

ARC assists Correctional Services with beef herds

Correctional Services with beef herds are equipping offenders with skills that could help them secure employment when they leave these facilities.

According to Moses Marumo, Department of Correctional Services (DCS) agriculture and production workshops coordinator for the Gauteng region, the DCS Zonderwater, Leeukop, Baviaanspoort and Devon facilities all had agricultural production units.

Marumo and about 20 DCS agriculturalists and farm managers attended a recent Agricultural Research Council (ARC) training day, covering bull selection, the ARC beef improvement scheme, breeding seasons, management, fertility, and record-keeping by storing production data of their herds on the national Intergis system.

Marumo said that four DCS facilities

had beef and dairy herds, with poultry only at Zonderwater and piggeries at Leeukop and Baviaanspoort. "Initially the DCS only wanted to keep offenders busy, but now the intention is to [provide them with skills] for when they leave the facility," he said.

"We don't sell, but aim to produce for self-sufficiency. The DCS directorate wants to save taxpayer costs in terms of external procurement."

The department's agricultural projects and the ARC's involvement had been ongoing countrywide for decades, he added.

Offenders could become involved on a voluntary.

The largest beef herd was at the Zonderwater facility, which has around 400 breeding cows. Dr Ben Greyling, research team manager for beef cattle

improvement at the ARC, said that the goal of the ARC's involvement was contributing science and management skills to improve on the economic and biological efficiency of animals.

"If you improve on these two facets, then you enhance production efficiency, which means theoretically you produce more with less, and save the taxpayer money," he said.

The DCS has 18 beef projects throughout South Africa's DCS facilities, with a total of 5 286 head of cattle in the 2015/2016 season. The average cow herd is 1 601-strong.

A total of 298 165kg beef were produced in the 2015/2016 season, according to Nomsa Chitenje, deputy director: agriculture, directorate production workshops and agriculture department of the DCS. – *Gerhard Uys*