

SUCCESSION STORIES



Mihlali and Lawrence Mgadle in the orchards at Ripplemead Farm

Ripplemead Farm, Lawrence Mgadle

Lawrence Mgadle's started farming at Ripplemead in 1985 when the farm comprised 34 ha of citrus orchards. By Tanya Ungerer (adapted from Louise Brodie's "Stories of succession in the citrus industry" publication of 2019)



At the entrance to Ripplemead Farm is a big name board which has a detailed inventory of the number of citrus trees of each variety and when they were planted. This remarkable accounting for every tree speaks of Lawrence's pride, attention to detail and a commitment to the wellbeing of each tree in the orchards at Ripplemead.

In 1993 he became the owner of this 86 ha farm and has expanded the citrus orchards to 60 ha over time, despite considerable challenges.

Lawrence is a member on various citrus groups, underscoring his passion for citrus farming. He and, his son Mihlali, are both upbeat about the future of Ripplemead farm as Mihlali looks forward to joining the family business in the next few years. A new, state-of-the-art citrus packhouse has been constructed next to Ripplemead Farm. This has largely been as a result of Lawrence's government lobbying, and is a dream come true for the Mgadle family and their neighbours.

After completing an Introduction to Citrus course at Fort Cox Agricultural College, Lawrence went on to work for Ulimocor, the Ciskei Department of Agriculture Parastatal Company. In 1989 the Ciskei Government

sent him to Israel for eight weeks of intensive training on citrus production guidelines. As part of the Ciskei's agricultural privatisation initiative, Ripplemead Farm was awarded to Lawrence on a five-year rental probation period. But before the five years had passed, Ulimocor was liquidated. And without title deeds, all the farmers who were part of this initiative were left without any support or funding structures.

After many years of struggle, Lawrence managed to secure the title deed for Ripplemead Farm. He puts his success down to the dedication of his motivated workforce, most of whom have been at Ripplemead since Lawrence started and who he handpicked while he was still the manager.

"Lona markets our fruit and we have a good relationship with them, based on mutual trust."

Lawrence explained that his family lives in King Williamstown, about an hour away from Ripplemead, and gets involved in the planting, growing and harvesting process during the holidays. Nokuzola, Lawrence's wife, handles the business and administration side of the farm while teaching accounting in King Williamstown. They have three children - Mihlali, is the eldest son who has graduated from Nelson Mandela University, Somila is the middle daughter who studied accounting and Yonela is the youngest daughter who matriculated recently.

"I am thrilled that Mihlali is planning to join me on the farm but I have a plan to provide him with broader experiences within the citrus industry," explains Lawrence. "I have asked Deon Joubert, a big commercial farmer from the Sundays River Valley, to employ Mihlali on his farm to give him the opportunity to learn about the citrus industry, experience the production process, and get to know the citrus industry role-players in the Eastern Cape." Lawrence further explains that farming is a business and not a charity and that he hopes the experience will teach Mihlali to think like a businessman. When he returns from the Sundays River Valley, Lawrence would like to work with his son

for a few years before he hands over the responsibility completely. Lawrence's hope is that, in time, his daughters will also become part of the family business.

Mihlali explained that he received a bursary from the Citrus Academy, which gave him exposure to the industry. "In 2017 the Citrus Academy arranged for us to go on a study tour to the Western Cape. There we visited farmers and learnt about successful and sustainable farming operations. It was during this tour that I saw that farming is not just about production, but that there is an entire value chain and various companies that deal with citrus from origin to consumption and adds value to the product. It inspired me to see how many opportunities this offered within our industry."

And thanks to the Citrus Academy, Mihlali also attended the Citrus Summit that took place in Gqeberha in March 2017, as well as the Citrus Production and Value Chain Short

Course that was offered in their region. "I am trying to get as many industry exposure opportunities as I can in order to learn about the various aspects of the industry to broaden my knowledge for the future. This includes learning as much as possible about new technology in citrus production. My father has just introduced new irrigation technology called Chameleon, which reads the irrigation requirements of our various orchards. This kind of cutting edge technology has the potential to make great advances within the citrus industry," he added.

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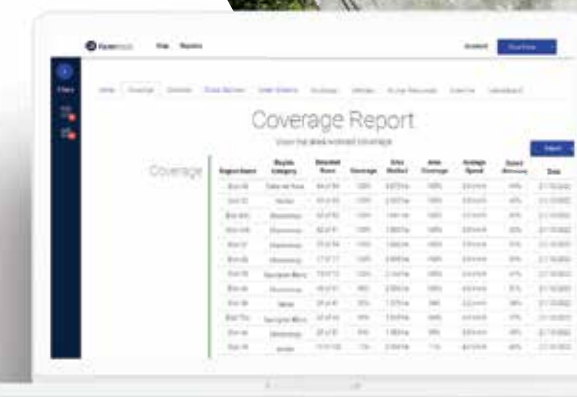
The sign at the entrance to Ripplemead Farm

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