



Invest in your WORK FORCE

An effective labour management system is one of the most important investments 2011 Agri SA Young Farmer of the Year **Gog van der Colff** made in his grape and raisin enterprise. It afforded every worker the opportunity to take responsibility in this major enterprise and resulted in better production. **Annelie Coleman** reports.

“People are the biggest asset on my farm,” says 2011 Agri SA Young Farmer of the Year, 34-year-old Gog van der Colff.

His 200ha Carpe Diem estate east of Upington produces grapes and raisins, two particularly labour intensive enterprises.

Gog took over the business from his father Johan in 2000. One of the first things he did was to do a thorough analysis of the labour management practices in place.

“I soon realised the existing systems and practices were inadequate,” he says.

“Because of the labour intensiveness of our production, it made good business sense to develop the labour force, one of the main economic factors in a business.

“In our peak times we employ about 350 temporary workers on any given day, coupled

with 100 permanent workers. It goes without saying that these employees’ commitment, or lack thereof, could have a major impact on the overall profitability of this enterprise.”

Grapes are produced on 152ha of the original farm as well as on additional land bought over the years.

The business includes a GlobalGAP-approved packhouse with a combined packing capacity of 8 000 of 4,5kg cartons of grapes a day during the peak times of November and December.

There are also two raisin processing plants – Carpe Diem Raisins in Upington and Kalahari Raisins in Friersdale, 55km south of Upington.

Carpe Diem exports raisins all over the world. The biggest markets are Europe and Canada, with other markets in North Africa, the Middle East and the Far East.

Its organic grapes are exported to Europe and the UK.

PROFESSIONAL HELP

To help with labour management and training, Gog hired local consultancy, Orffer & Van der Merwe HR Practitioners.

“Effective labour management is one of the mainstays of the table grape and raisin industry in South Africa where hundreds of labourers per farm are the norm,” says Marius Orffer.

“By developing and building the labour force in a positive way, Gog built a team of winners where every employee takes ownership of their specific responsibilities,” says Marius.

Detailed needs analysis is done annually followed by a pro-active training programme based on the needs and capacities of each worker. In turn,

ABOVE

LEFT: Carpe Diem estate exports grapes to Europe and the UK, while raisins are exported to Europe, Canada and the Far East, among others.

ABOVE

RIGHT: The first Van der Colff land in Upington was bought in 1950 by Gog’s grandfather, Gog van der Colff Snr, at Kanoneiland, 30km west of Upington. Carpe Diem is situated about 10km outside Upington.

PHOTOS: ANNELIE COLEMAN



GOG VAN DER COLFF

this is supported by an open communication and evaluation system with regular feedback.

“Gog believes in shared success and responsibility. He values people,” says Marius.

EMPLOYEE UPLIFTMENT

Early on, Gog and the Carpe Diem team decided on a management system that allows for labour force participation in management. This means every team member and team leader is responsible for their team and its performance.

Job levels in junior and middle management were created, giving workers



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FAST FACTS

- Labour is one of the most important economic factors of a farming business.
- Every employee must take responsibility for their specific task.
- Productivity improved markedly since the implementation of an effective labour management system.

a specific goal on the management ladder.

One dedicated worker is Seolobaleng Matong. He started about five years ago as a seasonal worker on the farm, explains Gog.

'THE EMPLOYEES' COMMITMENT OR LACK THEREOF COULD HAVE A MAJOR IMPACT ON THE PROFITABILITY OF THE BUSINESS.'

"But since Orffer & Van der Merwe screen the training ability of all our workers, we identified his potential and drive. He was the first Carpe Diem worker to attend the local Agri Seta training and to complete its plant production course.

"We currently have three other workers on Seolobaleng's level and several more on their way to that level."

The course involves production, social training and food safety. Production includes subjects such as harvesting, pruning and the use

of chemicals. Social training focuses on management of finances, relationships and HIV/Aids. Food safety is concerned with putting a safe product on the market.

widespread in this area and often leads to theft and domestic violence. This is addressed through our social training, and over the years we've seen a real decline in alcoholism," continues Gog.

"HIV/Aids is playing havoc with peoples' lives in the Lower Orange River region. That's why we concentrate so much on its prevention in our training programmes. On the other hand,

"Export markets are extremely demanding as far as food safety is concerned and we pay particular attention to this aspect," says Gog. "It's important that the workers at grassroots level understand what these stipulations and requirements are.

"If they aren't trained, how would they know that it's important to wear protective clothing, wash their hands and that make-up isn't allowed in the packing facilities as it can contaminate an entire consignment? "Alcoholism is

TOP: The GlobalGAP-approved packhouse on Carpe Diem has a combined packing capacity of 8 000 of 4,5kg cartons of grapes per day.

RIGHT: Seolobaleng Matong started as a seasonal worker and is now an assistant production manager. Screening done by a professional HR company identified his potential.



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Food safety training at Carpe Diem emphasises putting a safe product on the market.





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◀ most of our permanent workers reside in the nearby Nsikelelo township and we have seen a definite improvement of the living conditions there. Literacy is on the increase and more and more people are completing Grade 12" he adds.

PROFIT SHARING

"It's also vital that employees know the nuts and bolts of the business," says Gog. "Our permanent staff complement works on a profit-sharing basis. The percentage of profit-sharing is determined by the company's nett income and the employee's job level.

"It's therefore important that employees know what the economic realities of the business are. If

they don't know what goes on, it may create unreasonable expectations and wrong perceptions of how the company is doing," explains Gog.

"I once asked a number of employees what they thought our annual income was and was astounded by their lack of economic comprehension. They overestimated the income by far. Not that I can blame them, because they've never been exposed to the financial realities of farming."

Employees need to understand what's really happening and that profit margins are always under pressure," says Gog.

"It remains an uphill battle to this day to change these perceptions because

ABOVE: Grape and raisin production is particularly labour intensive – and Gog van der Colff regards the Carpe Diem labour force as the biggest asset on his farm.

RIGHT: Gog van der Colff with his children, 3-year-old Kara and 5-year-old Migael. His wife Melissa was not present at the time the photo was taken.



of the ingrained belief that commercial farmers make loads of money.

"Workers are also exposed to the markets we produce for. Every year before the harvest they go through an induction programme that explains which countries the products are going to, and what the requirements of the specific markets are.

"Some of the workers are taken to Cape Town harbour to see what happens to the fruit after they leave the farm."

WORKER COMMITMENT

Team building exercises are held before harvest. Workers are divided into teams and compete to pack the most containers per day, per cultivar,

among other challenges. The winning teams can choose to have time off, or be entertained with a braai, or visit the Augrabies National Park. "It's our way of rewarding them for a job well done, over and above their salaries and bonuses, which are determined by attendance and production," says Gog.

"The workers are very positive about the new labour management system," he continues.

"We have problems here and there, but the workers' commitment is evident in the increase in productivity per individual worker, which resulted in a clear increase in total productivity on the farm."

• Contact Gog van der Colff on 083 324 0340 or email gogvdc@carpediemfarms.co.za. ■FW

A good investment

Gog van der Colff of Carpe Diem advises commercial farmers to invest in a proper labour management system – and to hire professionals to set it up. Gog and his

management team had held training programmes on Carpe Diem for a relatively long time, but finally realised these were ineffective. 'You'll have to spend some money

for a year or two before you get results, but the increase in productivity, dedication and drive will soon repay the initial expense of hiring consultants,' says Gog.

