

Bayer seed innovation to benefit the entire agriculture community

 By Cari Van Wyk

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Bayer recently opened its first SeedGrowth Centre in Africa with the aim to provide farmers with innovative products that suit their specific needs. Dr Klaus Eckstein, CEO and head of the Crop Science Division for Bayer in Southern Africa, said "We have the opportunity to provide the latest in research at a local level to support our farmers to compete globally. We believe that through Seed Treatment we now have the tool to truly add value to the developing farmer through an innovation such as seed treatment which can comfortably increase yields by 30 % per hectare and more, specifically in the Southern African region." We spoke to Dr. Eckstein to find out more.



Dr Klaus Eckstein

■ ***Tell us about Bayer's history in Southern Africa and how this positions the organisation to help farmers overcome the challenges they now face.***

Klaus Eckstein: Bayer is a world-class innovation company with a more than 150-year history and competencies in the fields of health care and agriculture. Our core focus is on developing new molecules for use in innovative products and solutions to improve the health of humans, animals, and plants – with our research and development activities based on a profound understanding of the biochemical processes in living organisms.

However, to be able to do this appropriately and sustainably, we also pride ourselves on having a deep understanding at the molecular, biochemical and behavioural level of the ecosystems and environments in the regions in which we operate. In particular, in the agricultural space, we understand that there cannot be a 'one-size-fits-all' solutions for farmers and agribusinesses because they operate in very different natural climates and typographies, and face different challenges based on their environments.

We have a long history in South and Southern Africa where we have spent time understanding the natural environments and challenges faced in various regions and, based on this, we continuously look to adapt our innovations and products to be conducive to the local environment. Our goal is to operate in a manner that will ensure the sustainable supplies of safe, nutritious and plentiful food sources.

■ ***Bayer recently opened the SeedGrowth Centre in Johannesburg. Why is this significant?***

Eckstein: For us, this is the first of its kind facility that we have opened on the African continent – and is one of only 16 other such centres in the world. This is a clear commitment to the agricultural industry in the region, considering that the SeedGrowth Centre has the potential to help farmers in the region to not only secure but significantly increase their yields in key crops. The SeedGrowth Centre has been designed to support seed companies and farmers to improve their production efficiencies by addressing issues related to seed treatment. This includes:

- Optimising plantability of seed.
- Improving the stewardship of seed treatment by managing dust
- Ensuring that seed is treated accurately

Customers will now be able to test their recipes in our experimental seed treatment facility. This means that they do not need to stop their factories to refine their recipes resulting in better efficiencies. This whole programme is linked to our four competency areas which include:

- Seed treatment equipment to apply seed treatment products
- Products that add value to the grower and how they perform on seed
- Film coatings to reduce dust, improve plantability and benefit responsible use
- Ensuring the service that is required to optimise seed treatment process

🏢 ***Tell us about the science and technology behind the SeedGrowth centre as well as the scope of research that will be conducted there***

Eckstein: Our SeedGrowth Centre brings together significant technological, scientific and manufacturing resources to support sustainable agricultural initiatives and global product stewardship. Not only will this facility enhance research and development efforts, but it will also be of benefit to the entire agriculture community for sustainable future growth.

As one of our key strategic initiatives to promote sustainable farming in the region, the SeedGrowth Centre will provide a host of advantages for every player in the seed treatment value chain, including high-quality coatings, innovative products, and powerful application equipment all linked to services and advice tailor-made to specific customer needs. Additionally, our ongoing research and development (R&D) through this facility will enable us to provide customised solutions to seed companies as well as provide crop benefits such as improved plantability and pest/disease management to farmers that will be based on data of the local environments and/or natural climates.



Image Source: [Bayer SeedGrowth](#)

■ ***How will farmers in the region benefit, as well as the entire agriculture industry, from this centre?***

Eckstein: Through this SeedGrowth centre, we will have the opportunity to provide the latest in research at a local level to support our farmers to compete globally. It is our intention that the benefits of the R&D undertaken at the facility will result in higher productivity, profitability and sustainability of farming – where innovations such as seed treatment can comfortably increase yields by 30% per hectare in the Southern African region.

In addition to this, we will also be able to bring added value to all stakeholders in the seed treatment business, including; breeders, seed companies, research facilities, advisors and of course farmers. We believe that growing Seed Treatment throughout Africa is critical in order to support farmers to be commercially viable and, by taking a holistic view of the seed treatment business, we can offer customers added value that will grow their business.

■ ***Will small-scale farmers also benefit from the innovation and technology that the centre brings to the region?***

Eckstein: Absolutely. We understand the incredible and potential roles that small-scale farmers have to play in the region, not only from a food security point of view but also in terms of sustainable employment and contributing towards gross domestic product (GDP) growth. We believe that with this SeedGrowth Centre and the benefits it will bring to local farming industries in the region – we now have the tool to truly add value to the developing farmer. In fact, we are evaluating specific Seed Treatment products that we believe will improve yields of cotton and maize significantly making emerging farmers more efficient in their specific environments

■ ***In a landscape currently characterised by low yields, drought, and uncertainty, innovation is becoming increasingly important, especially considering the pressure the agriculture industry is under to meet a growing demand. How does Bayer approach innovation and change, not just in the organisation itself, but also with the farmers and agribusinesses that Bayer helps and serves?***

Eckstein: The challenges facing farmers in Southern Africa today are not only increasing but are complex. As a result, new and innovative approaches have become necessary to maintain productivity and ensuring that only high-quality produce and safe foods reach the end consumer. This is intrinsically a part of our “science for a better life” DNA.

As a socially responsible company, our mission is to use science to improve life. We are committed to the future of farming in Southern Africa and leveraging our years of local research and development together with our expertise we to continue to work with local farmers and agribusinesses to help tackle their challenges through science-led innovations and a holistic, responsible and sustainable approach to farming. It is our intention to ensure that we develop products that will make farming more efficient - as we want to partner with all farmers to realise the full potential of their land and yields.

■ ***How will Bayer further support and encourage innovation in the industry?***

Eckstein: We understand that the science communities have an instrumental role to play in cultivating solutions that will yield a more sustainable supply of safe, nutritious and plentiful food sources for years to come.

Within the Crop Science Division, in particular, we are driven by the urgency of the challenges facing agricultural sectors and farmers and remain committed to doing everything possible to support farmers. Our values run deep, as does our sense of responsibility and commitment to making the world a better place for all. We demonstrate this commitment every day through community partnerships, investments in education and philanthropic support for programmes and institutions that share our vision and hopes for the farms of the future, including for instance our partnership with the [Future Farmers Foundation](#). Added to this, we continue to invest in research and innovation into seed growth, crop protection solutions and services to maximise farm yields, secure harvests and drive sustainability.

Bayer is also a global leader in crop protection and non-agricultural pest control, where the focus of our products, pioneering innovations and activities cover the areas of Crop Protection, Environmental Science, and Bioscience.

ABOUT CARI VAN WYK

Cari Coetzee is a contributor to Bizcommunity Tourism, Agriculture and Lifestyle.

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