

Overcome hunger

"Nothing is cheap any more, especially food". But this is likely to become worse as long as Southern Africa persists in its policy of dividing commercial farms into small units.

The economies of scale are sacrificed, especially where we need to add supplementary irrigation facilities to help counter our drought cycles.

Now we hear that many struggling small-scale farmers are being evicted for non-payment of loans at a time when rainfall has not been a problem this past season.

Inter alia, this points to another menace, equally as bad as drought. That is the omnipresence of root knot eelworm in our soils.

Its manifestation is caused by nematodes. They may be microscopic, but the knotting up of roots results in devastating crop failure, regardless of rainfall. Nematode build-up is promoted by continuous cropping without applying either fumigation or suitable crop rotations, or both.

Experienced commercial farmers have found that Mexican Marigold or Rhodes grass in the crop rotation actually decreases the presence of soil nematodes.

But these crops have to be incorporated into the soil while they are still green, before the end of the rainy season, so that they can also enhance soil structure, ready for spring plantings of the next commercial crop.

This practice generally calls for heavy machinery, usually beyond the scope of emerging small-scale farmers.

Perhaps we should examine the successes in a country where the conditions are even harsher than our own before commandeering any more commercial farms.

The Kibbutz idea has proved successful. The participants remain as shareholders. The economies of scale are recaptured. They are managed by an elected committee of wise people. They also have the capacity to indulge in other commercial activities, other than agriculture.

Should we not overcome hunger before seeking transient popularity?

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