

Most still going for farm auctions

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Hundreds of Mpumalanga farmers descended on the Jan Hendriksfontein farm near Ermelo last week, searching for bargains on livestock, vehicles, workshop equipment and farm implements.

At an auction held by agri-marketing company Vleissentraal, some got exactly what they'd come for. Some spent more than they had planned. Others just couldn't take the heat generated by those with deeper pockets.

They wore their hearts on their sleeves: big grins from those who snapped up valuable items cheaply; smaller, uncertain smiles from those who got what they wanted but wondered whether they needed what they wanted; and those casualties of the bidding looking as if they had just been hit in the mouth.

The visit to the auction presented the refreshing view, in an agricultural sector where worries about land reform and diminishing margins are at the fore, that there is still money around and the farming life remains appealing.

The buyers spent about R3m - before Vat - in two hours, not counting the takings on the boerewors rolls and soft drinks.

Possibly the biggest winner was not a farmer but a builder, Bheki Masina, who was there to bid for a truck to transport the bricks and cement blocks produced by his Swaziland-based construction company, De La Sina, to building sites.

The hammer came down for him on a 2008 Isuzu tipper truck with about 30000km on the clock at R300000.

"I was prepared to go up to R600000," said a beaming Masina. "I also need it to transport sand and crush to my factory."

Bets Lee, who came to the auction with her daughter Jackie, owns five farms totalling about 4000ha in the Piet Retief area on which she grows wattle, eucalyptus and pine trees used in the construction and paper industries, locally and for export to countries such as Japan.

She bought a "buffel" military truck, for R92000, plus various attachments for R8000.

Vleissentraal auctioneer Paul Botha made it clear the robust vehicle had no papers and couldn't be used on public roads.

"The tree farming is going very well," said Lee, "but fires can be a big problem for us. The buffel will be used mainly in fire-fighting."

At that point Lee confided she also had an eye on a red Massey-Ferguson 4260 tractor. She eventually beat off a couple of other bidders to secure it for R150000.

A few lots of Beefmaster and Huguenot cows in calf, in pens of nine, went for R7000-R9000 each, and a bull with two cows for R15000.

When a few cows barged through a pen, nobody batted an eyelid. A few men slapped the beasts back into the enclosure and secured the gate.

Livestock farmer Pieter van Rooyen brought his wife and two children to the auction for an outing. He was pushed up to paying R30000 for a trailer to transport cattle.

"It would probably cost about R40000 new," he said. "It was a bit more than I wanted to go to, but if you need something you must pay for it."

Van Rooyen farms on about 1000ha in the area and confirms the current wellbeing of the livestock industry, in which he has worked for 20 years. He laughs off the idea that some farmers say they aren't doing too well: "I'm not one of those guys who complain all the time."

Livestock farmer Jabulani Khumalo said he couldn't afford to buy anything but was there to soak up the atmosphere and get an idea of what things cost.

He's been farming for a year on his 160ha spread in the area. "It's too big for 20 head of cattle," he said.

The top bid for a bakkie in goodlooking condition with a reserve price of R50000 was R32500. "Make it R35000 and I'll speak to the owner," the auctioneer told the bidder. A nod from the owner and the deal was done.

The winning bidder on a bean combine harvester wasn't as lucky. His R6000 bid was the highest but not close enough to the R20000 reserve to buy it.

A 200cc motorcycle scrambler - "no papers, farm use only" - went for R2500. An assortment of ploughs went for between R2000 and R5200 each.

The auction ended two hours after it had started, in a shed with a selection of lathes, band saws, planers and sanders.

Auctioneer Botha was tired but happy. "It went very well," he said. "One of the best auctions of its kind."

Hundreds of similar auctions and sales take place in farming areas around SA every year.

The farmers didn't hang around. There was work waiting on their farms and they got into their cars and bakkies to get to it.

Source: Financial Mail