

Save Bekker School's agriculture



Meadow feeds recently called upon all its contacts to encourage support and donations towards the 'saving of Bekker School's agricultural status', which has fallen in disfunctionality as a direct result of low interest and support from the Department of Education and Training.

According to Theo Scholtz, Headmaster, the Bekker Schools accommodate 650 students and produce of the best results at all levels. This 70/30 dual medium school for pupils from Grades 8 to 12 has the biggest hostel in the country and introduces students to agricultural activities. It is an integrated school with an integrated governing body and staff. The school's agricultural department has 21 teachers, but "we pay for 37 - 16 extra teachers - ourselves as it is".

They were beset by a number of mishaps such as having the boreholes run dry due to draught soon after installing a R300 000 centre-pivot irrigation system. The demonstrative production units do not cover running costs. "It pays say 80% of overall farming cost and therefore requires 20% support."

Out of an agriculture budget of over R5 million, it was reported that the Department contributes only as little as R180 000! What a disgrace!! (Using the term 'disgrace' in almost the same context as JM Coetzee's Nobel prize winning novel of similar name. Is this not one of the aspects of oversight (discrimination?) that leads one to conclude that our skills shortage is a 'managed' one? – If you will allow the editor a personal remark on the situation – Editor.)

In opening the meeting, Chris Schutte, MD of Meadow Feeds, announced that the gathering was organised by Louise du Plessis of Meadow, with the objective of gathering support for the school to be a sustainable and independent institution in its agricultural divisions, and so promote all the aspects of agriculture, including broilers and layers.

The role of the agricultural industry at Bekker can be to upgrade facilities to operational status, improve profitability of farming sections and supply equipment to operational facilities. The industry can also lend a hand with some sound technical advice, quality feed, guest lectures and a well-equipped training facility. This will ensure the continued high quality training of agriculturalists by developing an interest with scholars in agriculture. Donors will also have access to the top matric students.

In both the broiler and layer divisions, the school currently has housing that is not ready for production, and feed and water equipment that is not in working condition, which means that feeding is done manually. There is no heating system and the ventilation system is not operational. They also have a problem with insufficient lighting.

Broiler requirements

- Management and technical advice:
 - Placement density etc.
 - Vaccinations
 - Quality feed
- Repairs to the Broiler housing building:
 - Floors, door and walls
 - Windows
 - Ceiling
- Repairs to the feeding system:
 - Water nipples leaking
- Heating and ventilation
- Electrical repairs

Layer requirements

- Management and technical advice
- Repairs to the Layer building
- Installation of a new feeding system
- New cages for Layers
- Heating and ventilation
- Electrical repairs
- Quality feed for optimal production

Some of the outcomes of the discussions amongst the attendees (Cargill, Instavet, Ceva, Alltech, Deltamune, Grainco, Afma, Natchicks, Nu Tech, etc.) was that a trust should be formed and role players are to be asked to pledge support per sub-section. A visit by bus for people with an interest will follow later to take stakeholders to see for themselves what is required.

As much as R1 million capex is needed, linked to a running support of say 20% of the costs. Poultry Bulletin joins the support for Bekker Schools in encouraging readers to contact Louise du Plessis at Meadow, Randfontein, and pledge support from the poultry industry in Gauteng to save the agricultural status of the only agricultural school in the province. Gauteng is a concentrated poultry producing

province and therefore should wholeheartedly support this initiative.

Pledges made include National Chicks, who are to adopt the broiler section, while Dave Stock supported the establishment of a fund for cash contributions. Hannes Swart of Avimune supported the exercise with an undertaking to assist with health and vet expertise and contributions to the layer side. Guest lectures and study material can be forthcoming from them. Other attendees filled in with more ideas or pledges.

For more information, or to add your support, please contact Louise du Plessis at telephone 011 693 5120 or email LouiseduPlessis@meadowfeeds.co.za.