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Agri-Learn

Farmer's Capacity Building Newsletter

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The Basics of Grazing Management



• Erastus Ngaruka

The grazing value and capacity of the land is a factor of certain attributes such as the soil condition, grass species composition, density, and abundance amongst others. These attributes are further influenced by rainfall activities and the intensity of utilization of the grazing materials. Grazing management refers to the approaches that farmers use to ensure that their livestock have controlled access to a grazing area. The grazing habits of these animals have varying degrees of impact on the grazing. For example, donkeys are heavy grazers, and sheep are selective grazers. Selective grazing is where the animal only selects to utilize certain grass species (e.g. *Brachiaria nigropedata*) that are more palatable or valuable than others.

When heavy and selective grazing pressure on the most palatable species is continuous over a longer time, these grasses become locally extinct or depleted. This leaves the less valuable grass species (e.g. *Aristida stipitata*) to dominate that grazing area. These are the grasses that animals have at their disposal during the dry season because they were least utilized during the active growing period (summer months) and had a chance to grow to maturity. Due to their rigid structure for example, the animals struggle to eat/digest them, limiting the daily intake.

Furthermore, overgrazing renders the soil unstable and infertile/unproductive because the removal of grass exposes the soil to adverse

conditions such as heat, erosion, and compaction amongst others. For example, erosion removes the seeds and organic matter together with the soil, thus, inhibiting plant growth. In addition, this reduces the competitive ability of the grass which then gives rise to the establishment and dominance of other opportunistic plants such as the woody plants (bush encroachment). Overgrazing amongst others is considered the primary cause of rangeland degradation in Namibia because of the multiple impacts associated with grazing livestock. One of the grazing practices used to avoid overgrazing is the rotational grazing system where animals periodically move from one grazing area to another. The practice allows grazing areas to be utilized and rested to recover for a certain period before they are grazed again. To achieve this, it is advisable for farmers to consider the following amongst others; firstly, the amount of grazing materials available should continuously satisfy the amount that is required by the animals. This means, appropriate stocking rates or the estimated carrying capacity of the grazing area should apply. Secondly, the duration of grazing and resting allows animals to graze the area optimally and allow sufficient time for the grazing to recover (graze-shorter-rest@longer). This timing should also be informed by the intensity/level of grazing and the response of the grazing materials. Other factors to consider when plan-

ning grazing management include the availability and status of infrastructure such as the number and sizes of camps, and water availability and distribution. In conclusion, it is worth noting that rainfall alone will not improve grazing conditions without sustainable grazing management practices which includes rangeland rehabilitation efforts. These include, rotational grazing, grass re-seeding, controlling soil erosion and bush encroachment, and stocking rate adjustments amongst others. However, the applicability of these practices will differ as per the characteristics and production system in each grazing area.



Some Basic Considerations for the Dry Season



• Erastus Ngaruka

Many farming areas in Namibia have received a lot of rain compared to the previous seasons, recording above the usual annual averages. The rangeland productivity has improved in some areas although the quality of the grazing materials is still not the finest. However, the livestock's body conditions are high (fat conditions). It should however be noted that the quantity and quality of the grazing materials the animals are eating now have an influence on their endurance until the next rainy season which can also not be surely predicted. Thus, farmers need to continuously ensure that their livestock survival and performance are not compromised. Since the normal dry season is approaching, there are specific challenges that farmers will face, these are associated with, livestock nutrition, health, and reproduction amongst oth-

ers. On the topic of nutritional supplementation, livestock require sufficient supply of nutrients throughout the year as a response to seasonal changes in rangeland conditions and body demands. Grazing livestock such as cattle and sheep are the most vulnerable to nutritional deficiency, especially mineral deficiencies because the soil-mineral concentration especially in sandy areas is beyond the grass root zones for uptake.

During the rainy season or the summer months, focus has been on mineral supplementation, with greater emphasis on phosphorus as it is deficient in soils. Phosphorus plays a principal role in metabolism, amongst others, especially when animal feed intake is higher. As winter approaches, the grasses stop growing and go into the dormancy period where the nutrients are relocated to be stored in the root system as reserves for regrowth in the next season. During this time, grasses are drying up and shedding seeds and, in the process, vitamin A and much of the protein is lost.

Therefore, farmers need to inoculate their animals with vitamin A and to provide protein lick supplements. One of the ingredients needed in the winter supplements is urea as it enhances the digestion of dry forage materials through increased population and strength of the rumen microorganisms responsible for digestion in ruminant animals. Later in the dry season, the animal's demand for energy increases as the grass plants become depleted, scarcer or grazed to the maximum. Thus, energy supplements need to be added to the protein supplements and in certain cases especially when there is grazing shortage, roughage feeds or hay will be needed to fill the rumen. Since many farmers have plant-

ed crops, they can cheaply use processed crop residues as dry season feed supplements. Winter is also the period during which goats and sheep will be giving birth for some farmers. This is a critical period that requires extra effort in ensuring that the birth processes are smooth and that the lambs and kids survive. The biggest challenge for the lambs and kids is to survive the cold conditions of the winter months, thus, farmers need to start preparing shelters to keep the newborns warm.

These include, houses, digging pits, and enclosures covered with heat-trapping material such as black plastic sheets amongst others. The cold conditions can also result in respiratory infections, mainly pneumonia (Pasteurellosis). Thus, the mothers must have been vaccinated already to pass the immunity to the young ones through milk (colostrum) at least in the first month, or the young can be vaccinated at least at two weeks of age. In addition, the lambs and kids need sufficient milk and feeds (creep feeds) to generate heat to keep warm and maintain optimal growth.

Therefore, mothers (ewes and does) need sufficient feeds to produce sufficient milk for the young. Another challenge for the young ones will be parasites such as mites, fleas, and lice. These parasites will compromise the health and growth potential of lambs and kids; thus, they need to be controlled. One of the good methods of controlling such parasites is by dipping the young ones in an antiparasitic dip solution.

Furthermore, dirty (e.g. dusty, excessive dung) kraals will also pose health risks such as respiratory and eye infections and harboring of parasites. A clean, healthy, and safe kraal environment play a big role in the survival of lambs and kids. Therefore, all potentially harmful conditions need to be eliminated. In conclusion, your farm productivity depends on the animal, the environment, and your management. A successful production cycle is the one where the animal is born and raised to survive until it reproduces or marketed. Therefore, farmers need to develop appropriate management plans that are responsive to the conditions in their production environment. These include seasonal feed shortages and prevailing health risks amongst others. A closer and regular inspection of livestock will be needed to allow quick response to any abnormality or change in livestock health and behavioral conditions.



Basic Considerations on Livestock Handling

contemporary livestock production systems, the concept of animal welfare has become critical with increasing consumer ethical consciousness and preferences. To this end, animal welfare practices have been introduced and enforced through livestock marketing and trade protocols.

Moreover, penalties for improper practices are imposed on farmers at marketing. Basic animal welfare practices aim at caring for the physical and mental state of the animal. This can be achieved through, disease prevention, provision of water and appropriate diet, safe production environment, and humane handling of the animals. The impact of improper livestock handling can result in irreversible losses, including deaths, fractures or broken bones, bruises on carcasses, flesh wounds, and infections amongst others. These in turn result in high veterinary costs, carcass condemnation, and loss of market and potential income.

Handling livestock is always made much easier and safer with appropriate handling facilities and applied human skill and consciousness. This does not mean there will be no risks involved, but sensible health and safety are about managing the risks, and not eliminating them. Part of risk reduction entails farmers knowledge and understanding of the natural instincts and common behaviours of their animals. This will also help at the time of designing and setting up the handling facilities. For example, animals with a bad temperament or that can jump fences would need strong and higher fences to contain them. Furthermore, animals also respond to their environment and handling, thus, when



• Erastus Ngaruka

Handling livestock is always a risky exercise that can culminate into significant livestock injuries and deaths on farms because of improper livestock handling and inappropriate handling facilities. These risks are not only limited to animals, but humans (e.g. workers, veterinarians, etc.) are also highly vulnerable. Apart from risks posed by handling animals, the production environment can also be hazardous. Farmers should note that the physical handling of animals on a farm is part of the daily or regular management tasks. These include vaccination, treatment, branding, dehorning, ear tagging, milking, and others. In

they are in a hostile environment and not used to human presence or are handled roughly, they respond aggressively. For example, new animals on the farm should first be kept close-by in smaller camps for some time until they are accustomed to human presence and handling. Livestock handling is made much easier when all necessary handling facilities are in place. A good handling facility should be viewed as an investment to reduce labour and improve animal welfare or minimize stress and injury to animals and people. These facilities include, a crush pen with neck clamp, kraals (holding and forcing pens), loading and offloading ramps, and dipping pits amongst others. All handling facilities should be well maintained, and most importantly, the farm workers must be competent or skilled to handle animals and understand animal welfare principles and market requirements.

Farmers should also maintain a safer production environment, for example, clean and hygienic kraal environments and beddings, safe disposal and storage of hazardous objects and chemicals, e.g. plastics, medicine bottles, bones, and batteries amongst others. In addition, try to eliminate or reduce fierce competition amongst animals especially at feeding, watering, and breeding (e.g. bull fights). Furthermore, one critical management aspect for consideration is transportation.

Many farmers lose animals during transportation, and this is due to stress, suffocation, injuries, thirst, hunger, and fatigue amongst

others. It is thus, advisable to follow proper transportation guidelines to avoid or minimize these problems. In conclusion, your farm productivity depends on the animal, the environment, and your management. These three factors need to be in harmony. Your presence in the kraal should not only be noticed during the time of physical handling of the animals, but maintain regular presence, mingle, feed, and groom the animals more often. Talk to your animals all the time, they have a message for you about their health, nutrition, and general wellbeing.



Understanding Grasses



- **Erastus Ngaruka**

In Namibia, livestock production is heavily dependent on the rangeland, which grows a variety of forage resources including trees, shrubs, grasses, and forbs. These plants differ in growth forms, structure, life cycles, habitat preferences, and their uses. Livestock farming in the country is dominated by grazing livestock, mainly cattle and sheep. Moreover, these animal species mainly depend on grass amongst others for their nutrition. When one describes a grazing area, there are several attributes that should be key to determining the

grazing value of that area. These are grass species composition, frequency, abundance, density, and soil cover amongst others. Basically, the quality of the grass plant can be attributed to its species, growth structure and life cycle. Farmers commonly use the term palatability as an assertion of the quality of the grass, however, grasses have different levels of palatability. A palatable grass is one that an animal is attracted to or selects amongst others to graze, and this is influenced by its smell, taste, nutrients, and digestibility. Therefore, selective grazing becomes dangerous especially when species diversity or composition is narrow, thus, leading to local extinction of very sensitive valuable grass species. One of the important attributes that farmers should understand is the grass life cycle or life span.

There are two different life spans under which grasses can be classified, annual and perennial. The annual grasses refer to grasses that have a shorter life span of less than a year. They grow fast, produce seeds quickly and shed seeds for reseeding, and then the mother plant dies. Usually, annual grasses emerge with the first rainfall or are only seen during the wet season but disappear during the dry season, usually by August. Many grazing areas in Namibia are dominated by these types of grasses as their dominance increases with rangeland degradation. On the other hand, perennial grasses have a longer life span or last for more years. Unlike annuals, they do not die after shedding seeds, but only undergo a dormancy period (stop growing) during the dry season to conserve nutrients for regrowth from the same stump in the next rainy season. There are many different species of perennial grasses,

however, not all are palatable or well utilized by grazing animals. The most valuable perennial grasses are more sensitive to continuous grazing; thus, their dominance decreases with overgrazing or rangeland degradation which in turn gives rise to aggressive establishment of annual grasses.

To make informed grazing management decisions, farmers need to know and understand the impact of the prevailing ecological perturbations, including herbivory, climate, and intra-and inter-specific species competitions amongst others. The reaction of the rangeland to these perturbations can be observed through its plant population establishment and distribution. The dominating annual grasses in almost all grazing areas in Namibia currently include *Schmidtia kalahariensis*, *Chloris virgata*, *Eragrostis porosa*, *Eneapogon cencroides*, and *Urochloa brachyura* amongst others. The dominating perennial grasses are *Stipagrostis uniplumis*, *Stipagrostis obtusa*, *Stipagrostis hochstetteriana*, *Eragrostis pallens*, *Eragrostis rigidior*, and *Aristida*

stipitata amongst others. The most valuable perennial grasses such as *Cenchrus ciliaris*, *Brachiaria nigropedata*, *Antheophora pubescens*, and *Schmidtia pappophoroides* are only observed in well managed or least disturbed areas in some parts of the country.

Farmers can obtain more knowledge of these grasses from descriptive literature books(e.g. *Grasses of Namibia*) and can find common names as well. These literature materials and information can be found on the internet, book shops, Namibia Botanical Research Institute, and university libraries amongst others. It is advisable that farmers engage in restorative practices on their rangelands. These include improving soil conditions, controlling bush densities, reintroducing the valuable perennial grasses by reseeding on their grazing areas, and to cultivate them in gardens or crop fields. These efforts should all be aimed at reducing pressure and adding value on the rangelands, and to ensure sustainable fodder availability for livestock. Lastly, "Farm with nature and farm with grass for profit".

The Types of Chicken Production Systems



• Hanks Saisai

Farming is an activity that primarily focuses on the production of food and fiber inclusive of commodities such as wool and cotton for example. In Namibia, chicken farming is an emerging venture that is on the rise with a focus on producing table eggs and meat to supplement the daily protein needs of many households. For one to farm successfully with chickens for either egg production (layers) or meat (broilers), it is of great importance to implement a certain production system. By definition, a chicken production system is the way or method in which chickens are kept and raised in order to produce eggs or meat in a specific period.

Chickens can be reared in one of the following production systems; free-range, semi-intensive and intensive. In most rural areas of Namibia, the free-range production system is commonly practiced. In this system, the farmer's responsibility is to buy the chickens and he/she does not have to provide them with shelter. The chickens must find their own shelter, normally they sleep in trees, old houses or any place that seems safe and they must find their own food and water. In this type of system, the farmer has no form of

management, as his/her chickens are not vaccinated against diseases or parasites. This production system has the least costs of production, but because the chickens are not cared for, their productivity is also very low. Moreover, this system is also very risky as the chickens are vulnerable to disease outbreaks and parasites.

Furthermore, free-range systems are not good for egg production as the chickens may lay eggs wherever they find themselves and dogs may consume the eggs before they are collected. Further to this, the chickens are also vulnerable to predators and theft. The second chicken production system is known as the semi-intensive production system (modern free range), in this system the farmer is responsible for providing his/her chickens with housing, water, feed and on an occasional basis the chickens receive medical attention when necessary. In this system, a roaming area is constructed around the chicken house so the chickens can wander around during the day to look for additional food. This system provides protection against predators, theft and parasites to a small extent.



The third and last production system for farming with chickens is known as the intensive production system. With this system, the chickens are kept indoors for the full production cycle and it is the farmer 's responsibility to ensure that all inputs (shelter, feed, water and medical attention) are provided throughout. This system is normally implemented when one engages in commercial poultry production operations. The farmer must implement production practices such as cleaning of the house, replenishing the feeders and drinkers with fresh and clean feed every morning and evening. Moreover, in this type of system, the farmer must ensure adherence to regulations or standards set by the poultry association such as the mandatory vaccination of chickens against notifiable diseases (Newcastle Disease, Infectious Bronchitis and all other diseases) to be able to have access to formal markets. In conclusion, whichever type of production system you decide to adopt, your inputs, as a farmer will determine the output of your chicken farming operation. Therefore, for each system you undertake please ensure that it enables your poultry enterprise to be productive and profitable.



An Overview on Farming



- **Hanks Saisai**

Farming is an endeavor that allows a person to be involved in the growing of crops or keeping of domestic animals for the purpose of producing food and raw materials. Over the course of time, farming has rapidly evolved to incorporate technological and scientific advancements to make it a sustainable undertaking that utilizes resources such as land and water efficiently. These advancements have enabled the achievement of food security and significant revenues in many developed economies.

However, aspiring farmers need to keep key considerations in mind when deciding to become a farmer.

Before you embark on your farming venture there are critical questions that one must be able to answer in order to make the farming journey a success. The first and most important question is *Why do you want to farm?* This question will easily help an aspiring farmer to have a purpose or objective as to why he/she wants to farm.

This question has to be followed by asking *What do you want to produce?* This question helps a farmer understand that from the wide range of products available, he/she can focus on producing one or two with determination. For example, if one wants to be a livestock or crop farmer, they must

decide to either focus on the production of cattle, sheep, goats, poultry, pigs, or crops. If one opts to produce livestock (cattle, sheep, and goats), aspiring farmers should identify their product of choice (breeding stock, weaners, oxen, or steers) to produce from their cattle farming venture. Aspiring crop farmers on the other hand may decide to focus on growing agronomy crops such as maize, pearl millet, wheat, or sorghum for grain production or to produce vegetables such as tomatoes, cabbages, potatoes, etc.

The third question is *Whom are you producing for?* This question helps you identify your potential target market which will be the immediate consumers of your product. Furthermore, this helps you to properly plan your production to meet sufficient quantities demanded by your target market.

The fourth question is *What are your expectations?* This question addresses the farmer 's envisaged output from the farming operations in the form of revenue and profit. Farmers are also encouraged to keep records that they can use to assess their progress, costs, and incomes. This will enable any farmer to answer this critical last question, *is farming a business?* Once you decide to embark on a farming journey, it should always be noted that once money is invested, one should anticipate a return on investment, and this makes farming a business.

Starting a farm is a complicated endeavor because it encompasses a myriad of aspects. In no particular order, farmers must consider business planning, finding land, securing financing, marketing, production selection, production knowledge, securing equipment, developing, or securing infrastructure, and their vision for their farm. Moreover, an aspiring farmer should be cognizant of their knowledge and experience levels. In the final analysis, addressing these questions may ease the planning process and enable farmers to set up sustainable and profitable farming businesses.

Opportunities in the Crop Production Subsector



● Hanks Saisai

Namibia as a nation recently celebrated its 31st Independence Day Anniversary on the 21st of March 2021, a significant milestone for an emerging economy. However, there remains, unexploited opportunities that Namibian farmers and entrepreneurs can embrace. The entire crop production subsector of Agriculture has an abundance of niche opportunities that are yet to be exploited. A brief overview of the country's Horticulture industry indicates that local production accounted for about N\$ 240 274 807, with total imports being valued at about N\$ 417 675 765 and local consumption of horticultural commodities being about N\$ 657 950 772 during the 2018/2019 financial year as per the Namibia Agronomic Board's statistics. During the 2019/2020 financial year, about 28 887 tons of White Maize was produced locally, whereas 171 031 tons was imported from other countries. The total local consumption of White Maize as a staple food stood at about 199 918 tons. These statistics indicate an opportunity for local producers to upscale production, substitute imports and contribute to the local economy.

Crop Production as a subsector has various opportunities that can be exploited by farmers and businesspeople, the following are some of the areas of opportunities that can be taken into consideration:

Production of high earning cash crops

Farmers can focus their production on crops that are in high demand and those that earn a high per kg price. Good examples would be producing potatoes, peppers (red, yellow & green), cucumbers, and crops such as garlic and ginger that have seen increased consumption rates due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Supplying of Agricultural inputs

As more people become involved in primary crop production, many farmers struggle with obtaining the necessary inputs required. Fertilizers, seeds, herbicides, pesticides and irrigation systems are some of the basic inputs needed by those involved in primary crop production. In some instances,

farmers travel long distances to purchase these inputs. It would be of vital importance to bring this critical service to the proximity of farmers. This would ensure that farmers focus on production while having easy access to inputs needed at each stage of their production journey.

Ploughing services

In most remote and rural areas of Namibia, mechanized agriculture that utilizes the use of machineries such as tractors is still a major problem. On average a tractor can serve about 3000 farmers or more in each constituency, this is an opportunity that would offer income to someone who would focus on the rendering of ploughing services. A crucial point to remember is that during the rainy season, most farmers experience delays to get assisted with ploughing services from the Ministry of Agriculture, Water & Land Reform (MAWLR). One can be financed by Agri-bank to purchase tractors and their implements to render ploughing services to many small-scale farmers.



Seed Producers (Seed Multipliers)

The Government of Namibia through the Directorate of Agricultural Production, Extension & Engineering Services (DAPEES) periodically supplies seeds to farmers that produce crops under the Dryland Crop Production Programme (DCCP). An opportunity exists for farmers to become producers of seeds and multipliers of certain Pearl Millet (Mahangu) varieties that are adopted to local conditions. This will ensure that in each cropping season all farmers receive seeds on time and avoid the procurement of seeds from other countries.

Development of Markets through Organized Markets

Namibia imports quite a significant quantity of its fruits and vegetables from South Africa, with an estimated 85% of these commodities being imports. One aspect that needs to be understood is that once local farmers are not organized to be able to supply the right quantities of vegetables and fruits to retailers consistently, retailers view local farmers as a risk. But if farmers

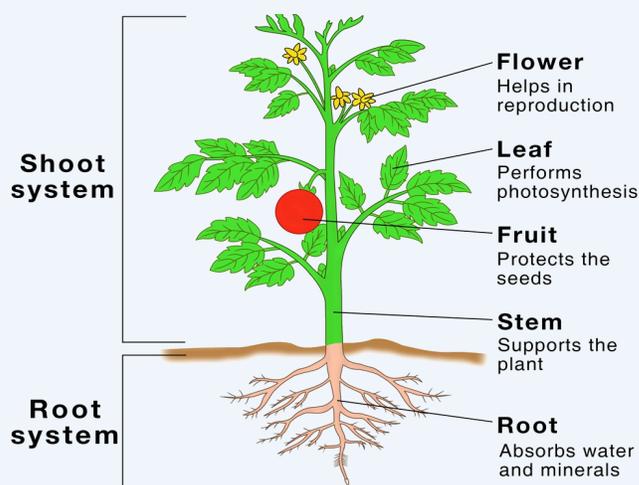
are organized into production groups that supply the right amounts of the demanded commodities in a consistent manner.

Retailers may be in position to reduce the costs they incur to import and transport these commodities from South Africa. This would create a sustainable market for local farmers, boosting their income levels and increase the contribution of Agriculture to GDP.

Let us all learn to prioritize food production in our country. This will ensure that more people can be afforded employment in the many subsectors of Agriculture from primary production to the processing of commodities. A nation that feeds itself can afford to earn foreign currency from sales of surplus to other countries. Lastly, aspiring farmers in need of financial assistance and advice on increasing productivity and capacity are encouraged to visit the nearest Agribank of Namibia's offices.



The Basic Form and Structure of Plants



• Hanks Saisai

It is important to know the basic form and structure of plants for you to understand how plants grow and produce seeds and fruits. A plant has different structures, and each structure serves a certain function. At most, a plant has the following parts.

The root system:

Roots are the parts of a plant that are normally below the ground. They absorb water and dissolved minerals from the soil. Additionally, they store some food in the cells of the cortex e.g. carrots, sweet potatoes, potatoes, etc. Roots also anchor the plant and hold it upright in the ground. Overall, there are mainly two types of root systems. The taproot system and the fibrous root system. In a taproot system, the main root can be differentiated from the secondary or side roots and root hairs, as it is larger than the side roots. This can be found in plants such as carrots and beetroots. As for the fibrous root system, the main root cannot be differentiated from the other roots and an example of plants with fibrous root system are maize, beans and millet.

The Stem:

The stem is the part of the plant that grows above the ground.

It bears the leaves, flowers, and fruits. Furthermore, it transports water and dissolved minerals to all parts of the plant via its vessels which pass nutrients and food in the plant system.

The Leaves:

Leaves help to transport nutrients and water, and they store food such as sugars especially in leafy vegetables such as cabbage, spinach and lettuce. They manufacture food using energy obtained from sunlight, while also allowing the plant to breath. Furthermore, they help carry out the process of evaporation.

The Flowers:

Essentially, flowers are the plant's means of reproduction. The most important parts of a flower are the ovary, stamens, and petals. In essence, the petals protect the ovary, stamen, and stigma. The male cells are known as pollen and are found on the stamen. Whereas the female egg cells are known as ovules and are found in the ovary.

Finally, it is of great importance for crop farmers to understand that each different part of plants has a vital role to play in order for that specific plant to grow successfully. Additionally, when the functions are well understood, it is the farmer's responsibility to ensure that the plants are protected from pests that may harm useful parts of the plants and cause delayed growth.





DID YOU KNOW ?

- If you are employed and do not own a property which you can provide as security, you can apply for a loan with Agribank under the **No Collateral Loan Scheme** and your monthly repayment will be deducted directly from the salary. However, your employer needs to have a pay-roll deduction agreement with Agribank. The No Collateral Loan Scheme is thus tailor made for part-time communal farmers.
- If you are a full-time communal farmer, or a lease holder in a commercial area, you can apply for a loan under the **Emerging Retail Financing Product (ERFP) Loan Scheme**. The ERFP is a no-collateral loan scheme for full time communal farmers or lease holders in a commercial area.
- If you own a fixed property or have an investment policy with a surrender value, which you can provide as security, you can apply under the normal **Agribank Loan Scheme**. This is applicable mostly for emerging and or established commercial farmers.

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