

POSTER ABSTRACT

**IMPACT OF NEW EXTENSION METHODOLOGY
ON THE PERFORMANCE OF SMALL GROWERS**GILLESPIE WA¹, MITCHELL FJ², WAY MJ¹, WEBSTER TM³ AND WITTHOFT JH³¹South African Sugarcane Research Institute, P/Bag X02, Mount Edgecombe, 4300, South Africa²KZN Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs, P/Bag X9059, Pietermaritzburg, 3200,
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mnpd@sai.co.za mnbio@sai.co.za**Abstract**

The South African sugar industry remains under pressure to increase sugarcane supply to mills, many of which operate below optimal capacity. One opportunity for the industry, that of significant spatial expansion, lies in small grower, communally-owned areas where much of the land is suited to sugarcane production. Extensive investment capital has been channeled into small grower projects with little or no success. The perception by development agencies that small growers are a 'poor investment' continues to be reinforced by attempts to implement projects that, despite comprehensive planning, prove to be economically unsustainable whilst requiring significant inputs, technical support and management. To address this negative perception, a new extension methodology, developed and implemented in the Noodsberg mill supply area since 2004, has resulted in increased production, skills development and improved income generation by small growers. To date, the methodology has been implemented in eight communities, all within 50 kilometers of the Noodsberg mill. The area planted to sugarcane has increased from 267 to 356 hectares, and production (tons cane/ha) has increased by 47%. The impact of this methodology has not only proved valuable to the mill in terms of cane supply, but represents a gross income of R8.63 million (2011) per annum to the community, providing impetus for the growth of the rural economy. The methodology, appropriate to socio-economic needs and generating new viable businesses, also serves as a framework for other enterprises such as agronomic crops and livestock production. The success of this extension methodology represents a unique opportunity for new entrants to the sugar industry to become successful. This poster provides a succinct overview of this extension approach.

Keywords: Small growers, sugarcane production, productivity, income generation