

Farm ladies and staff upliftment

For many farmers' wives, the question "What do you do all day?!" is not an uncommon one coming from friends and strangers alike. Often their lives are as busy as any of their counterparts in towns, but their work not as easy to quantify. Giving a farmer's wife a job description is nearly impossible as each lady's work will differ according to her unique situation. But the one common factor that every farmer's wife will surely agree upon, is that being pro-active is a prerequisite for finding your role on the farm a rewarding and fulfilling one.

Three farmers' wives have given us a glimpse into their lives, showing us the initiative they have taken to not only make their own lives fulfilling, but also to impact and uplift the people working on their farms. In a country with a large population of poor and unemployed people, these ladies are helping to fill a much-needed gap to improve the lives of the rural farm workers who are dependent on them for making a living.



Farm Hands – Brenda Murray

Farm Hands is a non-profit empowerment project started on Bloemhof and Allendale farms near Graaff-Reinet in the Eastern Cape to try and help the wives of the farm labourers who have no job opportunities due to the distance from the local town. It is the brain child of Emma Palmer, a full time nurse on

the oil fields in Angola. In her off months she lives in the cottage on Bloemhof Farm. Working in Angola, Emma spotted the potential of the lovely "African" patterned materials that one can't find in South Africa. This inspired her to start the Farm Hands project.

I live on Allendale, the neighbouring farm, and together we strategised and started off with two ladies, one from each farm. Using the "African" fabric, we cut and matched the often difficult patterns and put them back together to make stylish quilts. Even though the quilts are beautiful and unique, we found that they are often too big and bulky a product to consistently sell volumes of, in order to keep a steady flow of income. We then started branching off to also make table cloths, cushion covers, place mats and bags. We found that these smaller items sell better, which encourages the ladies working on the project.

The main idea behind the project is to empower the unemployed wives of the farm labourers to learn new skills that can be employed in their own capacity to work from home and make their own products. These ladies did not know how to thread a sewing machine when they started and they are now working independently – cutting and stitching together quilts, making tablecloths and cushion covers to measure, and creating a variety of tablemats.



Some "Farm Hands" products for sale

On all sales, the ladies receive 40-50% of the profit and the remainder is saved to enable the project to buy each lady her own sewing machine and materials. Although the project is still in its baby shoes, we would like to train the ladies up so that they will be able to run their own independent businesses one day. In addition to the practical side of sewing, we would like to equip them with the necessary business, accounting and marketing skills too.

Farm Hands can be contacted at 049 84 00202.

Elizwe Ceramics – Elize van Aardt

I was born in Cradock in the Eastern Cape and grew up on a farm. I was always inspired by beautiful things and so decided to study at NMMU where I obtained my degree in fine art and ceramic design. In 2008 I married a farmer and now live on a sheep farm near Cookhouse in the Eastern Cape. I think that – having grown up in a family that has bred beautiful sheep for centuries and then marrying into a farming family that has a history of generations of fine wool merinos – I was certainly inspired to create something beautiful myself!

I started the project Elizwe Ceramics because I am passionate about art and creating jobs for disadvantaged people. Cookhouse, our nearest town, is afflicted by HIV / Aids and poverty. I wanted to make



Elize and her staff in the studio on her farm



a change, even if it was only for one person. My father helped me to build a pottery studio and gallery next to my house.

I applied for funding to various organisations and was sponsored by the Arts and Culture Trust. They helped me to buy all the equipment and materials I needed to get started. I trained 22 women from the Cookhouse community in traditional African pottery for six months. My idea was that the women would be able to take clay from the river and make their own pots using traditional African methods, thereby creating employment for them by developing their skills. We started off by making small African cactus pots to teach them basic skills. I am now employing four women on a permanent basis.

The design of my range of products was inspired by a piece I made in my second year at university. The range is called Rose and Lace bowls and platters, and it has proven to be very successful.

Elizwe Ceramics has been operating since February 2009 and we are growing from strength to strength. Tourist Enterprise Development (www.tep.co.za) made a video of our studio as part of one of their projects called The Hidden Treasure Project. Through this we received a lot of exposure.

We also have a website www.elizwe.co.za where all our products can be viewed.

Kokskraal Handcrafts – Liza Troskie

Since I can remember, I had a passion for making things with my hands, being creative and playing around with different hobbies. In 2001 a friend of mine opened a coffee shop in town and asked me to make little gifts to sell in the shop, mainly aiming at the tourist market. She also had the vision to start a training centre where we could teach unemployed people different skills and then sell their products in the shop. This did not work out as planned, but her enthusiasm to help the less privileged people was so strong that I could not help becoming excited about trying to make a difference in others' lives too.

At that time I had been married to a farmer for 9 years and my children were big enough to give me a gap to start doing my own thing. I used R1 000 of my savings and bought raw material to start making curios for the coffee shop in town. Every cent I earned by selling products, went straight back into the business (which, at that stage, was only a hobby).

The same friend later gave me the opportunity to take a few of my products to a trade show and gain some experience in the business world. I still believe that God used her to help me get started and I know that I am only here to manage the business which is really His. We have been so blessed through all these years.

Kokskraal Handcrafts is my business on our farm in the Eastern Cape, about 30km from the nearest town, Cookhouse. We have about 10 families living on the farm. The men work for my husband, but most of the women have no way of creating an income for themselves. That is why I started this project. I train the women and teach them to make different curios and crafts. We started off on a very small scale, working at my kitchen table and making items to supply my friend's coffee shop in town. At the beginning I had only one lady working for me. Today, eight years later, every lady on the farm is involved and earns an income. I have trained nine people in different skills, we have our own workshop, supply our products to 180 shops countrywide and have exported our products to twenty countries.

In 2004 we attended a trade show where we were advised to go to



Above: The crafters of Kokskraal Handcrafts

Below: Liza receiving the Global Micro Entrepreneur 2005 award from Sir Richard Branson in New York.



SEDA (Small Enterprise Development Agency) to ask for assistance. I paid them a visit and they agreed to assist us with marketing tools – brochures, business cards and a website. After this they monitored us closely to see whether their assistance was making a difference in the business. The business grew so much during this time that they entered us in a competition held by City Group for micro-entrepreneur of the year. We were very surprised to hear that we had won the category for “Women Empowerment” and then found out that we were the overall winners. We were flown to New York where the United Nations held a forum for “The Year of Micro-credit”. There we were awarded the prize for Global Micro Entrepreneur 2005. This was a huge highlight for the business and meant a lot to us.

ABET (Adult Basic Educational Training) was another opportunity which crossed our paths. Through this programme we are able to provide education to our workers through the use of computer literacy and numeracy in Xhosa, English or Afrikaans. We see this as yet another way to uplift our people, educate them and open new doors for them.

Today we are a BEE company involving eight women and two men, where the crafters all have shares in the business. To me our biggest achievement has been to see how people with hardly any skills can develop into financially independent individuals with dignity and self confidence, making the most beautiful products of which they are very proud.

Kokskraal Handcrafts' products can be viewed and ordered at www.kokskraalhandcrafts.co.za