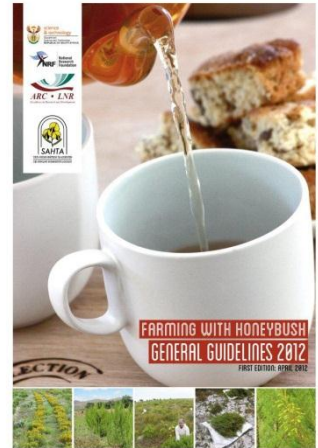


First Honeybush Farming Guide Launched

A new guide that will help small and emerging farmers to get started with this indigenous crop has been launched by the Agricultural Research Council.

1 August 2012, Stellenbosch

Researchers at the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) have developed a step-by-step guide on how to farm with honeybush tea. The guide provides practical tips – illustrated by photos – on topics ranging from how to prepare the soil through how to harvest the bushes. The research team hopes that this guide will encourage interest in honeybush farming and help farmers to farm more profitably, since there is a growing global demand for this unique tea that only grows in South Africa’s Southern and Eastern Cape.



Emerging farmers were given the opportunity to comment on the honeybush farming guide during a focus group held at Genadendal on 23 July 2012. From left to right: Jocabus Pernel, Ernest August, Rosalynn le Roux, Abraham Joorst and Gertrude Olivier.



This honeybush research project was led by Prof. Lizette Joubert, with technical research done by Marlise Joubert – both at the ARC’s Infruitec-Nietvoorbij research institute outside Stellenbosch.

“We hope that this guide will help to boost South Africa’s current honeybush crop of about 200 tonnes per year, and that future growth in this industry will come from commercial honeybush plantations (farming) instead of wild harvesting,” explains Marlise Joubert. “Currently, about 80% of South Africa’s honeybush crop is wild harvested and only about 20% is cultivated. We must reverse this ratio in order to relieve unsustainable pressure on wild honeybush populations. Honeybush farming must be profitable, but we also have a responsibility to ensure that honeybush farming is sustainable in the long term and environmentally friendly.

“The guide is based on ten years of research and bits of information that we have gathered from honeybush farmers,” Marlise Joubert adds.

“We don’t have all the answers yet, but this guide should go a long way towards helping newly interested farmers to farm honeybush sustainably and profitably.

“Despite the fact that honeybush is part of the fynbos vegetation that occurs naturally in the area from Piketberg to Port Elizabeth, it can be tricky to cultivate. There are several species that are farmed commercially and farmers need to understand the unique requirements regarding the area, soil and climate of each one in order to farm successfully with this crop.”

Using the first draft of the honeybush farming guide, a team from the ARC held discussions with established and newly interested farmers in order to make sure that the guide is easy to understand and that it provides answers to farmers’ questions about cultivating this crop. The first focus group involved emerging farmers from Genadendal, Bereaville and Spanjaardskloof, while the second focus group targeted farmers and processors in the Overberg, Tsitsikamma and Langkloof.

“I am sure this guide will be invaluable to new farmers and I wish I had this information available when I first started farming with honeybush,” said Mr Fritz Joubert, one of South Africa’s pioneers in honeybush farming who has been cultivating this crop near Pearly Beach since 1996. With an estimated 30 ha of honeybush plantations, Fritz Joubert is currently also one of the largest honeybush producers in the country and he still has plans to expand his honeybush plantations.

Fritz Joubert, one of South Africa’s pioneer honeybush farmers with Karina Gerber, a new farmer potentially interested in the crop.



The guide is available free of charge from the ARC. Contact Marlise Joubert: SMS 083-3888-312 / Tel: 021 809 3331, email: joubertm@arc.agric.za

The development of the guide was co-funded by the project on indigenous knowledge systems of the Department of Science and Technology via the National Research Foundation.

More information on honeybush:

- SA Honeybush Tea Association (SAHTA): www.sahoneybush.co.za
- Agricultural Research Council: www.arc.agric.za/home.asp?pid=4045

High-resolution honeybush photos: <http://www.sahta.co.za/photos/general-honeybush-photos.html>

To get hold of the images used in this media release, email marina@southernscience.co.za

For media interviews, contact Marlise Joubert: Mobile: 083-3888-312, email: joubertm@arc.agric.za

Notes for editors (next page)

Notes for editors

- Like rooibos, honeybush is a uniquely South African herbal tea.
- It is made from the leaves and stems of the indigenous *Cyclopia* shrub that grows naturally in specific fynbos regions in an area ranging from Piketberg in the Western Cape to Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape.
- The 23 known honeybush species – all belonging to the genus *Cyclopia* – each has a characteristic distribution in nature. Some species prefer sandy coastal plains, while others flourish on cool, moist mountain slopes.
- Most of South Africa's honeybush crop comes from people harvesting wild-growing honeybush – especially *Cyclopia intermedia* (“bergtee”). A small, but growing number of farmers grow specific species, such as *Cyclopia subternata* (“vleitee”) and *Cyclopia genistoides* (“kustee” or “coastal tea”) commercially.
- South Africa currently exports about 150 tonnes of honeybush tea per year to more than 25 countries, but the demand for honeybush far outstrips the supply. Consumers around the world are increasingly interested in honeybush tea, because of its unique flavour and health properties. Honeybush can also be used in value-added foods, medicines and cosmetics.
- The ARC encourages sustainable honeybush farming – rather than the harvesting of wild honeybush – as the key to realising the significant growth potential of this young industry. Ongoing ARC research focuses on sustainable and profitable honeybush farming, specifically for emerging farmers.

Issued by: Southern Science (marina@southernscience.co.za) on behalf of the Agricultural Research Council (Honeybush Tea Indigenous Knowledge Project).



A group of emerging honeybush farmers from Genadendal, Bereaville and Spanjaardskloof with copies of the new honeybush farming guide released by the ARC, 23 July 2012