

New tracking device improves farm productivity

[FarmTrack](#) has launched a new tracking device which gives farmers the ability to manage their farm productivity to much higher efficiency and cost-effective standards by removing the guesswork from everyday regular tasks.



Cluver Farms in the Western Cape grows both apples (60%) and vines (40%) and has conducted extensive trials with FarmTrack. They have recently rolled out the FarmTrack device for all their 18 tractors used on Cluver's 200ha of orchards. Farm manager Karin Cluver says that managing risk is, of course, always high on any farm management agenda. "When we first tested FarmTrack, we were excited about being able to measure our spray efficiency in both the orchards and vineyards. What surprised us was the positive spin-offs of other functions that we are now also measuring on a daily basis."

Cluver can now check the accuracy and coverage of spray in each field and, for example, show where crop rows have been missed. When rows are missed, this could mean that the trees and crops are then vulnerable and susceptible to specifically fungal diseases. FarmTrack also allows accurate monitoring of tractor driver efficiency and sheds light on any weaknesses and strengths.

Diesel usage

"The distance between crops and filling stations can be an issue and to improve efficiencies of our diesel usage, we've been able to track the drivers and see where we should install more filling stations. As this could amount to savings of hundreds of thousands of rands in a year, this is no small measure.

"The other thing we've detected is that driver turning circles in certain fields were not always big enough and that the tractor drivers were therefore not as efficient as they could be, so we are now able to take steps to improve the drivers' working environment," Cluver says.

Another big plus has been the monitoring of driver behaviour. Initially, it could be seen that many of the drivers were going too fast for optimal spray cover or that they were wasting time. By highlighting any inconsistent or bad behaviour, Cluver is now able to incentivise them to perform better and, for example, to drive at the correct average speed. This has resulted in greater efficiencies and a motivated workforce because the drivers are accordingly rewarded.

Bird's eye view

Because they are able to see the whole farm picture and each crop and field and what's happening in real time on the screen, Cluver can quickly pinpoint any problems and jump in to rectify them rather than having to drive around and identify where problems may lie. "We're able to change things and move things around because we have this bird's eye view of the entire farm and what's happening on it at any time."

FarmTrack was developed by Etse Electronics, which has partnered with Stellenbosch software expert company EMSS. The investment by EMSS has led to more manpower, resulting in the product being refined and tailored specifically for the agricultural market. "Actually, FarmTrack is very simple and that is why it is so effective. It uses GPS technology which links to a server where the data is stored, processed and organised automatically so that the farm manager may check on productivity across the entire farm merely by accessing the internet," FarmTrack's project leader, Waldo van der Merwe, explains.

"It provides detailed summaries of the spraying activity with daily reports. It tracks vehicle movements within metres and shows up, through colour-coded reporting, key efficiency indicators such as skipped rows or incorrect spraying speeds and whether the tractors are being operated correctly."

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