

## Drivers of Change

# Beefing up the meat markets

Winner — Drivers of Change Business Award: **ComMark Eastern Cape Red Meat Project /WBHO Construction**

### Ilham Rawoot

Two-thirds of the three million cattle in the Eastern Cape are owned by black communal farmers, yet the commercial farmers who own the remaining portion earn far more from their livestock.

Apartheid-era policies left black farmers unable to access markets or develop skills and infrastructure for starting small businesses.

Dr Xolile Ngethu, a veterinarian by training, decided to change the situation.

In 2005 he was approached by the ComMark Trust, a Southern Africa non-profit regional development organisation.

Their discussions led to the formation of the Eastern Cape Red Meat Project, with Ngethu as the implementing agent.

Through the project, black farmers learn how to access meat markets, technical information and marketing skills. The objective is to kick-start economic development in the most economically and socially marginalised communities in the province.

Ngethu spends most of his time in the field with emerging and communal farmers.

"My job is to ensure the farmers understand what we are trying to

do," he says, "so it's a two-way situation. We help farmers in the areas they ask to be assisted."

In the three-and-a-half years the project has been operating it has built five auction pens, which cost close to R1-million. It organises auctions every second month and aims to hold auctions monthly.

Another success has been the building of rural feed-lots, where a large number of animals can be fed at the same time.

One project, the Umzimvubu Red Meat project in Mount Frere — which forms part of the East-

ern Cape Red Meat Project — and construction company WBHO Construction came on board to build a major road in the area to make access to the market easier.

"We have also managed to capture the [attention of the] department of agriculture," says Ngethu. "We are going to be involved in certain programmes with them."

One of these is a project to build rural abattoirs in the Eastern Cape.

"The recipe for our success is listening to the farmers," says Ngethu. "Many people before us tried to get quick results. They walked in front of the farmers instead of next to them."

The pilot project was implemented in Pedit, a village between King William's Town and Grahamstown. The Eastern Cape Red Meat Project is now active in five municipalities.

Problems that needed to be tackled included a lack of understanding of grading processes, little or no access to markets and no access to pricing information. The project implemented a market linkage programme and a training programme for farmers and it promotes better animal husbandry.

The Drivers of Change judges described it as "an amazing project, with a direct impact on



**Gilbert Buwa chair of the Philani Farmers Association, a member of the Eastern Cape Red Meat Project**

the lives of community farmers in the Eastern Cape".

The judges were particularly impressed with Ngethu, saying that "local leadership is why this project is qualitatively different. That's the driver of change."

But Ngethu points out there

is still a long way to go before farmers in the Eastern Cape have financial security.

"I am scared and excited at the same time. Our work underlines the amount of work that still needs to be done and all the areas that are still underdeveloped."

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