



## ***12 DECADES OF PERSISTENCE***

Best Free State Agriculture member

We are already a month into 2024. We believe and trust that you all had a blessed festive season with loved ones. There probably wasn't much rest, as the rainy season had most of us holding our breath. Nevertheless, we look forward to the year ahead.

Apart from the planting season, which could take place slightly later than usual, there is possibly a slight discomfort with most of us about the election which takes place later this year. As history has proven, the rhetoric about land will once again receive unwanted attention. We can assure you that Free State Agriculture will not be intimidated by that. Our focus always remains to create a safe and sustainable agricultural environment so that you can continue to do what you are passionate about - and that is farming!

On a positive note: Free State Agriculture is in the very privileged position of being able to celebrate our **120th anniversary** this year! Few organizations have been granted such a milestone and we would like to express our sincere thanks to you as a member for making it possible! Without you, the organization is only a building. You are the heartbeat of Free State Agriculture and the reason why we, who have been elected by you to take the reins, will do everything in our power to state and defend the cause of farmers for the next 12 decades.

All the best for 2024. Hold on to the words of the Psalmist "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." (Ps 37:3 KJV)



*Francis Wilken*



## RURAL SAFETY

### Facial recognition for cattle

FSA's Rural Safety Committee was recently informed about Agri Facial Recognition which makes technology available on cattle ("Agri Facial Recognition"). Just as a fingerprint is unique to each person's DNA, facial recognition for cattle is the latest technology to act preventively in order to limit livestock theft. Each cattle's unique facial structure and nose helps the digital software to enter and store the automatic nose detection and biometric identification of each cattle on a database.

Various packages are available that vary from 1 to 1000 cattle and start at an amount of R8850 (1-80 cattle) and an annual fee is also payable of R3 500 for a livestock producer. The integration of the system into FSA's AIMS system is also currently being investigated. For "Agri Facial Recognition" Naas Botes can be contacted at 083 273 5350 or [naas@agrifacial.co.za](mailto:naas@agrifacial.co.za)

### Centralized control room for Bfn needed, say farmers

On 18 November 2023, a safety workshop was held between the farming communities around Bloemfontein, private security companies, neighborhood guards who serve holding areas, the police as well as organized agricultural structures including TLU, Saai, AfriForum and Free State Agriculture.

The aim of the workshop was to establish a better way of working between all the role players, as well as to establish an E2 Telegram group for the Bloemfontein area where response and activation of the police can take place in collaboration with private security, neighborhood watches and farming communities.

The need for a possible centralized control room for the Bloemfontein area has been identified and is being investigated.

[Read more](#)



### Illegal hunting with dogs still a big problem

Dr Jane Buys mentions that illegal hunting with dogs took place during December 2023 in 15 farming communities in the Free State.

In 5 of the towns, arrests were carried out, each time in collaboration with private security that serves the area.

The complaints that emerged from this were again brought to the attention of the SAPS at the Provincial Priority Committee meeting in January 2024, with the request that this type of crime be treated much more seriously and the police insure that dossiers are created with all the complaints affixed to it.



# COMMERCIAL

## FSA Traceability System

FSA's Animal Identification, Movement and Safety system is ready to open in mid-February.

Livestock farmers will be able to register and place orders for ICAR registered ear tags on Free State Agriculture's [website](#). These tags have unique animal identification numbers on them, which can also be easily read with a mobile phone camera through the QR code.



However, branding remains mandatory by law. Farmers will also be able to upload their current livestock, with old ear tag numbers, onto the AIMS system. Furthermore, farmers with current livestock management systems - stud or commercial - will also be able to upload their list of livestock onto AIMS so that the movement of livestock from one farmer to another, to an auction or abattoir, or stolen livestock is available. FSA's private livestock theft investigators will also have access to the database.

The system will also provide for reporting/notifying the outbreak of a reportable disease. Other advantages of AIMS are that the Section 6 and 8 forms for the movement of livestock are compiled by the program for a lot of livestock as well as a livestock health declaration (health attestation).

Members will be notified as soon as FSA publishes the web address for the AIMS system.

In the meantime, any queries about the system can be sent to Dr Jack Armour at [jack@vslanbou.co.za](mailto:jack@vslanbou.co.za)

**2024 Committee objectives**

The Commercial Affairs Committee of FSA, which includes Local Government in terms of property tax, plans to empower agricultural associations by creating/supporting structures for:

- effective liaison with local government (through the IDP and SDF),
- district roads officers,
- Telekom and ESKOM channels for error reporting,
- local government veterinarians,
- local chambers of commerce, etc.

Any queries or suggestions can be sent to Dr Jack Armour at [jack@vslanbou.co.za](mailto:jack@vslanbou.co.za)



## COMMERCIAL (continue)

### FSA Risk Index

In order to better serve our members, Dr Jack Armor together with other experts put together a questionnaire to determine the farmer's input on production and risk prospects for the quarter ahead.

The latest results (24Q1) highlighted the following:

- Farmers in the Free State consider infrastructure - i.e. roads, but also ESKOM and telecommunications - as a **threat**. There is also a great concern that crime and criminality as well as government policy will pose great risks going forward.
- As far as farming **production** / yield is concerned, reasonable decreases in maize (more yellow) and soya yields are expected with a small increase in weanling calf, lamb/sheep and teff sales.
- Participants in the questionnaire indicated that there were plans to **spend** more on fixed improvements after the three consecutive relatively good years. Farm safety and security systems, alternative energy generation, and community upliftment actions are some of the ongoing themes.

Other issues identified as risks included: service delivery expertise, problems with vaccines, theft, political unrest, local political accountability, overall negativity, the ANC and natural disasters (specifically wildfires). FSA will investigate the factors thoroughly and give the necessary attention in the coming quarter and year.

Participation in the index was forwarded to each member by email as well as announced via the FSA **WhatsApp Broadcast Group** with links. The deadline was January 30, but if you still want to send in your input (by February 10) and have access to the full results, contact [jack@vslanbou.co.za](mailto:jack@vslanbou.co.za)

Thanks to the farmers who have already participated. The Mangaung district (Central US) was ahead with 32%, followed by Thabo Mofutsanyana (Eastern US) 27% and Felize Dabi (Northern US) with 17% of the participants. 89% of participants farm with livestock and 49% are seed farmers.

### ESKOM technicians capacity

After numerous complaints by farmers during December regarding ESKOM technician capacity and availability, FSA was assured that additional technicians will be appointed and that Eskom's "recruitment drive will continue until optimal capacity is reached."

In relation to error reporting, ESKOM requests that customers respect repair times as per the supply agreements, i.e. 7.5 hours before following the escalation process. "If errors are escalated immediately after receiving a reference number, it causes unnecessary distractions and administrative burdens on the teams that should be focused on fixing errors and subsequent delays occur."

Where total feeders are out for more than 8 hours, Eskom considers load shedding exemptions for a block or two, depending on the situation.



## LABOUR ISSUES

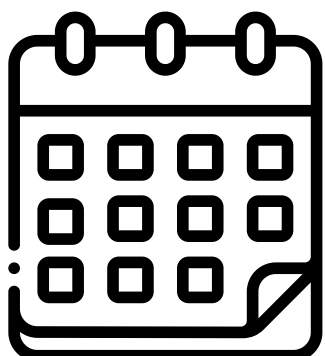
### National minimum wage

On 6 December 2023, the National Minimum Wage Commission requested comments on the recommendations made to the Minister of Employment and Labour, regarding adjustment of the minimum wage.

On 2 February 2024, the Minister of Employment and Labor announced by means of a notice in the Government Gazette an upward adjustment of 8.5% in terms of which the hourly rate of the wage is increased to R27.58. Francois Wilken, president of Free State Agriculture, believes the adjustment "is totally out of touch with the economic realities experienced by businesses and is indicative of the total lack of understanding about the economic conditions in the country."

Read the full media release [here](#) .

### FSA Calender



- 21 February - FSA Finance Committee & Executive Board meeting
- February 22 - FSA Executive management meeting
- February 23 - FSA Young farmer committee meeting
- March 5 - FSA Rural Safety committee meeting

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