

SUCCESSION

Alicedale Farm

LOUISE BRODIE

(Summarised by Gloria Weare)



Back: Kelvin, Jason and Christie Smit; front: Peter Nicholson, Teagan Joubert, Lynette Nicholson and Lyneveigh Smit.

Peter and Lynette Nicholson have farmed at Alicedale since 1984. The farm now comprises 850 ha of citrus, as well as a recently purchased 200 ha plot near Rustenburg where they are developing blueberries. All three of their children and their spouses are involved in the family farming business.

The Nicholson family has a long history in the area, as Peter's great-grandfather settled in Limpopo when he emigrated from Ireland. Although both his great-grandfather and father farmed, Peter did not inherit any land from them. The farms had been sold by the time he was born. His parents raised their children to accept that the only inheritance they would receive is a sound value system and a good education, to be able to make a good living. Peter studied civil engineering, and after his military service he started his own construction business.

However, his family's return to agriculture happened through his in-laws. He met his wife Lynette – a nurse at the time – in hospital while having a broken arm treated. After they married, Peter got involved in the running of Alicedale, Lynette's mother's farm. He soon bought shares and finally had full ownership.

Peter and Lynette's children are now all involved in the family business. They were raised with the same values as Peter, and have each qualified with various degrees, starting their own working careers independent of the farm. But then they each made the choice to join the farming business. Peter explained that it is not right for any family member to work for another. So they have structured the business into projects

with each individual being appointed as a project manager. As farmers in Africa, part of the culture at Alicedale is to help create prosperity for their neighbours and community. After land claims were registered against Alicedale, Peter called a meeting with all the claimants and neighbouring landowners to start a dialogue. With patience and time an agreement was finally reached with those who were prepared to participate in change. In the end, only one family was keen to unite for the sake of both families. The Nemamilwes and the Nicholsons have now purchased two other citrus farms as joint shareholders, with Alicedale guaranteeing loans and the income from the rental helps pay off the loans.

Peter feels strongly that the SA agricultural sector would benefit significantly from an official Charter of Agriculture. But, in the meantime he is doing the best he can by building policies around the relationships with the farm's labour force. Alicedale has 600 permanent employees, and during the ten-month harvest period an additional 1200 workers. They have a women's and men's labour trust and are establishing an investment company for these trusts.

In conclusion, Peter stated that the long-term plan for the Alicedale family business is for everyone to be future-focussed. Therefore, he is preparing the groundwork for long-term sustainability. 🌱

