierdie datums reserveer en begin met voorbereidings van voordragte vir lewering by die Kongres.*

Secondly, your Council is concerned about student membership of our Society and has mandated myself as President and other Council members to visit the South African universities where soil science is taught with the view to encouraging students to enter the professional ranks of the discipline. We also wish to encourage the research contributions from the students and staff of these universities at Congresses and for them to support the SA Journal for Plant and Soil.

*Tweedens is die Raad besorgd oor studentelidmaatskap van die Vereniging. Ek het myself as President, tesame met ander Raadslede, die taak opgelê om Suid-Afrikaanse universiteite waar grondkunde aangebied word, te besoek. Die doel hiermee is om studente aan te moedig om as professionele grondkundiges te begin werk. Ons wil ook studente en personeel by hierdie universiteite aanmoedig om navorsingsbydraes te lewer beide by Kongresse en vir die SA Joernaal vir Plant en Grond.*

I trust that you will all enjoy an active year in your scientific work.

*Ek vertrou dat u 'n aktiewe wetenskaplike jaar sal geniet.*

Warmest regards/*Beste wense*

**Dave Turner**

(012 310 2597; [dturner@arc.agric.za](mailto:dturner@arc.agric.za))

## **EDITORIAL/REDAKSIONEEL**

There has been sad news recently with the passing of two of our Honorary Members, Prof Willem Fölscher and Dr Dick Thompson. We not only mourn their passing, but also the amount of knowledge and experience that they had accumulated over their many years in soil science. It often strikes me that the younger, less experienced members perhaps do not make enough use of such experienced practitioners (and there are many within the SSSSA) and their accumulated knowledge. Often, aspects of planned research have been done before, or somewhat differently, and by consulting with some of the “old-timers” who were previously involved, much useful information may be obtained. Don't forget about this source of knowledge, everyone has something to contribute and are generally very keen to do so.

On another topic, the SSSSA web site has now been taken over by Ailsa Hardie (021 808 4790; [aghardie@sun.ac.za](mailto:aghardie@sun.ac.za)) and her team at the University of Stellenbosch. So if you have any interesting news items, suggestions or comments, feel free to contact Ailsa. After all, the web site actually belongs to the members.

Finally, I want to emphasise the importance of proof-reading of scientific articles. Many of our members who publish in English are not native speakers of the language, so it is vital to have someone look at your article prior to publication. To illustrate this, here is a small example of how infuriating English can be:

### The **OUGH** sound in English

These four letters can be pronounced in seven (yes, seven!!) different ways, as shown below.

“off” - cough

“uff” - rough, tough, enough

“uh” - thorough

"ow" - drought, doughty, bough

"oo" - through

"oh" - dough

"ott" - nought, bought, thought, wrought, brought, fought, sought

This cacophony could lead to the following somewhat convoluted sentence (including two meanings!!):

**Mr Clough coughed up the dough, made a thoroughly doughty effort and bought enough dough to last through the drought (or so he thought).**

Can you imagine trying to explain all of the above to non-English speakers? It would be a **thoroughly tough** task to get **through** to them!!

Regards,

**Garry Paterson**

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## **COUNCIL MATTERS/RAADSAANGELEENTHEDE**

**New Members:** we welcome the following new SSSSA members:

Full Members:

J Campher, AH Meyer, JB Sparrow, M van der Laan, R Maloma, NC Mamadi, L Mamanyuda, PM Kanyane

Associate Members:

F Olivier, CG Naane, DG Seome

Student Members:

DW Viljoen, N Schoonraad, P Botha, D Bouwer, GL Zetler

## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **PROFESSOR WILLEM JACOBUS FÖLSCHER**

Willem Fölscher, voorheen professor in die Departement Grondkunde en Plantvoeding aan die Univeriteit van Pretoria, is op 22 Desember oorlede. Hy is op 30 April 1921 in die distrik Moorreesburg gebore en matriculeer aan die Hoër Jongenskool, Stellenbosch. Weens sy liefde vir die natuur tree hy hierna in diens van die Departement van Landbou. Hy behaal met deeltydse studie die BSc-graad met Chemie en Fisika as hoofvakke *cum laude* in 1941 en die MSc-graad in Chemie in 1943 aan die Universiteit van Pretoria. Gedurende die periode 1944 tot 1947 was hy as vakkundige beampte betrokke by grondondersoeke vir verskeie Staatsbesproeiingskemas, o.a. by Groblersdal, Koedoeskop, Buffelspoort en die Sondagsriviervallei.



Met hierdie agtergrond word hy in 1948 as Lektor in Landbouskeikunde aan die pasgestigte Fakulteit Landbou van die Universiteit van Natal in Pietermaritzburg aangestel. In 1952 vertrek hy aanvanklik alleen na die VSA om aan die Universiteit van Kalifornië in Berkeley te studeer waar hy sy PhD-graad in Grondchemie in 1954 binne twee jaar behaal het. Die onderwerp van sy navorsing, naamlik die chemiese reaksies tussen fosfaattoediening en grond, het in later 'n belangrike rol gespeel in aanbevelings vir kunsmis op 'n rasionele en ekonomiese grondslag

Hy bestudeer ook na sy studie in die VSA lugkartering van gronde aan die Tegnieuse Universiteit van Delft, Holland. In 1954 word hy as Senior Lektor in Landbouskeikunde aan die Universiteit van Pretoria aangestel. In 1956 volg hy professor JJ Theron op as hoof van die Departement van Grondkunde en Plantvoeding. In 1964 onderneem hy 'n uitgebreide studiereis deur Wes-Europa en maak ook 'n ekskursie vanaf Moskou na die Swartseegebied mee om die klassieke gronde van Rusland te bestudeer, wat die basis vorm van internasionale grondklassifisering. Hierdie agtergrond, tesame met sy studie in die VSA sy filosofie versterk dat grond as 'n sisteem gedefinieër en bestudeer moet word en dat grondklassifikasie nie op 'n rigiede basis moet geskied nie maar op 'n rasionele basis met in ag neming van die grondeienskappe en al die plaaslike faktore, soos onder andere oorspronklike moedergesteente, klimaat, topografie en makro- en mikrobiologie.

Gedurende die periode 1967 tot 1971 het hy op 'n sub-komitee gedien wat die klagtes van boere oor besoedeling van landbougrond deur goudmynbedrywighede in die Oberholzer-Welverdiend gebied ondersoek het. Die klagtes het gegaan oor die agteruitgang van gewasse soos mielies, winterkoring, rog, lusern en weiding en abnormaliteite by varke en melkkoeie. Die verslag is in Julie 1971 aan die Minister van Mynwese oorhandig maar is nooit vrygestel nie. Daar kan maar net gespekuleer word oor tot watter mate die probleme wat tans met die

besoedeling van mynwater ondervind word minder sou gewees het indien gehoor gegee is aan sy aanbevelings.

Afgesien van verskeie magisterstudente het dertien doktorale kandidate onder hom gestudeer. Finansiële steun is oor die jare deur die Staat bewillig vir sy navorsingwerk ivm plantvoedingsprobleme, grondversuring onder droëlandverbouing van gewasse en die evaluering van landboukalke vir toediening aan grond. Hierdie navorsing het gelei tot gereelde bydraes tot simposia en kongresse en verskeie publikasies. Hy het dan ook op verskeie navorsingskomitees van die Staat gedien.

Hy was sedert die vroeë bestaansjare lid van die Grondkundige Vereniging van Suid Afrika asook van die Internasionale Bodemkundige Vereniging. In 1965 is hy o.a. verantwoordelik vir die reëling van die Eerste Nasionale Kongres van die Grondkundige Vereniging in Pretoria. Die erelidmaatskap van die Vereniging word in 1986 aan hom toegeken vir sy bydrae tot die studie en filosofie van grondkunde in Suid-Afrika.

Op 'n meer toegepaste vlak het hy gereeld in adviserende hoedanigheid opgetree vir die ontwikkeling van besproeiingsprojekte, veral in gebiede soos die Kavango, Kaprivi en Damaraland in Namibia, in Swaziland en die destydse Venda, Lebowa en Gazankulu in die RSA. Deur die jare het hy hom beywer vir meer doeltreffende gebruik van misstowwe in die landbou. Hy was betrokke by 'n omvattende projek op prakties plaasvlak om te bewys dat misstofinset vir mielieproduksie in die RSA dikwels met meer as 60% ingekort kan word. Hiervolgens kon nie alleenlik 'n uitsonderlike besparing meegebring word nie, maar terselfdertyd 'n veel stabielere mielieproduksie teen laer risiko, met verreikende ekonomiese implikasies.

Prof. Fölscher was 'n nederige persoon wat die kalklig vermy het. Hy en sy familie se persoonlike lewe was baie privaat. Hy word oorleef deur sy vrou Marié, 'n dogter Frieda en verskeie kleinkinders.

*Prof Willem Fölscher, previous head of the Department of Plant Nutrition at University of Pretoria, passed away in December. Prof Fölscher obtained his BSc and MSc degrees in Pretoria and his PhD degree at Berkeley, USA in 1956. He was Head of Department from 1956 until his retirement and he was SSSSA President in 1965, being awarded Honorary Membership in 1986. He was involved with a wide range of soil nutrition-based research, including irrigation projects, across much of Southern Africa. He is survived by his wife Marie, a daughter Frieda and several grandchildren.*

Compiled by Dr R E (Bertie) Oberholster,  
with inputs from Drr Les Stoch and Gawie du Toit  
and Prof Robin Barnard, all ex-students of Prof Fölscher.

## **Dr Dick Thompson**

James Goldsmith Thompson, better known to everyone as Dick, passed away recently in Howick, KZN. Dick was born in Durban, but spent a good portion of his working life in the former Rhodesia. He obtained his PhD degree, titled "Soils of Rhodesia – their distribution and classification" in 1965 from the University of Natal

and returned to Natal, South Africa later in life, where he retired. He is survived by his wife Sheila and their two sons.

### **Some Memories of Dick Thomson** by Oscar Ashton, KwaZulu-Natal

I first met Dick Thomson in 1959 in Rhodesia. At this time he was with Research and Specialized Services of the Ministry of Agriculture and I was in Dept of Conservation and Extension (CONEX) in the same Ministry. Dick spent a good deal of his time in the Zambian Valley with his survey team which included Errol Tillet and Pat Sweet, both of whom were friends of mine. Hence the stories told about him when camping in the bush in the Valley. These included his liking for putting Worcester sauce on his Post Toasties! He was famous amongst the CONEX staff and they told stores of his epic crossing of the Birchenough Bridge on foot, on the top surface of the arch, not at road level. This feat was completed at night after a party at the Hotel.

I had the great pleasure of working with Dick in the field and, amongst other places we spent a good deal of time in the Honde Valley carrying out a soil survey for what was to become the Katiyo Tea Estate. We fished in the Pungwe River and Dick revealed his incredible fishing rod. It was a shad rod which was cut into many sections to fit into his rucksack. He thus had all these sections to fit together into a long rod before he could commence fishing. On the way back from Honde Valley climbing up the escarpment, Dick suddenly stopped and pointed to the odometer, and said it was time for the cars' service. This he accomplished fairly quickly on the side of the road (including an oil change, the old oil was collected in a container in order to prevent pollution). Once this was complete we continued our journey to Salisbury.

Dick equipped his family with vintage vehicles – he rode a water-cooled Scott motorbike and the two boys rode Francis Barnett motorbikes which were referred to by Dick as “Frantic Bananas”. Sheila drove a vintage car to complete the family's vintage vehicle collection. In addition to this, Dick always had a number of other motor bikes, all of which he rode as the feeling took him. He was a regular competitor in the Johannesburg-Durban Vintage Motorbike Race, to a very advanced age.

On my last visit to his house, Dick showed me his papaya tree in the back yard. On the verandah parapet was a pellet gun which he told me he used to protect the fruit on the tree from birds. I was told that his neighbors were very upset about the bird shooting but Dick maintained that if they were stealing his fruit, he was entitled to shoot them.

These are just a few of the many stories told about Dick who was a well known and much liked man, who lived his life just a bit differently from other people.

# AWARDS/TOEKENINGS

## 1. UNIVERSITEIT STELLENBOSCH

By die onlangse Maart gradeplegtigheid is daar drie MSc grade toegeken. Een dame en twee mans het grade verwerf.

**Tarina Vermeulen** se tesis, getiteld: “Plant water relations of *Elytropappus Rhinocerotis* with specific reference to soil restrictions on growth”, het gehandel oor die aanpassings in groei en wortelontwikkeling van Renosterbos om in die droë somer van die Swartland te oorleef. Sover bekend was dit die eerste studie van die aard wat uitgevoer is. Sy het ook onder andere na die daaglikse transpirasie en wateropname van die Renosterbos gekyk.

**Danie Kritzinger** se tesis met titel “Evaluering van die langtermyn impak wat grondvoorbereiding op grondfisiese eienskappe” het, het met behulp van verskeie grondfisiese metings bepaal hoe effektief die grondvoorbereidings metodes na `n verloop van tyd was. In die een ondersoek was die effek nog steeds na dertig (30) jaar meetbaar in infiltrasie en brutodigheidsmetings. In `n ander ondersoek was die voordelige effek van laer brutodigtheid op wortelontwikkeling drie jaar effens beter as gronde wat nie bewerk was nie. Verskille tussen die tipe grondvoorbereidingsmetodes was ook duidelik meetbaar.

**Stefan Bekker** se tesis “An investigation into the vigour and physiology of grapevines on and off ‘heuweltjies’ “ het die verskille in groei en opbrengs op en van die heuweltjies af in twee verskillende produksie areas ondersoek. In die Stellenbosch area het die wingerd beter op die heuweltjies gegroei terwyl die omgekeerde effek by Robertson waargeneem is. Die verskille is selfs in die sensoriese ontleding van die wyn waargeneem.

## 2. COMBINED CONGRESS AWARDS

For his contribution to Soil Science, including his book “Soils of South Africa”, Martin Fey was awarded the Gold Medal from the SSSSA, becoming only the second individual winner in the history of the Society (after Prof Hennie van der Watt).

Many congratulations to Martin, seen here receiving his award from SSSSA President Cornie van Huyssteen.





Also receiving an award was Dr Hester Jansen van Rensburg for the best scientific article on soil science published in the SA Journal of Plant and Soil in 2009. The article was entitled "Assessing the potential soil acidification risk under dryland agriculture in the Mlondozi District in the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa" and Hester also received her award from Cornie van Huyssteen.

At the Combined Congress held in January in Pretoria, congratulations to the following winners:

**Best Presentation: Corrie Swanepoel** & Danie Beukes (ARC-ISCW): *Effects of conservation agriculture on selected soil properties and yields under dryland*

**Best Poster: Mike Kidson**, Corrie Swanepoel & Danie Beukes (ARC-ISCW): *Chamber design for in-field CO<sub>2</sub> flux measurement*

**Best Presentation by author <30 years: George van Zijl**, Pieter le Roux (UFS) & Dave Turner (ARC-ISCW): *Disaggregation of land types Ea34 and Ca11 with terrain analysis, expert knowledg and GIS methods*



*The photo on the left shows Mike Kidson and Corrie Swanepoel with co-author Danie Beukes, while the photo on the right shows George van Zijl being presented with his award by Congress guest speaker Martin Fey.*

## **CONGRESSES/KONGRESSE**

### **COMBINED CONGRESS**

The next Combined Congress will be held at the campus of the North West University, Potchefstroom, from January 19<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> 2012. The Horticultural Society will be participating in the African Horticulture Conference at Skukuza, so it will be the other three Societies (SSSSA, SASCP and SAWSS) who will take part.

The announcement will follow in due course, and the web site ([www.combinedcongress.org.za](http://www.combinedcongress.org.za)) will also only be open at a later date, but for more information, contact Astrid Hattingh ([astrid.hattingh@yahoo.com](mailto:astrid.hattingh@yahoo.com)).

### **International Conference on Sustainable Development of Natural Resources in Africa (5th – 8th December 2011, Accra, Ghana)**

Themes to be explored include:

1. Harnessing land and water resources;
2. Developing biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services;
3. Promoting and nurturing a Green Economy;
4. Governing the extractive industries.

Please indicate your interest and intention to participate in this conference by contacting Mr. Harris Andoh by e-mail: [andoh@inra.unu.edu](mailto:andoh@inra.unu.edu) and copied to [andoharris@gmail.com](mailto:andoharris@gmail.com)

Full details of the conference can be found at [www.unu-inra.edu](http://www.unu-inra.edu) and [www.unu.edu](http://www.unu.edu) .

## **SASTA (South African Sugar Technologists Association) SYMPOSIUM ON SUSTAINABLE SOIL USE**

Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> August at SASA, Mount Edgecombe. The cost is R150 for SASTA members, R350 for non-members. To book, contact Danny MacDonald ([sasta@sugar.org.za](mailto:sasta@sugar.org.za)) or phone 031 508 7534 (fax 031 508 7420).

## **MISCELLANEOUS/ALGEMEEN**

### **The importance of stupidity in scientific research**

**Martin A. Schwartz**, Department of Microbiology, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, USA

I recently saw an old friend for the first time in many years. We had been Ph.D. students at the same time, both studying science, although in different areas. She later dropped out of graduate school, went to Harvard Law School and is now a senior lawyer for a major environmental organization. At some point, the conversation turned to why she had left graduate school. To my utter astonishment, she said it was because it made her feel stupid. After a couple of years of feeling stupid every day, she was ready to do something else.

I had thought of her as one of the brightest people I knew and her subsequent career supports that view. What she said bothered me. I kept thinking about it; sometime the next day, it hit me. Science makes me feel stupid too. It's just that I've gotten used to it - so used to it, in fact, that I actively seek out new opportunities to feel stupid. I wouldn't know what to do without that feeling. I even think it's supposed to be this way. Let me explain. For almost all of us, one of the reasons that we liked science in high school and college is that we were good at it. That can't be the only reason – fascination with understanding the physical world and an emotional need to discover new things has to enter into it too. But high-school and college science means taking courses, and doing well in courses means getting the right answers on tests.

If you know those answers, you do well and get to feel smart. A Ph.D., in which you have to do a research project, is a whole different thing. For me, it was a daunting task. How could I possibly frame the questions that would lead to significant discoveries; design and interpret an experiment so that the conclusions were absolutely convincing; foresee difficulties and see ways around them, or, failing that, solve them when they occurred? My Ph.D. project was somewhat interdisciplinary and, for a while, whenever I ran into a problem, I pestered the faculty in my department who were experts in the various disciplines that I needed. I remember the day when Henry Taube (who won the Nobel Prize two years later) told me he didn't know how to solve the problem I was having in his area. I was a third-year graduate student and I figured that

Taube knew about 1000 times more than I did (conservative estimate). If he didn't have the answer, nobody did.

That's when it hit me: nobody did. That's why it was a research problem. And being *my* research problem, it was up to me to solve. Once I faced that fact, I solved the problem in a couple of days. (It wasn't really very hard; I just had to try a few things.) The crucial lesson was that the scope of things I didn't know wasn't merely vast; it was, for all practical purposes, infinite. That realization, instead of being discouraging, was liberating. If our ignorance is infinite, the only possible course of action is to muddle through as best we can. I'd like to suggest that our Ph.D. programs often do students a disservice in two ways. First, I don't think students are made to understand how hard it is to do research. And how very, very hard it is to do important research. It's a lot harder than taking even very demanding courses. What makes it difficult is that research is immersion in the unknown. We just don't know what we're doing.

We can't be sure whether we're asking the right question or doing the right experiment until we get the answer or the result. Admittedly, science is made harder by competition for grants and space in top journals. But apart from all of that, doing significant research is intrinsically hard and changing departmental, institutional or national policies will not succeed in lessening its intrinsic difficulty.

Second, we don't do a good enough job of teaching our students how to be productively stupid – that is, if we don't feel stupid it means we're not really trying. I'm not talking about 'relative stupidity', in which the other students in the class actually read the material, think about it and ace the exam, whereas you don't.

I'm also not talking about bright people who might be working in areas that don't match their talents. Science involves confronting our 'absolute stupidity'. That kind of stupidity is an existential fact, inherent in our efforts to push our way into the unknown. Preliminary and thesis exams have the right idea when the faculty committee pushes until the student starts getting the answers wrong or gives up and says, 'I don't know'. The point of the exam isn't to see if the student gets all the answers right. If they do, it's the faculty who failed the exam. The point is to identify the student's weaknesses, partly to see where they need to invest some effort and partly to see whether the student's knowledge fails at a sufficiently high level that they are ready to take on a research project.

Productive stupidity means being ignorant by choice. Focusing on important questions puts us in the awkward position of being ignorant. One of the beautiful things about science is that it allows us to bumble along, getting it wrong time after time, and feel perfectly fine as long as we learn something each time. No doubt, this can be difficult for students who are accustomed to getting the answers right. No doubt, reasonable levels of confidence and emotional resilience help, but I think scientific education might do more to ease what is a very big transition: from learning what other people once discovered to making your own discoveries. The more comfortable we become with being stupid, the deeper we will wade into the unknown and the more likely we are to make big discoveries.

## SASSO/SAGO

Four gatherings of the South African Soil Surveyors Organisation are planned for this year.



The first meeting took place in the Free State on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> March under the leadership of Pieter le Roux and Nacelle Collins and looked at wetland soils, in the Golden Gate Highlands National Park, in Qwa Qwa and at the Eskom Pumped Storage Scheme at Ingula.



**Photo 1:** SASSO delegates (honestly!!) in the Golden Gate wetland



**Photo 2:** Holding discussions at the wetland in Qwa Qwa.

The other SASSO meetings are as follows:

**Meeting 2:** 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> June 2011. St Lucia District of KwaZulu-Natal. Study of the soils and their development in the forestry industry. In addition to discussion on soil properties, we can expect information on tree planting with hydro-gel, mechanical harvesting, fire control, and species selection. An evening discussion of the conservation issues at the St Lucia Heritage Site is planned, while the agricultural production will also be addressed. Meeting Organizers: Mr. Keith Snyman, Mr Cobus Botha and Ms Janet Taylor.

**Meeting 3:** 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> August 2011. Study of the soils and fruit production systems in the sub-tropical fruit industry for mango, lichi and avocado fruits in the Tzaneen District, Limpopo Province. Meeting Organizers: Dr Johan van der Waals and Mr.Gerhard Nortjè.

**Meeting 4:** October 2011 (Dates to be confirmed). Study of the soils and production systems in the grain producing areas of Bethal and Kriel in the Eastern Mpumalanga Highveld. We can expect to study interesting soil profiles of the district and hold a Special Open Discussion on the production systems, limitations and agricultural potential of soils used for grain production. Meeting Organizers: Mr Bates Booyens and the Omnia Fertilizers Team.

All interested parties are invited to attend one or more of these workshops. For more details, contact Dave Turner (012 310 2597; [dturner@arc.agric.za](mailto:dturner@arc.agric.za)).

## **Nuus uit die Wes-Kaap**

### **1. Kalsium simposium**

Die Grondkunde Besprekingsgroep van Stellenbosch het 'n Kalsium Simposium gereël wat op die 10de Mei plaasgevind het. Die simposium was vir ons van groot belang om geskille rondom die bepaling van die kalsium- en gipsbehoefte in ons land se gronde te kon aanspreek. Daar is gevind dat verskeie instansies en landbou voorligters/konsultante wegbeweeg van die konvensionele metodes en die meriete hiervan is tans baie aktueel. Ons beplan om weer breedvoertig hieroor te rapporteer in die toekoms.

### **2. Duitse besoekers**

Die Grondkunde Departement het weer besoek gehad uit Duitsland, met Dr Beate Michalzik van Jena (Friedrich Schiller Universiteit) en 'n M student, Falko Stier, wat navorsing doen op die verskille in koolstof voorkoms in Renosterveld en die aangrensende koringlande.

### **3. Nuwe projekte**

Die departement begin vanjaar 'n nuwe WNK-projek gemik op die hulpverlening aan water bestuurders wat gekoppel aan Waterbestuurs liggame. Die hulpverlening is in terme van die opstelling van modelle en metingstegnieke vir suksesvolle water bestuur.

Ons begin ook 'n nuwe Europese Unie FP7 projek, EAU4FOOD, wat gemik is op innovasie rondom water en produksie in landelike gebiede. Die innovasie gaan gepaard met 'n transdissiplinêre aksie vir die implementering en verbetering van oorlewingshulpmiddele in ons agtergeblewe gemeenskap. Die projek gaan op persele in Suid Afrika, Mosambiek, Ethiopië, Tunisië en Mali gedoen word. Die instansie tans betrokke is die Universiteit van Stellenbosch, die WNNR op Stellenbosch en die IGKW in Pretoria. As deel van die belangegroep is die departement Landbou en SANCID ook betrokke.

### **4. Water Instituut**

Die nuut gestigte Water Instituut aan die Stellenbosch Universiteit het 'n OSP (oorhoofse strukturele program) status wat beteken dat ons as grondkundiges ook direk betrokke is by hierdie Instituut en dat ons ook werk vir die Instituut kan doen. Dit plaas ons noodwendig ook in 'n beter posisie om te kan meeding rondom water navorsing projekte internasionaal. Die eerste sukses hier rondom is dan ook die EAU4Food FP7 projek waarby ons betrokke is. Die projek is beide 'n voedsel sekuriteit en water sekuriteit projek wat in verskeie Afrika lande uitgevoer gaan word.

### **IECA-SA**

The South African chapter of the International Erosion Control Association (IECA-SA) recently held its 2012 AGM at the headquarters of Kaytech in Johannesburg. The Association has several aims, including the promotion of sediment control in all environments (industrial, agricultural and others), as well as holding workshops and demonstrations in this regard. Another objective is to produce a document (based on existing examples from USA and Australia) with guidelines on best practice technology for sediment control and erosion prevention. The next workshop has not yet been determined, but it may well be in Limpopo Province to connect with a very successful Vetiver grass cultivation project that is underway in the Sekhukhune District.

For more details on the activities of IECA-SA, contact the Chairman Lehman Lindeque (012 310 2598; [lindequel@arc.agric.za](mailto:lindequel@arc.agric.za)).

## Developments in the sugar industry

### 1. HONORARY APPOINTMENTS

Two soil scientists at SASRI received honorary appointments from SA universities over the last three months. They are:

<b>SASRI Staff Member</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>School/Department</b>	<b>Honorary Appointment</b>
Michael van der Laan	University of Pretoria	Department of Plant Production and Soil Science	Extraordinary Lecturer
Neil Miles	University KwaZulu-Natal (Westville Campus)	School of Environmental Sciences	Honorary Research Fellow

### 2. VISIT OF PROF MALCOLM SUMNER TO SA SUGAR INDUSTRY

Professor Malcolm E. Sumner, retired from the University of Georgia in the USA, will visit the South African sugar industry through an international visitor's grant made available by the South African Sugar Technologists Association (SASTA). Professor Sumner has 55 years experience in soil science and has worked in many countries, including South Africa, Swaziland, Central America, Saudi Arabia, the Netherlands, the USA, Australia and Greece. He has written more than 250 peer-reviewed articles and has been involved in the publication of eight books.

His visit will coincide with the annual SASTA congress in late August (see above) where he will also present a plenary session paper. During his visit, Professor Sumner will work closely with SASRI scientists on issues pertaining to soil fertility management and soil health. A special workshop on sustainable soil use is being organised where Prof Sumner and a number of other specialists will share their knowledge. The workshop will be an excellent opportunity to discuss many related issues, and persons who are interested to attend this workshop are welcome to contact the SASTA secretary ([sasta@sugar.org.za](mailto:sasta@sugar.org.za)).

# HUMOUR

*With acknowledgements to Prof Giel Laker*

## **Pasop vir die Boere!**

Barack Obama was sitting in his office wondering which country to invade next, when his telephone rang.

"Howzit, Barack!" a voice in broken English said. "This is Koos Vannermerwe here from the Doringboom Bar in Welkom, South Africa. I am ringing to inform you that we are officially declaring war on you, boet!"

"Well, Koos," Barack replied, "This is indeed important news! How big is your army?"

"Right now," said Koos, after a moment's calculation, "there is myself, my cousin Jan, my next-door neighbour Lang Hannes and the entire darts team from the pub. That makes eight of us!"

Barack paused. "I must tell you, Koos that I have one million men in my army waiting to move on my command."

"Blikkiesfontein!" said Koos. "I'll have to ring you back!" Sure enough, the next day, Koos called again. "Barack, my china, the war is still on! We have managed to acquire some infantry equipment!"

"And what equipment would that be, Koos?" Barack asked.

"Well, we have four Hilux double-cabs, two kombis, an old Case bulldozer, and Vet Gert's John Deere tractor".

Barack sighed. "I must tell you, Koos, that I have 16,000 tanks and 14,000 armored personnel carriers. Also, I've increased my army to 1.5 million since we last spoke."

"Liewe erdvark!" said Koos. "I'll have to get back to you..." Sure enough, Koos rang again the next day.

"Barack, ou swaer, the war is still on! We have managed to get ourselves airborne! We've modified Doepie's ultra-light with a couple of shotguns in the cockpit, and four okes from the Virginia Hengelklub have joined us as well!"

Barack was silent for a minute and then cleared his throat. "I must tell you, Koos, I have 10,000 bombers and 20,000 fighter planes. My military complex is surrounded by laser-guided, surface-to-air missile sites. And since we last spoke, I've increased my army to TWO MILLION!"

"Slaat my dood!", said Koos, "I'll have to ring you back." Sure enough, Koos called again the next day. "Jis, jis, jis, Barack! I am sorry to tell you that we've had to call off the war."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Barack. "Why the sudden change of heart?"

"Well," said Koos, "We've all had a long chat over some Klippies and coke, and decided there's no way we can feed two million prisoners of war!"

## **SOIL SCIENCE SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA: MISSION**

The SSSSA is a scientific society, which, in the interest of its members, promotes the advancement of soil science and soil technology as well as the responsible practicing thereof by its members with the view to the long-term sustainable utilization of the environment in the interest of the community.

### **Aims**

1. Promotion and protection of the professional status and prestige of soil science as a science and career.
2. Promotion and extension of the society.
3. Promotion of the standard of training of soil scientists and technologists.
4. Creation of opportunities for the free exchange of ideas on soil science and technology.
5. The obtaining and dissemination of knowledge, information and ideas having relevance to soil science by means of discussion and publication.
6. Promotion of contact between the society and other bodies with common or similar interests, both within South Africa and overseas.

## **GRONDKUNDEVERENIGING VAN SUID-AFRIKA: MISSIE**

Die GVSA is 'n wetenskaplike vereniging wat in belang van sy lede verbind is tot die bevordering van grondkundige wetenskap en tegnologie, en die verantwoordelike beoefening daarvan deur sy lede met die oog op die lang termyn volhoubare benutting van die omgewing in belang van die gemeenskap.

### **Doelstellings**

1. Bevordering en beskerming van die professionele status en aansien van grondkunde as 'n wetenskaplike beroep.
2. Bevordering en uitbouing van die vereniging.
3. Bevordering van die standaard van opleiding van grondkundige wetenskaplikes en -tegnoloë.
4. Skepping van geleenthede vir vrye gedagtewisseling oor grondkundige wetenskap en tegnologie.
5. Die verkryging en verspreiding van kennis, inligting en idees wat op grondkunde betrekking het by wyse van samesprekings en publikasies.
6. Bevordering van skakeling tussen die vereniging en ander liggame met gemeenskaplike of soortgelyke belange, beide in Suid-Afrika en in die buiteland.