

THE LESOTHO AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE INTERNSHIP FOR 2021/2022



Lesotho Agricultural College [LAC] is committed to providing professional education and training, promoting research and community outreach, providing guidance on commercialized agriculture, through combining quality theory, practicals and research methodologies. The College strives to remain relevant, forward-thinking, industry-related in developing graduates who are thinkers and practitioners. The College programmes involve practicals and theoretical knowledge facilitated by highly skilled academic professionals by ensuring that students are well equipped to enter the world-of-work confidently upon graduation.

With this intent, through the Department of Crops [CPD], LAC is engaged in collaborative partnerships with other Government ministries and Departments, NGOs, and commercial farmers to create a platform for internship. Through this initiative, the CPD placed the first group of students of Diploma in Agriculture (General) and Diploma in Agriculture (Crop production) for an internship at the Department of Agricultural Research [DAR] and to thirty-two (32) farmers who are actively engaged in horticulture enterprises in Lesotho. These enterprises and farms were selected based on their accessibility to the students. The internship ran from the 27th June 2022 to 22nd July 2022.

It is worth noting that LAC is collaborating with the Department of Agricultural Research (DAR) on a World Bank funded horticulture-based research called Agricultural Productivity Programme

for Southern Africa - APPSA. APPSA seeks to promote a regional approach to agricultural research, technology generation and dissemination by supporting the strengthening and scaling up of Regional Centres of Leadership (RCoL) on commodities of regional importance. The Kingdom of Lesotho through Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security has selected the RCoL for horticulture farming system.

The main objectives of the internship were:

1. To induct and equip learners with more practical skills in horticulture.
2. To equip learners with skills in horticultural-based farming systems and research, and relevant innovations.
3. To give learners opportunity to explore both primitive and advanced technology used by farmers.
4. To expose learners to the real world of horticulture production.

Those attached at DAR specifically did, Greenhouse management; Landscaping; they also did cereal seed harvesting and selection with Seed Development Unit section.

Post-Harvest Handling of Potatoes

Learners were involved in postharvest handling activities in horticultural crops. This was concerned with ensuring that the harvested crops received appropriate treatment to minimize losses as illustrated in Figure 1 below. This comprised harvesting, transportation, grading, packaging, and storing of horticultural produce. The learners also managed to perform some data collection and determination on potato yield. They indicated that this practice equipped them with the appropriate skills on handling potatoes from harvesting to storage.

Figure 1 illustrates post-harvest handling of potatoes



Protected Cultivation

a) Field quality determination and comparison

Learners had a practical feel of operating under the protective structures. They were able to compare quality of crops produced either under the shade net or tunnel as illustrated in figure 2 below and those produced in an open area. However, learners observed that some farmers are not so particular about spacing and thinning of crops, hence low quality. Producing under protective

structures kept the vegetables in good condition despite the severe frost encountered this year. According to the learners, this internship was an eye opener to them as they realized that some of the Basotho farmers are engaged in agribusiness to earn their living.

Figure 2 illustrates some of the protected cultivation management practices



b) Trench Plots

Students also constructed the trench plots which were mostly used in the protective structures due to their merits in vegetable production. Students report that some farmers had little knowledge about the merits of the trench plots while others explained that they used them just because they had seen other farmers using them. Nonetheless, students report the construction of trench plots is more labour intensive as illustrated in figure 3 below, hence recommend machinery, especially if it is practiced on a large area.

Figure 3 illustrate trench plots practices undertaken by LAC students on internship



Conclusion

Students gained reasonable hands-on experience that will assist them to perform much better in their forthcoming Student Enterprise Projects (SEP). LAC offers this as a course in the final year of study. It has also forged network with farmers hence easy technology sharing and skills transfer. This internship indicates improved collaboration between LAC and DAR as well as the farming community. The farmers showed much appreciation and support to the students during the internship. Some agricultural enterprises and farms have already contacted the LAC about absorbing the students who have completed their studies and looking for jobs. It is apparent that this internship exposes LAC students to potential employers.

The institution is very appreciative for this move and intends to sign memorandum of understanding (MOU) with farmers to ensure sustainable collaboration and to strengthen the existing one that is between LAC and DAR. The College is planning to make some improvements in the next coming years regarding this internship.