

A higher income from you game farm Gert Fourie

The question always remains: "Could I possibly produce a higher income from my game farm?"

Evaluate the management practices that you are currently applying by answering the following questions:

AM I IMPLEMENTING THE CORRECT ACTIVITIES?

Before adapting your current management system, be sure to know whether you are running the correct activities on your farm.

In other words- utilize the potential that your farm offers! It is of little use either trying to maintain a "biltong" hunting farm on expensive property, or an exclusive eco-tourism farm on land that is of little esthetic value.

Should you have a scenic farm, utilize it by running an eco-tourism business. Should you have a farm with good grass production and poor scenery/variation, utilize it by concentrating on meat production.

For example: A farm in the Lowveld region that can maintain 100 LGU (large game units), would have to be approximately 1 400ha in size and could cost R8 million.

A farm with the same carrying capacity in the Mixed bushveld region would have to be 1 100 ha in size, costing R2,9 million. Both have the same carrying capacity, but with a totally different tourism potential.

IS THE FARM BEING UTILIZED? OPTIMALLY

It could be that only a small portion of your farm is being utilized. A few possible reasons could exist.

Perhaps you do not have a sufficient distribution of water?

By spending approximately R6 000 (depending on the existing infrastructure) on a water hole, the distribution of game could be improved to such an extent that you could produce a higher income from game production (due to less social stress).

Perhaps there are "sour veld" areas on your farm?

By implementing a burning program, the utilization of these under-utilized areas could be improved, thus increasing the capacity of the farm. Invest in a detailed burning program and see the difference in the potential carrying capacity of your farm!

DO I HAVE THE CORRECT GAME SPECIES COMPOSITION?

The potential income from your game is greatly determined by the habitat type and existing veld condition!

Every game species utilizes *a unique habitat*.

By analyzing and identifying the different habitat types on your farm, the correct species combination can be introduced/kept, thus resulting in optimal utilization and increased production per hectare.

Social pressure and competition between animals for food results in poor animal condition and consequent below average reproduction rates.

Should the habitat types and veld condition permit, more exclusive species, with a consequent higher income per hectare, could be introduced.

For example: Ten buffalo utilize the same grazing as 20 zebra, but with obvious different income results!

ARE THE SEX RATIOS IN THE GAME POPULATION CORRECT?

It could be that the species combination and number of game are correct, but the ratios of the male to female animals could be wrong. This could produce an income of less than 50% of the possible annual income!

Too many male animals in a population lead to higher competition and lower reproduction levels in the population. In addition to the lower annual reproduction rates, the unproductive male animals utilize valuable food, without contributing to the income of the farm.

DO I HARVEST ANIMALS SUFFICIENTLY?

The harvesting of animals once in every three to four years not only influences the veld condition negatively, but it also has a negative impact on the reproduction rate and consequent sex ratios of the game population, as the optimum production level of the veld is reached. Both are to the detriment of the long term income production of the farm.

By harvesting animals annually or bi-annually, a maximum reproduction rate, with a higher annual income will be reached.

For example: 100 Impala (correct ratio productive animals) should produce 35 offspring per annum.

If the population is only harvested after four years, only 20 offspring per annum could be expected – due to insufficient time-span between harvesting periods, as well as a poorer veld condition and lower capacity.

CAN I IMPROVE THE CARRYING CAPACITY OF THE FARM WITH THE CURRENT APPLIED PRINCIPLES?

By applying the correct management principles as discussed, together with rehabilitation practices (bush clearing, erosion control, etc.) the potential carrying capacity of your farm could be increased.

Are you currently unknowingly mismanaging your farm?

Correct planning and management could make a difference in the potential income of your farm!

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